

**Sue Kitchen**  
**Anglia Ruskin University**

## **THE CASE OF INCLUSION AND PROGRESS**

### **Abstract**

Inclusion has been recognised as an ongoing process, reflecting changes in political positions, values, policies and practice. As inclusion in the UK develops from focusing upon children with Special Educational Needs to recognising all children in order to resolve inequalities in society, inclusion in government policy is being equated with educational outcomes rather than the process by which it is achieved.

Within a constructivist paradigm, the research utilises a case study methodological approach carried out in one school, sampled for its uniqueness. Shakespeare School, a pseudonym, successfully supports a group of children who are considered to be at risk of underachievement to make outstanding educational progress. Located within an inner city and currently situated near the bottom of the national educational league tables, this school is rated within the top 5% for academic progress within the country. Therefore, it is of significant interest for this research to detail the systematic inquiry undertaken into the relationship between inclusion and progress within this school.

The findings of the research demonstrate that Shakespeare School is a transformational organisation, where all children and staff are welcomed, empowered and valued as members of a creative, academic, social and emotional learning collective. The research provides new knowledge challenging the way inclusion is currently understood and identifying a holistic model of inclusion and progress that is characterised by the school's philosophy, creative curriculum and leadership in practice. As a result, the research provides holistic, practical contributions in the detailing of the school's bespoke and creative approach in support of positive learning experiences for both the inclusion and progress of all its children.

The research concludes that the methods by which children's educational outcomes are achieved matters not only for the treatment of children but also for equity, social justice and entitlements. This paper determines that the relationship between inclusion and progress can be a positive one, particularly when children are placed at its centre.

**Key words: inclusion, progress, case study, leadership, curriculum and creativity.**

### Introduction

The research I undertook stemmed from an interest in the connection between social justice and inclusion within education. Developing a socially just education system in order to support social, educational and economic reform has been a focus of government rhetoric since the Newcastle Commission Report written in 1861 (cited in Alexander, 2010) called for an increased number of children to be educated in order that they could join the expanded workforce required for greater industrial productivity (Wood, 2004). However, as soon as this act of including more children in school occurred, the segregation and exclusion of some children through the categorisation of deficits and handicaps was based upon a within person impairment (Johnstone, 2011) and a medical model of inclusion was legitimised (Thomas and Loxley, 2001). An understanding of social justice therefore became based on how the inclusion of children and their differences was understood and managed.

Over one hundred and fifty years after the Newcastle Commission Report, Nicky Morgan as the Secretary of State utilised the same narrative of social, economic and educational reform within the publication *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE, 2016). She emphasised that all children must achieve high educational progress and outcomes in order to resolve not only the country's economic development but the inequalities within society; education was positioned as 'the engine of social justice and economic growth' (p.8) and inclusion seen as synonymous with educational outcomes. Any concern for the process of inclusion and the treatment of children in order to achieve the required expectations of outcomes were rejected within the publication, as the government confirmed that

‘outcomes matter more than methods’ (p.12). Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016) not only equated inclusion and therefore social justice with educational outcomes, but the same educational discourse that holds teachers and schools to account also ensured that children are accountable too. Theresa May in her speech in 2016 to the British Academy proclaimed: ‘I want Britain to be the great meritocracy of the world’. In education this focus on meritocracy is seen as being displayed by children’s individual hard work in order to achieve. Therefore, the concept of work ethic as a within person deficit or strength is aligned with a medical model of inclusion and enables differential outcomes in education and society to be reconceptualised as a product of that work ethic. Therefore, poverty as well as educational failure can be portrayed as a matter of the personal choice of the ‘unmotivated, unambitious and underachieving’ (Reay, 2009, p.24). As inclusion is therefore both the process and outcome of social justice for children, it appears that any agreed definition of the term inclusion remains elusive.

### **Literature Review**

The principle that an inclusive education system is based upon a moral and ethical obligation (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000), the equality of opportunity and an entitlement (Lipsky and Gartner, 1997; Oliver, 2000), appears to be accepted and not debated within research literature. The plurality of inclusion recognises that what some authors consider a ‘buzz word’ (Evans and Lunt, 2002, p.41), others such as Glazzard (2014) see as a ‘proactive stance’ (p.40). Whilst Bailey (1998) considers it to be a fervent campaign by the disability rights movement, Hodgkinson (2012) recognises it as the dominance of one group controlling the identity of another. For some authors the definition of inclusion relates to the restructuring of provision to promote a sense of belonging for children on equal terms (Kunc, 1992; Oliver, 2000; Gross, 2001), with Warnock (2005) considering inclusion to be regarded as a common endeavour of learning, providing a sense of worth (O’Brien, 2000). Lauchlan and Greig (2015) concluded that most people’s construction of an understanding of inclusion would probably agree on what they mean by it:

It is generally taken to mean that children and young people are included both socially and educationally in an environment where they feel welcomed and where they can thrive and make progress (p.70)

Whilst there have been a variety of models of inclusion associated with the differing perspectives, the developing capability framework has been seen to underpin a human rights approach and in doing so offers an opportunity for developing an understanding of its relationship to social justice. Originating from the work of Sen (1985) in the field of normative economics and philosophy, the approach has been considered by educational researchers interested in both disability and equality (Terzi, 2005; Nussbaum, 2009). The capability to function framework, focuses upon human diversity, real choices and individual goals and well-being. In Sen's approach, capability refers to the real opportunities and agency provided in support of freedom of choice, with functionings regarded as the 'achievement of a person: what she or he manages to do or to be' (1985, p.12). Functionings are recognised as valuable to the person, something they have chosen and therefore related to their well-being and personal fulfilment. The commodities available to a person, the environment in which they live as well as that person's individual characteristics are acknowledged as having the potential to impact upon a person's capabilities, and in turn their functionings. Capability theorists have highlighted that the interaction of those personal and social commodities enables any evaluation to not focus on a person's impairment or deficit in isolation (Terzi, 2005). Disability is therefore not defined not in terms of a medical model, but regarded as a deprivation or limitation in capability or functioning (Mitra, 2006). Within my research there was an opportunity to consider the relationship between this framework for inclusion and that of Bourdieu's work on social justice.

In his 1977 publication *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu challenged the role schools and the education system played in the marginalisation of some children by actively seeking to reproduce rather than ameliorate cultural and social inequalities. Bourdieu (1985) highlights three main areas as relevant for transformation in education: habitus, cultural capital and the field. His version of habitus has been

considered as a person's internalised dispositions that at a subconscious level supports their action and choices. The habitus of children is seen as developing from birth through what Jenkins (2002) refers to as imprinting 'in a socialising or learning process which commences during early childhood' (p.75). The advantages, as well as disadvantages, of a child's background are therefore regarded as not only orientating a person to adopt the dispositions of the group in which they were acquired, but recognises that this may also be at odds with the values schools seek to offer and reward. *Cultural capital* was regarded by Bourdieu as the cultural values, knowledge and attitude acquired through a child's background and what Henry et al. (1988) referred to as 'all the competencies one class brings with them to school (p.233). Children whose families developed different cultural capital were seen by Comber and Hill (2000) as entering the education system with 'cultural capital in the wrong currency' for success (p.80), thereby perpetuating inequality. Bourdieu's concept of the field has been considered as the space or context, structured by different forms of capital, and an area in which the habitus interacts. The field can therefore be regarded as operating at the level of a school. The school I selected for the research was Shakespeare School, as the children who attended it had high levels of social deprivation and were at risk to underachievement, yet made outstanding academic progress. I wondered by what methods this was achieved and what model of inclusion was in operation that appeared on paper to be supporting a socially just educational approach in reality.

### **School Context -Case study**

Shakespeare School is based within one of the fastest growing and culturally diverse cities in the country with recognised high levels of social deprivation poor health outcomes for inhabitants. Nationally the Local Authority (LA) has been judged to be one of the lowest performing authorities with over 60% of children not achieving the expected outcomes on leaving primary schools compared to 47% nationally (Perera et al., 2016). The school opened in 1935 and currently has over one hundred and twenty adults working on site with over seven hundred children on roll, many of whom are regarded as vulnerable (DfE, 2016). 30% of children at school are considered as having Special Educational Needs (SEN), a greater

proportion of children than the national average of 14.4%. Greater too is the percentage of children in receipt of pupil premium, with a quarter of all children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) instead of 14.5% nationally. 80% of children have English as an Additional Language (EAL) at school compared to 20.1% nationally and over thirty different languages are spoken.

However, compared to the average city results where 39% of children achieve the expected outcomes by the end of primary school, 70% of the school's children continue to reach this level within Shakespeare School. The measurement of progress that compares the results of children nationally with similar prior attainment, puts Shakespeare school in the top 5% of schools within the country for adding value to children's learning, a measurement that government regards as an indicator of school effectiveness, evidence of inclusion and relative uniqueness. The tension between inclusion and the standards agenda is well recognised (Black-Hawkins et al., 2017), so by researching Shakespeare School's solution for their children I aimed to construct their model of inclusion in order to inform the way the term is currently understood and challenge the statement from government that the methods by which inequality is resolved matters less than educational outcomes.

### **Methodology**

I approached the research utilising the paradigm referred to by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as constructivism. In the same way that the literature identifies multiple inclusions, constructivist ontology recognises multiple realities. With inclusive values of empowerment and equality, constructivist epistemology considers the role of the researcher as a facilitator (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994 p.114), an interpreter and 'gatherer of interpretations' (Stake, 1995 p.99), empowering participants through the construction of a collective understanding of knowledge. The constructivist ontology therefore supports the 'key philosophical assumption' (Merriam, 1998 p.6) of qualitative research, that reality is constructed by individuals as a result of their experience. I was able to utilise methods of qualitative data collection that enabled me to 'strive for a depth of understanding' (Patton, 1987 p.1). In line with the ontological and epistemological position

of constructivism, the methodological framework of case study that is situated in a constructivist paradigm was selected for my research (Stake, 1995). This enabled the methodology to remain connected to the 'core values and intentions' of the research (Hyett et al., 2014 p.2). Purposeful selection, as opposed to random selection, of Shakespeare School as a single case was focused upon maximising what could be learnt based upon its uniqueness (Miles and Huberman, 1994), as seen in Figure 1. Whilst quantitative researchers in seeking for generalization would recognise such uniqueness as an error, a carefully chosen case with a clear rationale for its selection is seen as critical in order to add to knowledge and lead to discovery (Flyvberg, 2001).

	<b>National</b>	<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Shakespeare School</b>
Reading	66%	52%	70%
GPS	72%	62%	85%
Maths	70%	59%	82%
Writing	74%	73%	79%
RWM	53%	39%	70%

Figure 1 2016 Key Stage Two results- percentage of children achieving national expectations at Shakespeare School

The research process of the data collection and analysis can be seen in Figure 2 with the steps of thematic analysis shown in Figure 3.

The participants in the study were all staff working across a range of roles within Shakespeare school, including four members of the Senior Management Team (SM), six teaching staff (T), three Teaching Assistants (TA) and four Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA).

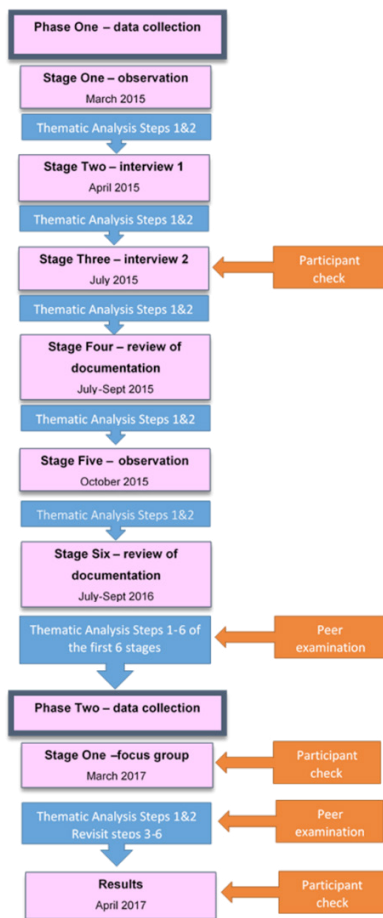


Figure 2 Phases and stages of data collection with steps of data analysis

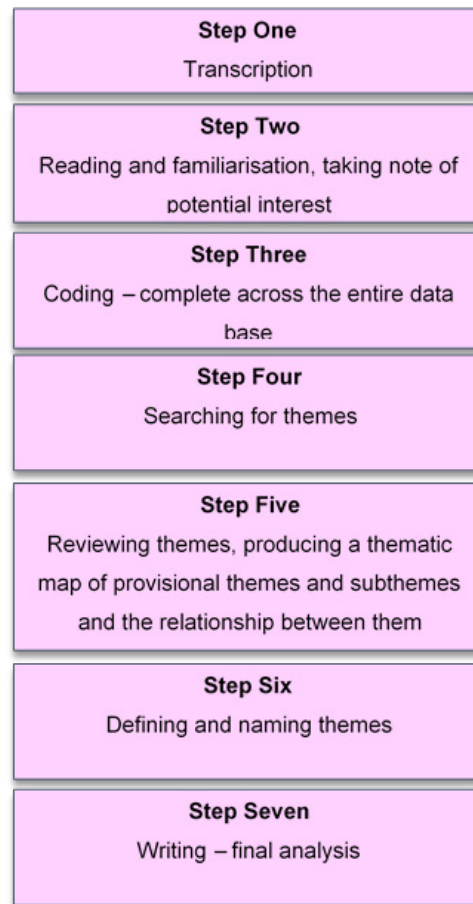


Figure 3 The steps of Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.202)

## Results and Discussion

The school achieves both inclusion and progress for its children through the holistic and joined up approach it takes between the three main themes and subthemes found and identified in the model shown in Figure 4. There is an alignment between the philosophy the school holds regarding the inclusion of their children and how that philosophy is implemented through their creative curriculum and supported by leadership values. All three themes are connected by the blue central columns that represent key areas of learning for the inclusion and progress of both children and staff in order that they thrive. Whilst arranged on top of each other, the model does



not imply a hierarchy of themes, instead the dotted lines symbolise the dynamic and transformational nature of the model. The children are central to it, and as the cohort's current or future needs change the layers of the model will adapt as part of the transformational focus of the school.

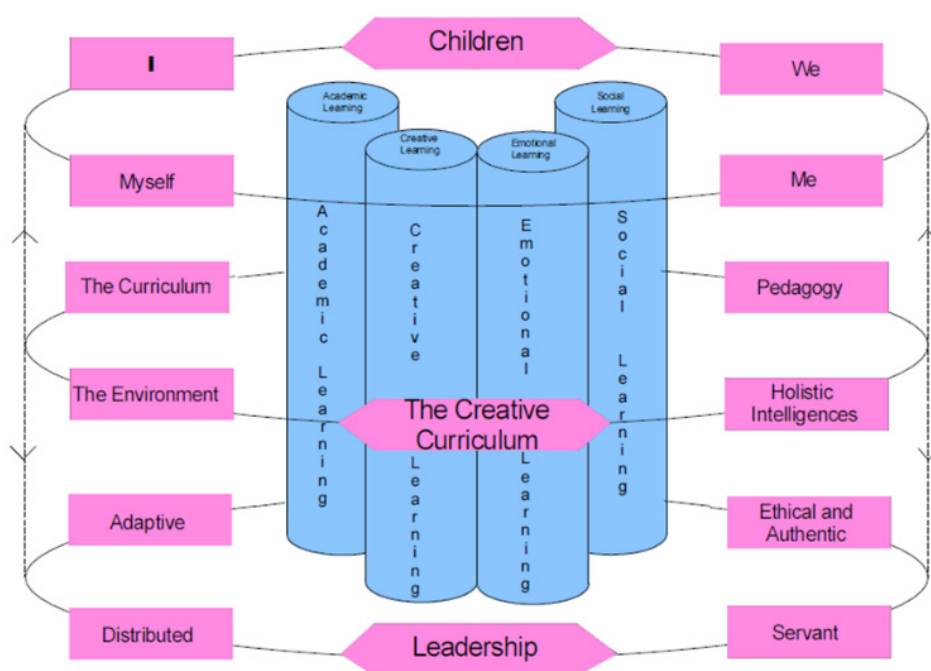


Figure 4 A model of inclusion and progress for social justice, as identified at Shakespeare School

The theme *Children* presented the school's philosophy and participants understanding of inclusion and progress. Theme One provided four subthemes, 'I', 'myself', 'me' and 'we', each aligned to a central area of learning in support of inclusion and progress, academic, emotional, creative and social learning. Three main points arose from this theme. Firstly, the inclusive values and philosophy of Shakespeare School supported their transformational goal and aspirations for all children which led to high expectations for all based upon growth mindset (Dweck, 2012). This enabled the distinction to be made that if the government position of high expectation is based upon a medical model of inclusion and a fixed mindset of learning, then high expectations are nothing more than symbols of inclusion without the power to transform children's lives. Each child in

school was recognised as having the capacity to succeed and develop their learning. This was supported by the context for that transformation through empathetic relationships between the staff and children as well as between children in order that they thrive. It was recognised as important that children were involved in those high expectations, developing children as agents in their own learning and who could problem solve, utilise independent thinking skills and take pleasure in their responsibility for and of learning. The co-agency between children and staff as well as the treatment of differences was based upon human and humane relationships whereby both children and staff remained proactive and motivated to learn. Secondly, the school's inclusive mindset was underpinned by a set of non-negotiable entitlements for all children. They were to be treated fairly, labels of difference rejected, each valued and with the same amount of staff time provided to all children. Children had an entitlement to be known as an individual as well as part of a collective, participating in the full curriculum with a commitment that everything would be done to engage, excite and facilitate their responsibility for learning. Children were not removed from the class or the curriculum for interventions, a legacy of the medical model for understanding inclusion that has been supported by government for both the treatment of children found to be educationally underperforming, or in order that schools can demonstrate appropriate use of pupil premium money for those in receipt of FSM. Thirdly, difference was not based upon comparison with others, nor seen as a static concept that limited what children could achieve that leads to labelling. Differences were recognised and respected across the four central areas of academic, emotional, creative and social learning, valued for developing the whole child and what made a child unique.

Theme Two was identified as *The Creative Curriculum*. The school's created curriculum and pedagogy remained a child centred approach that was a fusion of both excellence and enjoyment and informed by the philosophy of Theme One. Their curriculum provided a context and commodity that valued all children (Hodkinson, 2010) by both responding to the diversity and needs of the children in school (Slee, 1999) and engaging them in learning (Kellet and Nind, 2003) as part of a collective. The curriculum was delivered through the school's knowledge centred thematic approach. However, rather than considering knowledge as a static concept that

children merely reproduced, the curriculum focused upon developing knowledge and skills that aim to support them both as learners and citizens beyond school. The school had demonstrated its own risk taking in developing their curriculum, and risk taking of children in learning was recognised as essential for both their progress and inclusion. The focus on developing empathy was seen as crucial to both collaboration and enabling children to feel confident to challenge themselves, confident that failure would not be perceived negatively. Engaging children in learning was recognised as not being automatic and resulting from children's presence (Ellis and Tod, 2014), but as a pledge between children and staff through the creation of a shared childhood, utilising what children had in common and stimulated by stories, the environment (Figure 5), their senses, emotions, imagination and creativity (Robinson 2015). A framework of valued holistic intelligences was embedded within the curriculum in support of academic, emotional, creative and social learning. Academic learning was seen as one area of learning, and with the combination of social, emotional and creative learning all learning was regarded as valuable for the school's philosophy of the whole child as present in Theme One.



Figure 5 The school's creative environment

Theme Three identified the school's philosophy for *Leadership* that enabled staff to role model their active, moral responsibilities as adults.

This included their authentic treatment and support of others as well as their response to developing their own long term learning transformation. Bass (1985) refers to this approach as transformational leadership. The philosophy of leadership in school modelled the same understanding and treatment of difference to staff as it did to children, the same encouragement to take risks in learning and to be challenged, the same focus on collaboration for co-creating learning and creativity for generating next steps. As a result, like the active learning they promoted for their children, staff experienced the benefits of the skills they taught. Through the focus on active leadership not only were academic skills supported, but subject knowledge was also enhanced. Staff reported their openness to learning from others, including children, and immersion in their own learning as part of the 'flow' of learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013, p.110). The research at Shakespeare School led to an agreement with Flem and Keller (2000) that the successful inclusion of children is related to a school's leadership. A combination of leadership philosophies were recognised within the school, this included: Heifetz and Linsky (2004) for adaptive leadership, Hodges (2016) for distributive leadership, Greenleaf (1970) for servant leadership, Spears (2002) for empathy in leadership, Yukl (2006) for authentic leadership and Northouse (2012) for ethical leadership. The skills of the Holistic Intelligence framework were developed, practised and modelled by staff as part of the school's approach to leadership and therefore experienced first-hand by those responsible for teaching them to children.

The school's holistic approach enabled inclusion and progress to be part of the same transformational process for children and staff. Progress was regarded not as attainment or outcomes but about transforming lives within and beyond school, not just for learning but for children as citizens. Learning across the Holistic Intelligence framework, like knowledge, mindset and habitus was not regarded as a static concept, but as transformative, 'possibility thinking' (Craft and Jeffrey, 2004 p. 41), whereby both agency and learning within a network of others was valued. Inclusion was broader than children with SEN, including all children and staff as a collective to which they all belonged. The inclusive ethos, pedagogy, curriculum and leadership approach of Shakespeare School recognised children's rights, entitlements and the value of difference; with difference

regarded as diversity rather than deviancy. Empathy was regarded as a key skill and leadership skill in supporting both inclusion and progress by providing an understanding of others, supporting a sense of belonging as well as being utilised to support high expectations based upon a growth mindset and the freedom to take risks in learning. Within the humane context of the school risk taking was seen as a sign of inclusion, a freedom to learn, consider possibilities and aspire. The creation of allness within school was supported by the provision of an engaging, responsive and shared childhood for children, one that they all had in common through their creative curriculum, providing the humane and motivational context, conditions and opportunities for inclusion and progress in learning to take place so that all children could thrive. As a result, Shakespeare School resolved the tension between a child's possession of knowledge and their participation in the social process of learning and belonging.

A combination of Sen's capability approach with the work of Bourdieu was identified as an appropriate model for inclusion, and one that recognises the methods by which social inequalities can be responded to within school but does not ignore the physical, social, economic, cultural and political dimensions of children's lives outside school. As a result, rather than school being 'the (my emphasis) engine of social justice and economic growth' (DfE, 2016, p.8), it is positioned as an invaluable part of the whole engine in a child's life that government has its own responsibilities for maintaining, reproducing or ameliorating the inequalities children face. Norwich (2013) highlighted that Sen's capability approach was incomplete in that it did not take into account social power, constraints and how the dilemma of difference is resolved in practice, suggesting that it would benefit from being 'integrated with other approaches' (Norwich, 2008, p.20). My research at Shakespeare School has responded to this, providing an example of this fusion in practice (Figure 6).

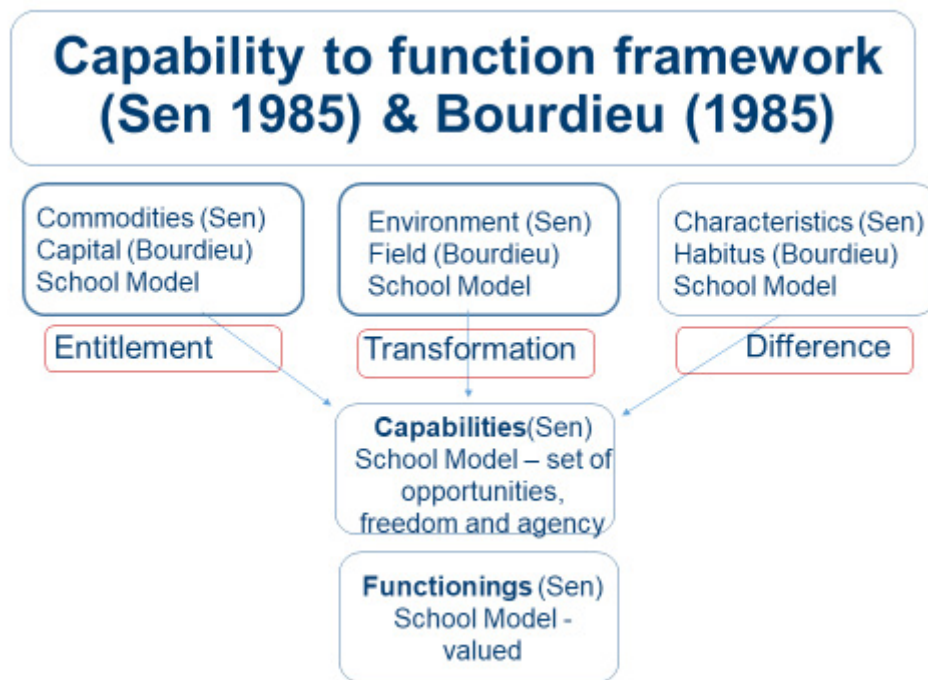


Figure 6 The combining of the work of Sen (1985), Bourdieu (1985) and the research at Shakespeare School

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