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CAPACITY-BUILDING
IN EDUCATIONAL
CONTEXTS**

Patrick Alan Danaher et al.





**Contemporary Capacity-Building in
Educational Contexts**

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Contemporary Capacity-Building in Educational Contexts

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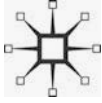
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*For our significant others, who make us who we are
For I take record of God, in you I have had mine early
joy ...*

—Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*,
Book XXI, Chapter IX

*Nunc scio quid sit Amor.
Now I know what Love is.*

—Virgil, *Eclogues*, viii, 43

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List of Abbreviations

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Programme
CBRN	Capacity-Building Research Network
CISUS	create, improve, store, use and share (knowledge)
ICT/s	Information and Communication Technology/ies
MBTI®	Myers Briggs Type Indicator
PAR&E	Participatory Action Research and Evaluation
USQ	University of Southern Queensland, Australia



1

Conceptualising and Contextualising Contemporary Capacity-Building

► **Abstract:** *Contemporary capacity-building assumes varied forms and generates varying degrees of effect and effectiveness. It is therefore useful and important to articulate a scholarly programme for researching capacity-building in its multiple manifestations. This chapter outlines that scholarly programme in three dimensions. Firstly, a concise account is presented of credible and sometimes divergent approaches to conceptualising capacity-building and to mapping a selection of current contexts in which those concepts can be applied. Secondly, nine distinct empirical data sets that the authors have amassed and analysed are portrayed as encapsulating some of the diversity of approaches to conceptualising and contextualising capacity-building. Thirdly, those data sets are used to identify eight educational ‘hot topics’ and ‘wicked problems’ in order to understand contemporary capacity-building from new and potentially powerful perspectives.*

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Introduction

Capacity-building stands tall in the contemporary literature, where it straddles several scholarly fields. It is lauded variously as assisting health-based research teams (Holden et al., 2012), as contributing to a deliberative process of democratisation (Dryzek, 2009), as enabling local communities to engage proactively with climate change (Shaw et al., 2009) and as furthering the goal of national school improvement and educational development (Sumintono et al., 2012).

Yet, despite the generally positive valence attached to capacity-building, much research remains to be conducted if we are to understand more comprehensively the parameters and possibilities of contemporary capacity-building. These research gaps have been identified as including the concept of absorptive capacity in organisation studies (Volberda et al., 2010), the effectiveness of sustainability oriented innovations in building capacities in small and medium-sized enterprises (Klewitz & Hansen, 2014), the continued development of strategies to enhance the capacities of older people (Martin-Matthews, 2011), the need for stronger links between policy-makers and researchers concerned with capacity-building in landscape policy development and implementation (Conrad et al., 2011) and the value of extending research into the relationship among health disparities, social determinants and capacity-building strategies (Koh et al., 2010).

The particular research gap taken up in this book is centred on identifying in greater detail and with increased specificity some of the processes associated with conceptualising and contextualising the educational manifestations of contemporary capacity-building. We have adopted an intentionally broad and inclusive understanding of 'educational', and we have deliberately selected empirical data sets (which are outlined in a later section of this chapter) that highlight the diversity of these educational manifestations and that also challenge many conventional assumptions about teaching and learning. Certainly we are convinced of both the necessity and the utility of elaborating and evaluating the concepts and contexts commonly associated with contemporary capacity-building in educational settings.

This volume builds on two previous books. In March 2009 several members of the then Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia, formed the Capacity-Building, Pedagogy

and Social Justice Research Team, and in 2010 they published the edited book *Sustaining Synergies: Collaborative Research and Researching Collaboration* (Arden et al., 2010). In July 2011 the research team was considerably enlarged to become the Capacity-Building Research Network (CBRN), the Faculty's inaugural faculty research centre, and in 2012 they published the edited book *Constructing Capacities: Building Capabilities through Learning and Engagement* (Danaher et al., 2012). At the end of 2012 it was agreed that the CBRN would continue as a single entity but would also consolidate its activities by forming three research strands around clusters of more specific research interests and strengths within the broader network. Like its companion volume (Baguley et al., 2014), this book is accordingly the work of the eight members of one of those strands, focused on elaborating the concepts and contexts of educational capacity-building.

As a later section in the chapter elaborates, there is considerable diversity of research disciplines, methods and paradigms among the eight strand members. At the same time, we are all committed to constructing productive synergies arising from that diversity. Indeed, we see that construction as crucial to deconstructing and moving beyond unhelpful theoretical binaries and methodological impasses and to developing new understandings of what capacity-building is, how to address its inevitable limitations and how to maximise its benefits for multiple participants and stakeholders in educational enterprises.

The chapter has been divided into the following three sections:

- 1 Approaches to conceptualising and contextualising educational capacity-building gleaned from the current literature
- 2 The research projects providing the empirical data sets informing the book
- 3 The 'hot topics' and 'wicked problems' that frame the book's purposes and structure and to which educational capacity-building informed by the research projects can contribute new insights.

The resultant discussion is intended to constitute a theoretically framed, methodologically rigorous and evidentially grounded scholarly programme for researching contemporary educational capacity-building.

Approaches to conceptualising and contextualising educational capacity-building

Current scholarship reflects a wide diversity of approaches to conceptualising and contextualising educational capacity-building alike. For example, Mitchell and Sackney (2011) differentiated among the personal, interpersonal and organisational dimensions of capacity and hence of capacity-building. They also enunciated ‘three learning phases’ that we contend can be applied to capacity-building also: ‘naming and framing, analyzing and integrating, and applying and experimenting’ (p. 138). As Mitchell and Sackney reflected:

These three phases are not isolated, independent, or linear. Instead they represent three mutually influencing and overlapping categories of learning through which educators proceed, with the ascendant phase at any given time being deeply influenced by particular circumstances, conditions, and histories. (p. 138)

A similar relationship between the concepts and contexts of educational capacity-building was noted in Cosner’s (2009) study of ‘the cultivation of collegial trust as a central feature of the capacity-building work of 11 high school principals, nominated for their expertise with capacity building’ (p. 248). For instance, ‘To address collegial trust concerns, principals set, enforced, and reinforced norms of interaction’, and moreover ‘[v]aried and context-specific strategies are noted’ (p. 248), again highlighting the importance of capacity-building being clearly conceptualised and also practised and instantiated across multiple conditions and contexts. This same relationship between capacity-building and interactions was identified in the context of student engagement and teacher–student relationships (Pianta et al., 2012).

Likewise, in relation to the educational aspects of community capacity-building for tourist development in Iran (Aref, 2011), the following features were articulated as arising from the country’s status as a developing nation and in turn as restricting efforts to enhance such capacity-building: ‘Community members have restricted access to decision-making, [have] a lack of resources, knowledge, skills and education and lack a sense of ownership with regard to tourism’ (p. 347). In a very different context – school districts in the United States – Sykes et al. (2009) observed in a similar vein that ‘educational institutions often lack the capacity to change in the desired ways – coercion (pressure) without capacity building (support) is insufficient’ (p. 772).