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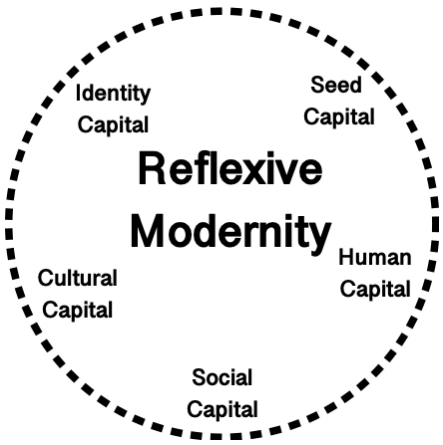
James Draper Memorial Lecture 2023

Letting No One Behind: the Importance of Five Capitals of Learning in Reflexive Modernity

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I am very honoured to have received the invitation from my friend and colleague, Professor S.Y. Shah, to deliver the 2023 James Draper Memorial Lecture. It is a privilege to contribute to the great tradition of the James Draper Lecture series. I was looking at the names of the previous people who have given this lecture, there are some present in this room today, so I'm following a very distinguished group of people. I wish to acknowledge those people before I commence.

Today I want to talk a little bit about this idea of five capitals of learning and to place it in the context of reflexive modernity. I believe this is really important because we need to have a clear understanding, an appreciation of the context in which we're working. That's why I wanted to look at the concept of reflexivity and in that context I also want to address the idea of capitals of learning. While today a lot is made of the idea of human capital and human capital is very important, human capital on its own is not the solution, it's not the destination. That's why I wanted to also talk too about the other forms of learning capital.



You can see at the center of my model there is the term reflexive modernity, which reflects my understanding of contemporary society, being shaped by a form of modernity that is reflexive. What I'm talking about here is the idea that people today are much more proactively engaged on a project around their own self-identity, understanding who they are, understanding the kinds of things that they feel are important in terms of their identity. This is happening all over the world. It's happening in all societies, in all communities and it's especially happening with younger people. For younger people this is becoming extremely important. You can see this maybe in terms of how they deal with their own identity on social media. They're taking and posting pictures and other things in order to project their identity, but they're also building their identities around things like what they consume, what things they eat, what groups do they join, what things are they committed to. This is becoming extremely important and if we are serious about putting the learner at the center of our project then we need to realize who the learner is. This is a learner who has a different set of demands and ideas, which was less the case in previous generations. Around this concept of reflexive modernity, I want to build the idea of the five capitals of learning.

I want to start that discussion with Seed Capital, then proceeding to Identity Capital, Cultural Capital, Social Capital and onto Human Capital. I want to talk about each capital because they're important in terms of us creating an understanding of the learning journey for people. I want us to form a sense of where learners can go to, how they can build their learning capital and how we can create the conditions for them to shape a better future through learning. Because if we're serious about lifelong learning then we have to be serious about giving people an opportunity to learn right through their lives. They're going to have different needs at different points in their lives. It's important for us to understand lifelong learning in a holistic way. Very often lifelong learning is attached to education. Education is important but education is just a small component of lifelong learning, not the other way around. We are we all are lifelong learners, we're constantly learning. As we engage with the world we are learning all the time. We have all learned things since we came into this room here today and hopefully we will learn many more things as we go through our day. Lifelong learning has to be seen in that context. It's not just formal and informal and nonformal it's everything it is in every format. It doesn't stop at a certain age or doesn't begin at a certain age. This is part of what I want to talk about in this lecture.

Creating and germinating Seed Capital

Let’s now consider Seed Capital. Seed capital is an important starting point. All of us in the room had good opportunities in terms of our seed capital accumulation. We wouldn't have been able to get to this room unless we had those opportunities. Seed capital represents the baseline off which the learner starts, this is where we all start from. Earlier I had a conversation with one of your colleagues about a literacy programme, which they were leading here in India, where they shifted the literacy levels by a huge amount. By shifting the literacy levels you're giving people an opportunity to do other things in their learning journey. It doesn’t just start and stop there. It's also about their capacity to accumulate additional capital. When I was sitting in the reception area earlier I saw quote from Mahatma Gandhi in Professor Shah’s book. I can't remember it exactly, I should have brought the book with me to quote it back to you, but it was it was interesting because he was making the point that learning and education isn't a destination per se. He was saying that education and learning is about the full human being, it's about all the potential that they can achieve, all the things they can be, all the contributions that they can make, all the impact they can make on the

people around them. In order for people to achieve those goals, to get to those places they need to be able to get some traction in the system. They need to get some initial learning that allows them to go further in their learning journey. Also, and this is the case with all kinds of capital, there has to be opportunies to invest with a reasonable chance of success. That's important. That's really important in terms of where do people go to next in their learning journey. How can they progress. Being able to read and write of brings them to a certain place, but can they do something more. Can they continue in that journey. There is no better example of the challenge of that than India as a country. I think 65% of the population of India is under 35 and something like 50% of the population is under 25. This is the primary asset that this country has, its people. In order for that asset to be realized then there has the opportunities for people. This is why I'm talking about seed capital as the starting point.

When I talk about germinating seed capital I mean how can these people move forward with their learning. How can they go to the next level. Parental education is an important catalyst in this germination. Parents are key influencers, they create key conditions for younger people in terms of their learning and educational. This is one of the key benefits of adult education

Logically we need to be investing in preschool, we need to be investing in primary education The logic is that most of the resources should be invested in the younger cohorts. There is a certain symmetry to that logic. A second kind of logic thinks about germination. The seeds will not grow unless there are certain conditions around those seeds. They will need moisture, a certain temperature, they will need certain light conditions. They need all of these things, but where does that come from? For younger learners much of this comes from their parents and carers. It comes from the condition to which the younger people are exposed. Through adult education you are not only transforming the experience of adults, you're also transforming the experience of all those people they come in contact with, all those people they interact with. They go on to interact with their families. They are in direct contact with their children, their siblings, their parents, their grandparents. They can be and are key influencers, that's a really important dimension in how we create the conditions for seed capital to become something more than just seeds.

I want to share an interesting piece of research from Australia. Dockery (2016) found that those young people whose sole parent's highest level of education was a degree were almost three times more likely to go to third level education than those who's sole parent didn't have a degree. That is just to give you an example of the extent of a parent's influence and why adult education can be key to the germination of seed capital. The principle of letting no one behind is a key call from UNESCO. In answering that call parents' education attainment, language status, factors like literacy practice in the home and literary proficiency are key determinants in creating the conditions for younger people to advance in their education and learning. Adult education has a key role to play in that space in terms of creating those kinds of conditions. Even with very small levels of educational attainment and educational advancement they straightaway change the paradigm. They can change it completely for people around them, that's really important.

The next point I want to make relating to seed capital is that education is the most important predictor of participation in adult education. What that's telling us is that those that have already gotten access to education are the ones most likely to seek participate in more education. As adult educators we probably already knew that. It tells us something about the importance of seed capital. Especially if we really want to change the world, and I think it has

to be our mission. To change the world we have to make it possible for people to get education. Education is really important as a shifter, as a catalyst for change. To those people who are a bit dismissive about education, I think it's important for us to reiterate this point very clearly to them.

We have to be conscious that some people need additional supports and helps. I don't need to talk to you about that, I'm sure this is something you're dealing with on a day-to-day basis. Patterson (2018) refers to 'the forgotten 90%' with reference to those that have not recently been involved in formal or nonformal education. Those 90% are completely outside the system and they are everywhere. If we are really serious about changing the world then we have to start thinking about how do we get to those 90%. What are their needs, what can we do to change their work, what can we do to put them in a position where they're able to contribute in a different way to the wider society. Again we can see this in contrast to those captured in Hovdhaugen and Opheim's (2018) phrase 'the partially met demand'. The partially met demand cohort, those people who are have already achieved things in the education system, are the ones who are going to make more demands on it. There's a lesson here for us in terms of the forgotten 90% . Unless we get to them they are not going to ask, they're not going to demand, they're not going to feel there's anything there for them. So how do we deal with this? We can address this with more resources and more outreach activity. This is absolutely critical in terms of impact. Because if we really want to be impactful, if we want to change the world, then this is where we have to go. We have to engage with those processes of learning and education that are closest to the learners. The closest place we can get is at community level, in non formal education systems and informal education systems, this is where we really need a lot of resources. We need resources in other places too, but this is absolutely essential if we want to shift the dial not just for today's learners, but for the next generation of young people and the next generation of adults. If we shift the dial for one generation, we've shifted the dial for all subsequent generations. In America they talk about the generation zero, generation zero are the first group of migrants to come to America. They talk about if they can change the experience for generation zero, then they change the experience for all subsequent generations. Now that's true for migrants, but it's also true of everybody else. If we really want to change things we need to start tackling those who are outside the system. We need to start creating conditions for the generation of seed capital and the germination of that seed capital, for people to move on in their learning journeys and move on with their lives.

Identity Capital and the learner at the centre of things

I want to talk a little bit about identity capital. Earlier when I spoke about reflexive modernity I spoke to you about the idea of everybody having a portfolio of identity. Everybody is involved in this reflection on who they are, why they are, what they want to become, what they want to consume, their tastes, fashion and so on. Identity capital is really important. It's about who we are and how we understand who we are. It's about self-esteem and dignity as a member of the community. We know, any of us were involved in an education process know, that the identity of the individual shifts through an educational process. It happens with all of us, we become a new and a different person through an education process. We're not the same person who enters the process. That's an important aspect of what we do, we are actually engaged in a process in which people changing their identity, we're allowing them to change their identity. If we're taking a holistic approach to this we're facilitating them to shape their identity in the direction which they would like to go. This type of identity journey is greatly enhanced through adult education. We can see that education enables people amend their

view of themselves. They appreciate the change and we can see how they can do different things in the world. I'll give you an example from my own place. One of the days in my university we had an interview panel for a new post. In this process we created a board and among the board members was an external person. In this case we wanted an industry person so we had somebody from a pharmaceutical company with which we work. We're having lunch and I'm sitting next to that industry person who was the director of HR. He said he wanted to share an interesting anecdote from something that happened in relation to a programme we were running at his plant. A man taking the course made an appointment with him at the request of his wife and teenage children. He wanted to tell the director of HR the positive impact the course was having on his person life, his family wanted him to share how his communication skills had improved so much and how their home life was significantly more harmonious. Making that man's home a harmonious space no wasn't the purpose of the course, but it was a very real consequence of the course. It's important for us to remember that we are engaged in all aspects of a person's life, their identity does not just change in the classroom, it changes in every aspect of their lives. I remember going to a mandatory health and safety program at my university, with a certain amount of reluctance. The instructor could see that we were not overly happy at doing this manual handling course. Well he said I want to say one thing to you now, I'm going to talk to you about manual handling lifting things today the reason why we need to talk about this is so that you don't damage your back, but remember to back you use in the university is the same back you use at home. That was an important learning point for me because he said basically you know you're learning in one context but what you learn impacts every other context. Even if that's how to lift a box, then you're always going to know how to lift a box regardless of whether it's at home or at work. It's the same in all learning contexts. We're changing people's identity, we're changing how they see to world, we're changing how they interact with the word and that's a really important part of what we do. We also give people opportunities to be a more actively engaged person in the wider community, they can do more things in wider society than they could do before their education. In terms of impacting, learning does not just impact the learner, the learners have impact on the whole world around them.

I want to try and get a little bit deeper into the idea of reflexive modernity and identity. Our identities are a means by which we can participate socially and develop our self-image. Our identity is important for us in terms of how we relate with other people, how we interact with other people. When contextualizing this in relation to reflexive modernity, this is captured very well by Honneth (2004), who talks about people placing. 'their very selves at the centre of their own life-planning and practice' (p. 469). Identity then is an ongoing process, it's constantly changing, but we are like navigators, we are like people out in the ocean and we're trying to decide where we want to go and we're trying to look at opportunities for ourselves. In today's world because of the advent of the Internet and social media and all of that, the amount of possibilities available to people is phenomenal. In a sense the range of possibilities are overwhelming for many people. This is a real challenge in terms of the amount of choices that people have. The amount of opportunities people have in terms of their identity project is at a scale that never existed before.

People who are newcomers, people who are from outside of the mainstream, they need to be able to engage in society and make decisions affecting their own lives. It is also the case where people are enrolled in skills programmes, people need to be doing things that resonate with them. They need to have a sense of self-determination and freedom. They need to be able to try to make decisions that impact their own lives. The more autonomy and the more feeling of having some kind of control over the direction of their learning journey, the better

it is going to be for the person. The freer they are in the system the more they're going to engage in the learning process, more they are likely to progress. I absolutely realize that things like identity have a different meaning in different societies. I can't tell you what it means in Indian society you have to figure that one out for yourselves, but I can tell you from my own perspective what it means.

Cultural Capital is key and often context specific

Cultural capital acquisition is complex, I want to give you a sense of that in relation to my own experiences here in India. We're all lifelong learners, we're all always constantly involved in learning. I arrived in India on Saturday night at 8 pm and I can tell you from a cultural capital perspective I'm on a steep curve. I've never encountered a place where the level of cultural complexity is so high. You all eat, sleep and breathe it and it's no problem to you, but for somebody coming from outside it's unbelievable. Every single thing is challenging, simply because I don't understand the culture. I think I know something about it, but of course I know almost nothing and so for me to function in Indian society I have to have much greater appreciation of the culture. I have to be able to engaged in this culture, otherwise I'm completely lost. I can't even get to here from my hotel. I was telling my colleagues about getting some hot water yesterday. I wasn't feeling terribly well nothing to do with Indian food, but to do with the food given to me somewhere else. I just felt I needed to drink some hot water, but trying to explain to the people in the hotel what I needed was quite difficult. We all eventually figured it out and we were all in the same place, but it took quite a while. You could look at that in different ways. You could look at that as an obstacle or you can look at it as an asset. If you've got the cultural capital then you've got a huge asset. If you don't have the cultural capital then it's an obstacle. You cannot navigate the system without the cultural capital.

Some months ago when I was reflecting on cultural capital and its place in this model, I found it hard to explain to people about why culture capital is important. Sometimes when you're writing something and you're creating a scenario and saying well should or shouldn't it be in there. Well arriving in India has made it all clear to me. I'm learning something about my own writing here and learning something about the stuff I wrote myself because I can absolutely see in a very clear way why cultural capital is so important. That actually is a tribute to India, because it means that you have a very deep, complex culture. That's a good thing to have, but it also means that for people to navigate in that system they need a lot of learning around culture. They need a lot of cultural capital, otherwise they're completely lost. That applies to me as an outsider coming in, it also applies to people who are from marginalized groups, ethnic minorities, different linguistic groups and so on. If they're not part of the mainstream culture then they have challenges. We have to recognize and validate cultural capital regardless of where that has been earned and that's a challenge for us because sometimes we are dismissive of other cultures. We look at other cultures seeing them as less good than our own. That's particularly the case for people who are from marginalized groups in society, from minorities, maybe from socioeconomically lower classes, we can be dismissive of their cultures. We don't see their culture as being as valid or important as our culture. We can see this in institutions. Universities are places that often demonstrate this. In universities people are often into high culture and they look down their noses at what is seen as lower level popular culture.

I was reading one of the Sunday newspapers here. I think it's the wedding time of the year. They have a whole page of wedding photographs. It is really interesting because they were

talking about the different cultural backgrounds and the different people who were getting married. Why they have different ceremonies. They explain why they're dressed differently and why one ceremony was like this and another ceremony was like that. All of those cultures are slightly different. All of those cultures are equally valuable. It's important to acknowledge the significant culture artefacts that come through in the wedding ceremonies. Appreciating cultural diversity, how people come to do things in a certain kind of way is an interesting learning journey. It's like how we cook and eat food. Yesterday I got some amazing Indian food and then there's a question of how are you going to eat the food. I've a certain idea in my head on the way to eat food, Indian people have different concepts about how we should eat food. It's the same situation in other countries. In Indonesia they have a different way of eating food, in Vietnam a different way of eating food, in Thailand a different way of eating food. For all of those people their sense of how they eat food came through cultural processes of understanding what food means to them. It's not just around the practical aspect of how do you get the food from the plate or whatever into your mouth, but how do you engage with it. That's all cultural capital.

You're not just going to pick that up in five minutes, that's a very long journey and it's a really important. It's important in terms of being able to participate and being able to do things in society. When we're involved in education we need to be conscious of that. That this is part of the lifelong learning journey. If people don't have that cultural capital they're they struggle. We need to create opportunities for everybody to extend their cultural capital in a reflexive way, that allows them to identify their priorities, goals and ambitions.

I want to give you a cultural capital dilemma from Ireland, because I know that situation better. In my university we do some work with Irish Travellers. Irish Travellers are an indigenous, tiny ethnic minority. A really small group of people, but they are the most discriminated against. They have the poorest educational outcomes, the poorest housing, the poorest health outcomes, lowest levels of income, shortest lifespan, you pick any metric and Irish Travellers are at the bottom. It's our mission to let nobody behind, so it's important for us to engage positively with Irish Travellers.

For them to have an equitable stake in society and move on on their terms, one of the big challenges Irish Travellers have is with the Irish education system. When an Irish Traveller child goes to primary school they come into a classroom in which they're maybe the only Irish Traveller in that classroom. They are in an environment where there is rarely a positive mention of anything to do with Irish Traveller culture. They don't see any images of Irish Travellers, they don't hear any mention of Irish Travellers, there's no content on Irish Traveller culture. So how could you interpret that from a cultural perspective. You could say these people are trying to steal my culture, they're trying to take my culture from me, they want me to be just like them.

This is an important lesson for us. We need to ensure that we are not involved in a process where we're taking people's culture from them, but instead we should be adding to their cultural capital. So we need to respect other people's cultures, we need to give them opportunities to take on more cultural capital, we should not be trying to take their culture away from them.

It's important we acknowledge the positive and mutually beneficial resources and richness that is generating in complex and diverse societies. We have to compare this to the ecosystem. If we have an ecosystem with a single species it would not be a very sustainable

ecosystem. It's the same with culture, the more cultural diversity we have the richer our lives are. The more diverse the society I live in the better life I have. That comes in all kinds of ways, even including the food we eat. There are a lot of Indian restaurants in Cork, if there were no Indian people in Cork there would be no Indian restaurants there. There's a whole range of things that impact us around language, culture, music, everything, even our ways of thinking that we benefit from through interacting with other cultures. So the more diverse our society is, the richer are our experiences.

Another aspect of cultural capital is our sense of belonging and being accepted. It is important to be able to speak whatever language or languages that are predominantly spoken locally, but sometimes we forget that it's also important, for children especially, that they can speak the language of to the place that they've come from. Otherwise they will not be able to interact with their families, they won't be as able to interact with their own culture. Then you lead people into situations of alienation and liminality. Europe is a good 'bad example' of all of that. In Europe we've been obsessed, since the Enlightenment, with the idea of classifying everything. Everything has to have labels, everything has to have a box, every box has to have to shelf We are very poor at being able to navigate uncertainty. What we so often see as confusion. I can see India is in a very different place, thankfully. This is a resource that you have.

We Europeans have been a little bit obsessed about trying to keep people in their lanes. We have all kinds of problems as a consequence. We have a terrible history of trying to 'fix the world', to shape it to our European ideas.

In adult education we need to be able to create conditions for people to advance culturally. Being able to advance to where they want to go, without us feeling threatened or without them feeling we're putting our hands in their pockets and taking something from them.

Riccardi (2021) presents us with a challenge, a prompt to extend ourselves past the sort of laisse faire that is not serving us particularly well. She wants us to go beyond a status quo "of tolerance, coexistence and respect for differences" (p. 13). She's addressing what we might call a comfort zone, a place that so many Europeans have gone to. Your typical European is living in a nuclear family, they shut the door and let people get on with their lives, but they're not really engaging with them, they're not actively interacting with their community. When it comes to accommodating diversity, we need to be proactively ensuring that all people are included. An example of a challenge in this sphere is the diversity that's emerging especially in Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and many other countries around gender identity. Gender identity is in a place that it has never before been in human history. Many societies and groups are struggling to move push beyond 'tolerance' and 'co-existence' in recognizing and respecting diverse gender identities. That's a huge challenge for us. If we're really serious about the autonomy of individuals to self-identify, for people to articulate and express how they understand who they are and to live their lives in line with their identity in accordance with the norms of what Bohman (2015) termed 'non-domination'.

The big challenges we have is that people need to have a voice, a capacity and an opportunity to be active agents in shaping their lives. If they feel their cultural values are not really appreciated or their culture is not really being accepted then they're effectively outsiders. This means there's a need for dominant cultures to accommodate to diversity. Again Europe is the best worst example of this because of its colonizing history, the level of hostility that there

has been towards people whose cultures are different to European culture, or more accurately some preconceived idea of what European culture is.

I want to take you on a slight tangent here. Sometimes we imagine that culture is fixed, we imagine that culture belongs to us in a certain kind of way. I was watching a movie on a streaming service called MUBI last year. MUBI is an interesting streaming service because sometimes it does these independent movies and sometimes it will do a season of movies from certain countries and certain parts of the world. This time they were doing a series of movies, kind of like a festival of movies from North Africa. In this particular movie, Un Homme Qui Crie (A Screaming Man), the basic story surrounds a family living in Chad. For reasons too complex to go into now, the father is responsible for sending his son to war and the son dies in the war. Subsequently his son's girlfriend, who is pregnant, comes to live with the family. At one point in the movie they're having a family event and somebody asks the girlfriend, who is from Mali, to sing. When she starts to sing, she does so in a particular unaccompanied style from her traditions in Mali. I got quite a surprise, because although the her language was not something I could understand, her style of singing sounded disconcertingly familiar. Her traditional mode of singing is very similar to a particular type of solo singing which is part of the Irish tradition, we call it seanós. If you're interested, you could search for it online and get a sense of how distinctive a style of singing it is.

So how would people in two ostensibly very different and unconnected places share a common and otherwise unusual form of musical tradition. It turns out that some of the first waves of people to settle in Ireland, many thousands of years ago, came via North Africa. Today people in Ireland don't necessarily appreciate this common cultural bond, yet it is very real. It also shows that cultures are not hermetically sealed from each other and that we share many common elements of our cultures. Sometimes even very important signifiers of our cultures have been borrowed from other cultures. It is incumbent on us as adult educators to allow our learners to have a more open-minded view of culture, be oriented to appreciate all cultures and to also create gateways for people from other cultural backgrounds to penetrate and thrive in locally dominant cultures.

Social Capital not just a glue, but also an enabler

Social capital you probably know more about because it's one of those ones that's spoken about. I like to use a nice graphic from the Red Cross/Red Crescent because it captures so very well the essence of social capital. Social capital is all the networks that we have. These networks are critically important for us in terms of opening doors and creating opportunities for us and our families. It's about knowing who to contact for all the goods and services we need to function in society. If you think about somebody from outside of any place, someone like me arriving in India. if I don't have a good contact people here, which I have thankfully, as I have no social networks, or very few, I wouldn't know who to contact or I wouldn't know who to ask about so many things. Educational and learning processes don't just create learning opportunities, they also create extensions of social networks.

When I walked into the room here this morning, my colleague Dr Shalini, started greeting and embracing people. How does she know these people? She met them here during her studies. All of you know each other or have links to each other. If there's something down the line that you need or want to know you can contact people that are in this room today. I can give you an example of how persistent, what we term as 'weak social ties', can be. When I was a teenager and in my early 20s, me and my friends used to socialize in the pub as was the

norm at the time. In our case we actually didn't go so much to our own local pub, but to a pub in another village about half-an-hour drive away. Over time we got to know the family who owned the pub very well. About five years ago I got a phone call in my in my office at the university, my secretary told me this man was trying to make contact with me. He had the same name as one of the sons in that family, so I called him back straight away. Yes it was him. He wanted me to explore something for his son at the university. He was leveraging some of his social capital, one of his weak social ties, though we had not been in contact for decades. These are the kinds of social capital that is generated between learners and with those who teach them and engage with them in other educational contexts.

Social capital is also crucial in creating societal trust. We could see that when the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic came, which countries adapted well. In countries with high levels of social capital there were relatively higher levels of trust, there were high levels of compliance with the various regimes to contain the pandemic, like all the measures in the beginning around social isolation and later with the uptake of vaccines. In Ireland the adherence to the changing policies around containing COVID-19 were high, because it's a small country with active social networks, so people trust each other. When the government and the chief medical officer said people should take the vaccine the general tendency was to say well if the government is saying it as well as the doctor's saying it, then I should do it, as I trust them. In other societies there was a huge level of hostility, like for instance in Florida in the United States where thousands upon thousands of people died needlessly, because not even the government trusted the science. People tend not to trust others if there isn't a level of reliable, robust social networks in their society.

Social capital is really important in terms of giving us opportunities to do all kinds of things in the world. In educational contexts, in learning environments, we get to meet all kinds of people. We make all kinds of connections. I want to talk a bit more about the strength of weak social ties. Weak social ties are really important aspect of what we gain through organised learning and education. They are bridges that link us to places outside of our normal circle. This is particularly important for marginalized, disadvantaged and excluded groups because it gives them links to people who are in advantageous positions. Those in advantageous positions may have knowledge and insights around opportunities in educational advancement, in jobs and careers even in things like access to advantageous groups, societies, organisations, etc. Those gains obtained through weak social also create critical resources for those people that Jane Jacobs (1961) described as hop skip people. You don't hear that description very much anymore, but hop skip people are the kinds of people who can literally hop and skip forward, like a grasshopper, to critical nodes of knowledge and opportunity and key people. If you imagine your are trying to solve a problem, some of us have to go step-by-step, but hop skip people can see several steps ahead, key links in the chain that can be ignored or identified as important and who the key decision-makers, gate-keepers and resource-holders are. But even the hop skip people need the material for them to hop and skip. Weak social ties that emerge through organised learning and education create the conditions for them to hop and skip, so everybody around them also benefits. Those weak social ties can be especially transformative for marginalised, vulnerable and excluded groups. As adult educators we need to be mindful that they are critically important outcome of what we do. We should be really conscious of that in terms of the resources we can make available to people, opportunities to build their social networks, build bridges to significant opportunities outside their own circles. If you need reminding of why this is so important, think about the phrase 'the old school tie', which places emphasis on the networks generated

at school, perhaps the most notable example being the elite Eglish public schools. They are no less important in a local learning community than in a public school

Before we leave this topic I'd like to also mention positive and negative structural determinants of social capital. We can also be exposed to negative determinants of social and have negative perspectives reinforced. A significant catalyst in generating negative social capital is online social media. It is easy to go into an online space where we only talk to the people who agree with us. We only talk to like-minded people. We don't need to or even want to engage with people outside of our circle. We don't engage with people who have a different perspective or a different point of view. We've seen huge problems with that. Again, if we talk about Europe and North America, we can look at some of the new right, xenophobic and populist movements finding space to thrive in online silos (I'm not saying exclusively). Here like-minded people find mutual support around their ideas, where conspiracy theories can be articulated and given credence. Because all or most of the people there talking to each other believe these things. Somebody said to me recently it's like every family has a crazy uncle somewhere and the crazy uncle has some daft ideas, that the world is flat or that the moon is made of cheese. In the past when he came to some family function people would listen to him and dismiss his ideas as nonsense. But nowadays he can go to these places with all the other crazy uncles and they all can reinforce each other's nonsense.

But we can also create positive determinants of social capital. We can create ways in which people can modify their thinking. We can give people a chance to see the world in a different way, step outside of their framework. We can help people see that it's important for us to critically analyze things. We can create arenas of critique for people, to get all of us to challenge our own convictions, to question things that maybe we otherwise might accept at face value.

Human Capital and links with the other four capitals

Human capital may well be the most familiar to you of the five capitals we are discussing today. Human capital is has a high profile in the contemporary world. It seems to be the one that's always being pushed in policy. Human capital is all the knowledge, skills, competencies that an individual has. They can be deployed in the labour market and the wider economy to facilitates the creation of income, personal wealth, economic advancement. Human capital is basically one of the things that helps someone get a job two years, the vocational skills and knowledge they draw on in the workplace. Like the other capitals, human capital is an intrinsic wealth that resides in people's skills and knowledge. Sometimes people think of human capital maybe only as high tech, but it equally refers to all spheres including the making food, including the making of food in street markets. The human capital involved in how to make food is essential for our survival and wellbeing as a species.

At the beginning I spoke about that huge generation of younger people that are in India today. Their human capital is going to absolutely transform India, provided that they have high levels of human capital and that they have human capital that's useful and usable. But they're not going to get to that exact place in terms of their human capital unless they've had opportunities along the way, facilitated by the accumulation all the other four capitals. The challenge today is that there's a whole range of new kinds of work and work areas. There is also a massive number of people here who are unemployed or underemployed or have no real access to resources. You only get access to tangible and intangible resources through the accumulation of those other capitals in conjunction with the accumulation of human capital.

It’s important that we acknowledge what the World Bank (2020) stated about human capital, highlighting that it is often the only asset the poor have. That is a really good way of describing it. When we talk about human capital we're actually talking about wealth. We should think about it in the same way as we talk about how much money a person has or how much property a person has. Human capital is actually a form of wealth. It's a form of wealth that people everywhere are using on an ongoing basis. That's why we describe it as capital rather than a saving. It is actually something they're investing and drawing upon every day. The World Bank also pointed out that for people to effectively accumulate human capital they are dependent on good education and good health. Looking closer at the education side of that, we understand that for people to accumulate human capital they need to have educational opportunities. Again it’s vital that we see the full picture, rather than just one part of it. We've seen a selective vision and analysis in many workfare policies in Europe, where policymakers make the assumption that you can start with human capital.

I want to use an example from my home city of Cork in Ireland. Cork city is the home of Apple’s European headquarters. Apple has a huge campus, with thousands of people working there, many in very high-skill—high-pay jobs. It happens that the Apple campus is right next door to the poorest neighborhood in Cork city, the neighborhood of Knocknaheeny. That neighbourhood has educational attainment levels well below the national average, likewise their health, housing and income levels trail the national averages. Suppose somebody from that neighborhood wants to get one of those high-skill—high-pay jobs in Apple how can they go about that. Suppose they are an early school leaver, somebody who leaves school maybe at 14 or 15, they have poor levels of literacy and few if any of the skills and none of the educational qualifications that would be needed for the job in Apple. You can immediately see that a short skills programme aimed at enhancing their human capital will not get them one of those jobs. At best they might get a much lower paid job with poorer terms and conditions, maybe in cleaning, security, working in the canteen or maybe in the grounds. If you're a cleaner for instance you might be employed by a contractor, be on a precarious contract, maybe on split shifts, with low levels of pay, much poorer entitlements than if you were working for Apple. You're not going to gain the high levels of expertise and skills to compete for those high-skill—high-pay jobs in Apple on a six weeks course.

However, it does not mean that the person cannot get to the kind of place where they could find a job like that. We did some research a number of years ago where we tracked the lifelong learning journeys of women in that very neighbourhood. Those women did introductory level adult education courses with my university in the 1990s. When we interviewed them, we discovered that they were all working, they had advanced in their careers, all their families were involved in education. Those courses were like dropping a pebble in a pool and their waves of influence reached people all around them. Initially they took the introductory level course, some went on to the university’s undergraduate programmes, some did masters, one went all the way to getting a PhD. That woman secured an academic role in another university and came back to us as an external examiner for one of our programmes. These journeys can be done, but it's not a simple process. It takes time. You have to have all the infrastructure in place for the person to navigate. A lot of things need to be right for them of course as well. It’s not impossible but we have to be a lot more creative in terms of how we imagine that lifelong learning journey. It's not a simple thing. You can’t just plug in the skills.

I want to also refer to the Eurydice Report (2015) and particularly two things that come from that report. The first is that skills from formal education become obsolete if not maintained. Again if we go back to Apple Computers and let us take somebody who graduated from my university in the year 2003, that's 20 years ago, with a computer science degree is working there today. Now ask yourself how much of the material they covered in that computer science degree are they using every day in their job at Apple Computers. Unless they kept up their learning in the meantime they would be well out of their depth by now. So much of their learning is now completely obsolete. Yet somehow we get into our heads that formal education creates this place that we get to and then we're finished our learning, but we're not done, any of us. Formal education is just part of the journey. That's why the idea of lifelong learning is essential for everybody. Everybody has to be coming back and coming back and coming back to education and constantly actively learning.

The second key point for the Eurydice Report is about informal education. We learn so many things in informal contexts. We need to be able to identify and acknowledge the human capital that people gain from places other than formal education. For instance as I came here in the car I could see that there's a lot of human capital involved in driving the car. You need to understand how to navigate the traffic, that actually is a real skill. It's a real skill that we need to acknowledge. It's actually a very important skill, if they didn't have that skill they could not navigate to here, they could not drive the car. That taxi driver has a lot of other human capital skills. The point I'm making is that we need to find ways to acknowledge, validate and recognize human capital that comes from other places not just from formal contexts. I was in Southeast Asia before I came here and I was speaking to a minister. The minister referred to 'no skill' people. There isn't a human being that has no skills. We all have skills. A lot of the skills we have we didn't learn in formal education. An example I have given a few times recently is around parenting. Sometimes people dismiss parenting as nothing of much importance. So what does a parent do day-to-day: childcare, they're involved in nutrition, they're involved in healthcare, they're involved in education, they're involved in logistics and I could go on and on. Yet do we acknowledge any of that? Generally we don't.

There are a lot of challenges for us in terms of acknowledging and validating non formal and informal learning and recognizing that people gain a lot of skills from other places and not necessarily from the education system.

Some concluding remarks

I'd like to make some final points. I would say that learners have to be at the centre. I know we all say that, but it's so important that they are at the centre. Everything we're doing should be around the learner, not about ourselves. One of the first meetings I had when I came to my current job at the university was in in the community. They were talking about different initiatives for addressing unemployment. One person there was describing a course she was running in Cork city training people to be forklift drivers, these forklifts that are used in warehouses. So she had 20 men on this forklift driving course. She said well you know of course we're running this course because we have the forklifts and the instructors, but there are no jobs for forklift drivers. These people are on the course where there's no possibility of them getting a job with the end. We can only hope that they were having a little bit of fun driving forklifts around. The learners were not at the centre, the available infrastructure, the instructors and the need to be doing something was at the centre.

We have to be responsive. That means we respond to a need and we say well what's needed now. What are people asking for? What is necessary for people's lives as well as their livelihoods. Today there is so much talk about artificial intelligence. It is one of the big issues of the day. How do we respond to that? We have to offer programmes and ways to support the learner, programmes that they can participate in whether that's online, or hybrid or face-to-face, we have to consider where it's located, at the time of day it's run, even maybe what time of year is the best. We need to think of all of those things with the learner at the centre of our design, for instance we have a programme for dairy farmers around environmental mitigation, dairy cows are milked for nine or ten months of the year, then there's a two or three months window when the farmers are less busy, so we schedule our programme for that time of year. We have to respect the autonomy of our learners, this is a huge problem especially in workfare thinking, where we think we know better than the learner what they should learn and in what direction they want to take their learning journey. We don't necessarily know better, we can engage with the learner and we can have conversations with the learner about options and potential things they could do, but we shouldn't assume that we know all the answers for people.

As adult educators we also have to be highly sensitized to the notion of responsiveness. We need to be addressing the issues of our time, to the need for learners in our communities and the needs of our communities and wider society too. That has to stretch from local considerations to global ones, we need to be cognizant of the sustainable development goals, climate change, migration, security, health and wellbeing, we have to be responsive across the full spectrum of need in the here and now. We need to be responsive now, not putting things on the long finger, to maybe five or ten years down the line. Responsiveness is about now. The learning capitals I spoke about today, I hope, are a useful framework in helping us devise responsive programmes that are holistic and that can genuinely change people's lives. As adult educators we are agents of change. Our mission is to change the world. We have huge capacity to bring positive change to the world, it is a big responsibility, but it also gives us an opportunity to work in one of the most exciting and dynamic roles imaginable.

Thanks you all very much. Thanks especially to my colleague and friend Professor S.Y. Shah for offering me this invitation to deliver the 2023 James Draper Memorial Lecture.

The lecture drew heavily from my chapter on learning capitals, see full details

Ó Tuama, S. (2022). Taking Forward Perspectives on Reflexivity in Learning: Five Capitals. In: Evans, K., Lee, W.O., Markowitsch, J., Zukas, M. (eds) Third International Handbook of Lifelong Learning. Springer International Handbooks of Education. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67930-9_13-1

The various sources directly mentioned in the lecture are listed in the bibliography of the chapter, with the exception of the following additional reference:

Bohman, J. (2015). Domination, global harms, and the problem of silent citizenship: Toward a republican theory of global justice. Citizenship Studies, 19(5), 520-534. doi:10.1080/13621025.2015.1074343.