Abstract: The multiple forms of capital represent a powerful framework for understanding certain approaches to capacity-building. This chapter explores how particular groups of learners and educators exhibit specific forms of capital and how the participants in the associated research projects gain access to and mobilise those forms of capital to generate certain outcomes. This exploration is analysed from the broader perspective of which activities and outcomes hold currency in certain contexts and how that currency can be converted into other contexts. The chapter concludes by synthesising key implications for theorising the links among capital, currencies and capacity-building. These propositions are illustrated by reference to circus families in England, Australian teachers supporting student well-being and Australian parents’ perceptions of capital and their adaptations to systemic practices.

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Introduction

This chapter is predicated on the proposition that the complex conceptual and material relationships among capital, currencies and capacity-building make a valuable contribution to the broader project of analysing contemporary capacity-building in educational contexts with which this book is concerned. From an economic perspective, the common denominator linking the three concepts is the notion of value – the level of worth denoted by a particular activity or qualification. From a political perspective, the common denominator is power – the capacity to exercise influence in specific contexts to achieve particular outcomes. Accordingly, the chapter elaborates examples of how the three data sets considered here exhibit value and power as the respective research project participants engage with forms of capital, currencies and capacity-building.

As with the other chapters in the book, we need to highlight at the outset of the discussion that we recognise that the processes outlined in the previous paragraph are neither easy nor automatic. On the contrary, many individuals and groups struggle to acquire and exercise capital, and the dispositions, knowledges and skills that they develop are not necessarily the currencies with the highest value in particular situations. At the same time, there is strong evidence in all three data sets being analysed here that individuals and groups can and do attain capital and maintain currency in ways that build their and others’ capacities over sustained periods of time.

The chapter consists of the following three sections:

- Selected literature and a conceptual framework articulating the links among forms of capital, currencies and capacity-building
- Forms of capital, currencies and capacity-building in the three selected data sets
- Concluding implications of the analysis of the data sets for understanding and enhancing contemporary approaches to capacity-building in educational contexts.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Several scholars have focused on the concept of forms of capital (see, e.g., Steele, 2009, in relation to theorising social capital). The US political