

Capital, capabilities and culture

A human development
approach to student
and school transformation

by

Cliona Hannon

The University of Dublin

Series in Education



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Table of Contents

Foreword	v
Introduction	ix
List of Tables and Figures	xi
List of Acronyms	xiii
Chapter 1 Introducing access to higher education by working-class students	1
Chapter 2 The capability approach and access to higher education	39
Chapter 3 Research design and methodology	89
Chapter 4 The capability of autonomy and post-secondary choice-making in working-class students	111
Chapter 5 The capability of practical reason and college knowledge	143
Chapter 6 The capability of identity, student choice and adapted preferences	169

Chapter 7	
The capabilities of social relations and hope and navigational capital for higher education progression	189
Chapter 8	
Conclusion	223
Bibliography	253
Appendices	275
Index	305

Foreword

Expanding collegiate opportunity for low-income students has become a major challenge facing economically developed nations engaged in the global economy. It requires developing new knowledge about the intersections between schools that prepared prospective students for college and universities and technical programs. By adapting Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's concepts of human capabilities to investigate interventions supporting cross-generation education uplift in secondary schools serving working-class families, Cliona Hannon addresses this topic of international and interdisciplinary interest.

Improving access is not merely a matter of pulling policy levers. Changing high school curriculum and promoting market competition, the policy approaches used in the United States for the past two decades, have not improved that nation's standing in college-going rates, especially when compared to nations in the European Union. Nor can the challenge be fully addressed by providing funding for all prospective students to attend college, although a few Western European nations have made more rapid progress on college access because they invested sufficiently to ensure colleges are affordable.

In addition to providing college-preparatory curriculum in high schools and guaranteeing college affordability for low-income students who took steps to prepare, it is also necessary to support cultural transformation within class families that have limited knowledge of schools, colleges, and methods of financing postsecondary education. Developing new knowledge about family cultural uplift that does not use deficit logics is a research topic with the potential of informing social action in schools and colleges that aims to support students making these transitions. This topic can be addressed within academic discourses in sociology, psychology, cultural and ethnic studies, and education in both Europe and the United States.

Cliona Hannon's book addresses this cross-disciplinary problem of cultural transformation facing working-class families and high schools that serve them in the Irish context. She examined the pilot test of a US,

school-based intervention—integrating adaptable practices of mentoring, exploring college pathways, and engaging in leadership opportunities supporting local social action—in case-study schools in the greater Dublin area. This work opens the door for cross-national exchange about improving socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic groups within elite universities and expanding the pool of students entering technical postsecondary programs. Hannon’s qualitative research on social activism in schools provides an expanded basis for cross-national dialogue about policy and practice.

Trinity College Dublin, the most elite university in Ireland, has become a global leader in promoting diversity in part due to this exceptional initiative. More than twenty years ago, the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) began as a “foundations” program that created enrollment opportunity for nontraditional-age students. During the next decade, TAP grew to include other forms of diversity, running directly into the educational, financial, and cultural barriers to expanding college access for children raised in a working-class culture in a nation that has a surplus of high technology jobs. In the early 2000s, TAP began to explore methods of outreach to high schools serving low-income neighborhoods.

Ireland had become a global leader in the high-tech and required an expanded workforce. Recognizing the prospective labor shortage, Google funded TAP to pioneer an approach to transforming schools in low-income neighborhoods. As TAP director, Hannon scanned a range of programs with some evidence of success in Europe and the United States, settling on College For Every Student (now CFES Brilliant Pathways) as an exemplary intervention method that could be adapted to address the challenges facing TCD and Google in Dublin.

In 2009 Hannon attended a CFES planning meeting in Essex, New York, where she met with leaders and researchers involved with CFES. She soon decided to undertake a research program at TCD as they tested the intervention method in Dublin high schools. She also soon decided to do her doctoral study in sociology using the research on this new intervention as the basis for her thesis. This book, *Capital, Capabilities, and Culture: A Human Development Approach to Student and School Transformation*, emerged from these initiatives.

Hannon uses the theory of human capabilities to analyze how working-class students develop the knowledge and skills for navigating educational systems, an approach that has great merit and potential in the emerging international discourse on cross-generation educational uplift. She focuses on students’ development of their capabilities through their engagement in mentoring, involvement in leadership projects providing

community service, and exploration of college pathways. By examining experiences of school personnel along with those of students, she builds understanding of transformational processes within schools engaged in transforming their cultures to support uplift.

Hannon's research-based understandings illuminate aspects of college preparation mostly overlooked in the US policy-levers approach focusing on graduation requirements, marketization and school choice. The findings confirm that this intervention method supports students' development of college and career dreams and their acquisition of navigational skills. She also found that overcoming concerns about college costs is a critical link in the cultural shift, illustrating the importance of Ireland's emphasis on maintaining college affordability. Ensuring affordability is part of overcoming barriers to education uplift in families with limited prior experience with postsecondary and collegiate education.

Hannon's study of the TAP adaptation of the US-based CFES core practices provides further evidence that social activists, educators and policymakers can use to advocate for government and foundation support of interventions that focus on the social and cultural aspects of educational uplift of working-class youth. She adds a necessary piece of the puzzle of expanding access facing national governments. In addition to education reform and financial support for college affordability, it is crucial to focus on social action supporting uplift. Ireland's national government now funds school-based interventions by all seven public universities.

Hannon's school-based concepts of capabilities are highly compatible with frameworks developed in US-based research on the development of essential skills in middle and high schools (Dalton & St. John, 2017), academic capital formation as a framework for building school-college partnerships (Winkle-Wagner, Bowman, & St. John, 2012), using non-cognitive variables in college admissions (Sedlacek, 2004), and supporting strengths-based interventions in colleges promoting diversity (Bowman & St. John, 2011). Finding unifying themes among this array of theoretical approaches is desirable, but not nearly as important as the aim of providing actionable research supporting interventions. Hannon has already proven not only to be an extremely quick-minded administrator and distinguished scholar, but she has become a leader in international projects promoting education equity social justice through actionable research (e.g., Chen, St. John, Li & Hannon, 2018).

Hannon's new book adds to the evidence base for educators, policymakers, and professors who are forging new knowledge about

methods of expanding access and diversity. The human capabilities approach provides methods and logics that can inform progress by moving from the overly simplistic notions of pulling policy levers to more complex and nuanced discussions of strategies for expanding educational opportunities for students in working-class and low-income families left behind by the technocratic reindustrialization. This combination of school- and university-based restructuring is crucial to promoting diversity in professions as well as universities. With this book, Hannon, already an international leader in global efforts to improve economic diversity in higher education through research informing action, furthers her role as a scholar expanding the academic foundations for social action supporting cultural transformational processes supporting schools and universities.

By Edward P. St. John,
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Introduction

This book applies the capability approach as an evaluative lens through which to explore the range of capabilities that emerged over a three-year period, through a longitudinal study with a group of working-class young people participating in the Trinity Access 21 – College for Every Student (TA21-CFES), university-to-school, widening participation project in four schools. It is adapted from my Ph.D thesis and distils theory, policy and my 25 years of professional experience in developing programmes to address educational inequalities.

Before joining Trinity College Dublin 20 years ago, I had spent my early graduate years in a range of educational non-governmental organisations and I undertook a masters in Development Studies, involving primary research in El Salvador. It was here I encountered the work of Paulo Freire being implemented with community groups supported by a range of popular non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which were providing informal education across the country to groups who faced development challenges related to literacy, health management and environmental management. Research for my master of arts (MA) aligned my thinking with resistance theory, as I had seen first-hand the positive impact on individuals and group of Freirean approaches to critical pedagogy and transformative education. I later drew on this experience when working with an Irish housing association to help establish a bachelor of arts (BA) in housing and community studies with University College Dublin, the aim of which was to bring together residents of social housing estates, local authority managers, area partnership personnel and community activists to develop a shared understanding of structural obstacles to residents within the estates developing greater control over their local environment.

Since the late 1990s, I have been the director of the Trinity Access, where I have been lucky enough to work with a tremendous team and some inspirational people worldwide, passionate about tackling inequalities of access to higher education. Trinity Access has developed a range of educational interventions focused on working-class students with little or no family history of higher education participation and implemented with

our school partners. These include university-based summer schools, campus student shadowing days, parents' higher education workshops, pathways to the professions programmes and extra tuition programmes in a range of second level subjects. Trinity Access has also developed alternative entry routes which are local and national such as the Foundation Course for Higher Education and the nationwide Higher Education Access Route, providing modified entry routes into all courses in participating institutions.

Trinity Access has adapted models from other countries to Irish widening participation practice, such as the College for Every Student¹ model (the subject of this research) and the pathways to the profession's model (adapted from the United Kingdom) and it has migrated some educational innovations to other countries (such as the Foundation Course for Higher Education, currently in year 3 of a 4-year pilot in Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University). It has built an evidence-base from all activity and involved participants in shaping practice, as well as using evidence to help to leverage policy change. While Trinity College Dublin still has a lower rate of participation by working-class students than other Irish universities, it has moved from admitting less than 50 students a year from working-class backgrounds in the early 2000s to admitting over 300 such students a year in 2018 and about 10% of the student population are working-class young adults who entered via Trinity Access. Young adults entering the university via these access route have a 91% completion rate.

This book focuses on the Trinity Access 21-College for Every Student (TA21-CFES) intervention, which hoped to reach every student in our link second level (middle and high) schools with the core practices of Pathways to college, Mentoring and Leadership through service. It tracked the project impact through a longitudinal study and it employed the capability approach as an evaluation lens, so that we could bring a broader understanding of what students are capable of to the research, and also the kind of structural impediments they typically encounter in working-class communities, in converting their capabilities into functionings

¹ College for Every Student is now re-branded as Brilliant Pathways in the US.

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1.1: Socio-economic group by sector, 2015/16 and 2016/17	21
Table 1.2: The TA21-CFES project overview in partner schools	35
Table 2.1: The content of the compulsory module A adapted to this study (Robeyns 2017: 38)	67
Table 2.2: The B-modules: non-optional modules with optional content adapted to this study (Robeyns 2017: 60)	68
Table 2.3: Criteria for developing a capability list for student aspiration to higher education	76
Table 2.4: A pragmatic capabilities list to prepare working-class students to aspire towards higher education	77
Table 3.1: Phases of data collection corresponding to year of study by second level students	91
Table 3.2: Overview of data analysis phases	93
Table 3.3: School information	99
Table 8.1: The capability of autonomy	229
Table 8.2: The capability of practical reason and college knowledge	231
Table 8.3: The capability of identity	233
Table 8.4: The capabilities of social relations and hope	237

Figures

Figure 1.1: A Whole school approach to student and school transformation	35
--	----

Figure 2.2: Framework of conversion factors influencing the development of aspirations and their conversion to capabilities and functionings, adapted from Hart (2013: 60).	66
Figure 8.3: Adaptation of a capabilities framework for preparing working-class students for higher education (adapted from Robeyns 2005: 98 and Wilson-Strydom 2012: 123)	227

List of Acronyms

CAO	Central Application Office
FE	Further Education
CFES	College for Every Student
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DARE	Disability Access Route Entry
DCU	Dublin City University
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Education in Schools
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
FG	Focus group
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland: longitudinal study
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HPS	High participation systems
INT	Interview
LCA	Leaving Certificate certificate Applied
LCVP:	Leaving Certificate certificate Vocational Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	Post-Leaving Certificate certificate Course
QLR	Qualitative Longitudinal Research
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
TAP	Trinity Access Programmes
TA21	Trinity Access 21
TCD	Trinity College Dublin
UCD	University College Dublin
WP	Widening participation

Chapter 1

Introducing access to higher education by working-class students

This book explores the potential of the capability approach as an evaluative lens through which to examine the range of capabilities that emerged over a three-year period, through a longitudinal study with a group of working-class young people participating in the Trinity Access 21 – College for Every Student (TA21-CFES), university-to-school, widening participation project in four schools¹. The emerging capabilities supported by project participation are: autonomy, practical reason and knowledge, identity, social relations and hope. Adopting a qualitative longitudinal research design, it provides insight into the lived experience of working-class students attending four schools linked to the Trinity Access in Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, all of whom are participating in this educational project aimed at providing more knowledge and confidence around post-secondary education options.

Research has identified challenges to the educational development of students in second level schools that are part of the Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools (DEIS) scheme² (McCoy and Smyth 2004 2011;

¹ Working-class is defined as consisting of people who work for wages, especially low wages, including unskilled and semiskilled labourers and their families. The students in this study are all from 'working-class' families and attending schools which are part of the 'Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools' (DEIS) scheme.

² Launched in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills, DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is the most recent national programme aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. A very significant element of DEIS is known as the School Support Programme (SSP) which is in place in about 340 urban primary

Smyth, McCoy, Darmody and Watson 2014). The DEIS scheme is a government-supported programme targeting additional resources and supports at schools with higher than average demographics. These challenges include limited educational guidance, alienation from schooling caused by a 'teach to the test' focus, a teacher-directed pedagogical approach, limited academic attainment and higher than average rates of absenteeism. Further challenges to students' educational outcomes exist within their families and communities; these include negative family history of education, financial worries and limited knowledge of the benefits associated with differing educational pathways (St John 2013). This study explores the impact of a project designed to address some of these issues.

The study focuses on the TA21-CFES project, while acknowledging there are many other factors influencing the development of young people, both within and outside of school. Some of the factors relating to socio-economic background may impact on the development of young people, but adolescence is a time of transition that can bring challenges and opportunities to all, regardless of background. Conger and Conger (2002) illustrated that socio-economic factors have a significant impact on social and behaviour outcomes, school achievement and health. The family stress model also suggests that economic stresses can lead to emotional distress among parents, which can effect parenting style, children's behavioural issues and school and health outcomes. In one of the *Growing Up in Ireland* recent literature reviews (2016: 33), it is reported that:

One of the most consistent findings regarding influences on child and adolescent health is that young people at the lower end of the socio-economic dimension are more likely to experience ill-health. This finding extends to a range of outcomes, including chronic illness, injuries and obesity as well as social-emotional challenges.

However, it is also reported that the majority of children reared in poverty emerge relatively unscathed, while an interesting parallel finding is that children of rich parents often experience challenges similar to those in low-income families (*Growing Up In Ireland* 2016). Social deprivation does not appear to have direct effects on anti-social behaviour, but there may be effects mediated indirectly through the impact on families and parenting. Substance use tends to go hand in hand with anti-social and problem

schools, 340 rural primary schools, and 200 post-primary schools with the highest levels of disadvantage (see www.education.ie).

behaviour. Regardless of socio-economic background, children of parents using an authoritative parenting style are more socially competent and academically successful than those with parents who are described as authoritarian, permissive or neglectful. Overall, girls tend to manifest less anti-social behaviour than boys (Growing Up In Ireland 2016).

Literature on the transition from primary to secondary school indicates that it is marked by deterioration in achievement, especially in core-content areas of the curriculum (Benner 2011). This is partly due to the weakening of student engagement. Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) discuss the behavioural and cognitive aspect of student engagement. A central feature of behavioural engagement is that a student gives attention to the task and is prepared to expend effort. This effort determines how persistent they will be and whether they will continue in the face of obstacles. A second feature is whether a student is using all available resources and prepared to endure the task. Cognitive engagement is defined as immersing oneself in sophisticated learning strategies, linking new knowledge to prior knowledge and exploring the unknowns independently (Diamond 2013). Roorda et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of student engagement found a significant impact of engagement on achievement. Furthermore, the association was found in several studies and seemed to be relatively similar at various stages of growing up (Growing Up In Ireland 2016).

Newman et al. (2000) found that students identified homework difficulties, the need for more intense studying and the need to accept greater responsibility as notable challenges in the transition period. This study also found that adolescents experience increased anxiety and loneliness during the transition. This can have long-term impacts, as West et al. (2010) reported in a Scottish study, which indicated that at age 15, a poorer school transition predicted higher levels of depression and lower achievement, along with lower self-esteem.

Byrne and Smyth's (2010) study illustrated that most forms of misbehaviour are predictive of disengagement and subsequently of early school-leaving. The Growing Up In Ireland (2016) study concludes that evidence indicates a reciprocal relationship between such behaviour and early school-leaving. Parental engagement, support and boundary setting all have a positive impact on student engagement (Rumberger 1995; Byrne and Smyth 2010). Claes et al.'s (2009) study of 93,000 students in 28 countries found that students who engaged in truanting are likely to underperform at school and to have lower academic self-esteem. Truancy is more frequently found in boys than girls and more prevalent in families where parents are less actively involved in boundary-setting and monitoring young people. School climate made a significant difference, with those that

encouraged participation and student voice having much lower truancy levels. The Growing Up In Ireland (2016) report notes that at an international level, truancy is more likely in schools where there is lower student-teacher trust and less likely in schools with clear demands on students, combined with a warm and caring environment. Darmody et al.'s (2008) Irish study found, in line with international findings, that the lowest rates of truancy were among students with a professional or farming background while the highest rates were among unskilled manual groups and from non-employed households. Darmody et al. (2008) identified school size and location as a factor in truancy, with small, rural schools less likely to have high truancy rates.

Gorard and See (2011) in the United Kingdom (UK) identified supportive factors in school transitions and integration. School enjoyment was enhanced by strong social relationships, small classes, varied learning environments and student autonomy in learning. Enjoyment was inhibited by perceived lack of respect by school personnel and passive pedagogy. For some more disengaged students, an environment that supported more positive adult relationships restored enjoyment and enthusiasm. The study concluded that enjoyment should be easy to enhance more widely, positively affecting the learner identities of all young people, including the more reluctant learners.

Durlak et al. (2011) found strong evidence that social and emotional programmes can enhance students' academic performance. This may partly be due to the fact that young people with greater awareness and confidence about their learning tend to try harder and persist through challenges.

In this book, these contextual factors informed a qualitative longitudinal research study that is used to facilitate an exploration of a change process focused on the students and unfolding in real time. This process aims to explore the effect of a university-school partnership to support higher progression to post-secondary education for working-class students. While it is acknowledged students may differ in respect of ethnicity, gender, disability and other factors, the focus of this study is specifically on class factors that may impact on their experience of school and their longer-term aspirations. According to Keane (2013), there is a limited evidence base in the Irish context on what works best in university-school partnerships to support widening participation in higher education. It is therefore difficult to determine the impact and effectiveness of these initiatives in supporting higher progression rates to postsecondary education by working-class students. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the kind of capabilities working-class students need to

PAGES MISSING
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

Index

A

a 'road map' for their future, 230
a life of value, 140
a thickening aspirational map,
166
actionable knowledge, 59
adapted preferences, 42, 70, 73,
82, 83, 85, 129, 187, 225, 240,
245
agency, 41
agency and structure intersect,
226
Amartya Sen, 40, 254, 255, 258,
259, 261, 269, 271, 272, 273
arenas of action, 65
ask the right questions, 230
aspiration, 61
aspirational capital, 124
autonomy, 111

B

basic capabilities, 49
building peer-to-peer
motivation, 198

C

capabilities, 40
capability list, 63
certificate in 21 Century
Teaching and Learning, 34,
302
collective planning, 126
College for Every Student, x
combined capabilities, 49
community cultural wealth, 124

conceptual contribution, 238
conversion factors, 41
costs of college, 146
cruel optimism, 189
curriculum and pedagogy, 15

D

deficit discourse, 115
Delivering Equality of
opportunity In Schools
(DEIS), 1
distributive justice, 45

E

early information, 151
education for all, 5
educational choice, 78
enabling conversion factors, 114
Equal Access Survey, 20
equality theorists, 54
ethical considerations, 104
ethical individualism, 45
experiential information, 159

F

factual and experiential
knowledge, 144
family experience of higher
education, 193
field, 65
functionings, x, 16, 39, 40, 41, 45,
46, 47, 48, 50, 53, 56, 58, 61,
66, 67, 68, 69, 74, 78, 96, 112,
115, 125, 133, 141, 143, 224,
226, 228, 229, 231, 233, 237,
240, 243, 245, 252

G

goal-setting and subject choice, 147
 group identity, 173

H

habitual patterns, 128
 habitus, 54
 hard work is enough, 217
 high participation systems, 9
 Higher Education Access Route (HEAR), 19
 hope, 85
 hourglass economy, 6
 human capital, 12
 human capital theory, 51
 human development, 11
 Human Development Index, 14
 human rights, 12

I

ideal-theoretical capabilities, 75
 identity formation, 78
identity in flux, 185
If they can do it, then so can I!, 160
 implications for policy, 247
 implications for practice, 247
 increased motivation, 139
 informed choices, 157
 inhibiting conversion factors, 139, 228
 institutes of technology, 9
 institutional culture, 125
 internal capabilities, 49
 Investment in Education report, 24

L

leadership, 34, 37, 112, 114, 115, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 126, 136, 138, 161, 170, 173, 174, 183, 229, 233, 244, 246, 248, 289, 291, 293, 294, 297, 298, 299, 301, 302, 303
 Leaving Certificate, 18

life skills, 149

M

Martha Nussbaum, 40, 257
 mentoring, 34, 35, 100, 131, 132, 133, 134, 137, 141, 147, 159, 160, 175, 177, 180, 186, 190, 196, 197, 199, 203, 204, 208, 214, 215, 216, 217, 248, 289, 291, 292, 293, 294, 297, 298, 299, 301
 methodological contribution, 238

N

navigational capital, 41, 125
 neo-liberal, 12
 networks of belonging and trust, 193

O

ontological individualism, 45

P

passive pedagogy, 4
 pathways to college, x, 33, 34, 35, 36, 89, 100, 111, 126, 127, 128, 129, 136, 138, 139, 140, 141, 153, 157, 159, 160, 166, 167, 170, 190, 192, 204, 208, 209, 211, 212, 214, 223, 224, 229, 230, 231, 233, 234, 237, 275, 278, 285, 288, 292, 294, 296, 300, 301, 302
 post-secondary education, 6
 practical reason, 80
 practical reason and college knowledge, 143
 pragmatic list of education capabilities, 75
 precariat, 8
 principal and teacher perspective, 135
 principle of subsidiarity, 25

Q

qualitative longitudinal
research, 1
qualitative longitudinal research
(QLR), 91
quality of education, 42

R

reflexivity, 105
relatable role models, 162
resistance theory, ix

S

school climate, 3
school enjoyment, 4
second level education, 17
self-efficacy, 59
skills gaps, 7
social relations, 80
structural changes, 126
Structuralism, 53

T

temporality, 92
the capability of iden, 169
the capacity to aspire, 145
the freedom to reject higher
education, 129
the level of guidance, 127
the Sen-Bourdieu analytical
framework (SBAF), 64
the student-teacher dynamic,
124
thick aspirational map, 85
Trinity Access, ix
trusted networks, 115

V

voice, 124

W

well-being, 41
whole school approach, 127
widening participation, ix