

**Capital, Capabilities and Culture:
A Human Development Approach to
Student and School Transformation**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been previously submitted as an exercise for a degree, wholly or partially for any other academic award at this or any other university.

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to apply 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. Qualitative analysis is presented from a longitudinal study of four schools over a three-year period, drawing on data from four student focus groups involving 21 student participants and 14 individual student interviews. An additional sixteen school personnel contributed in interviews.

There are three main findings: first, specific student capabilities emerge because of their engagement in the TA21-CFES core practices of Leadership, Mentoring and Pathways to College. These are: autonomy, practical reason/college knowledge, identity, social relations and networks and hope. Second, students encounter a range of inhibiting social conversion factors in developing capabilities and persisting with higher education aspirations. These are: the negative pull of peer relations; pressure related to the Junior Certificate; limited subject choice and conflicting family expectations. Third, it is the combination of their own emerging capability set along with a network of trusted relationships with others that enables them to overcome potentially corrosive disadvantage and translate their experiences into fertile functionings. It is proposed that these findings have national and international relevance for widening participation interventions. The research makes a methodological contribution as it is the first use of qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) in Ireland within a ‘lived’ project aimed at working-class students over a three-year period. It contributes empirically as it provides new knowledge about the impact of interventions aimed at developing students’ capability set and how these might help them to develop navigational capital and post-secondary educational aspirations. It also makes a conceptual contribution to how we frame the design and evaluation of impact of widening participation initiatives, as it takes a capability approach to considering how students develop higher education aspirations over time, towards what they consider ‘a life of value’.

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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 Applied

LCVP: Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PLC: Post-Leaving 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 study 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 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 Programmes (TAP) in Trinity College Dublin, 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; 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 a limited knowledge of the benefits associated with

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

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 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. Furthermore, the differentials emerge regardless of which SES indicators are used, including education, income and parental occupation.

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 impact on families and parenting. Substance use tends to go hand in hand with anti-social and problem 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 with 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 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 under-perform 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 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 the current study, these contextual factors informed a qualitative longitudinal research 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 develop to realise 'valuable doings and beings' (Sen

1999). The objective is to determine what capabilities we should focus on developing through university-school educational interventions, to support student capacity to plan for successful post-secondary progression.

While higher education participation rates have significantly increased over the last few decades, there are persistent patterns of inequality of access by working-class students compared to their middle-class peers. In Australia, England, and the United States, for example, middle-class students are three times more likely to enter a high-status university than working-class students. Across selective institutions in the United Kingdom and the United States, working-class students account for just 1 in 20 enrolments (Jerrim 2013). Other facts that hold true across countries are that working-class higher education students who graduate from second level schooling with high achievement are less likely to graduate than middle-class students, even those who are less academically prepared. Working-class students are worse off in employment and salary terms than low achieving students from middle-class families (Jerrim 2013).

Although many countries are still facing the challenge of ‘education for all’ at the level of basic provision, developed economies are struggling to determine how best to fund a high-quality education system that provides access to all through higher education. In the US, student debt is now \$1.2 trillion. In the UK, the actual price working-class students pay for selective universities is higher than in the US (Milburn 2012; Jerrim 2013). Similar patterns are seen in Ireland, which has the second highest tuition level in Europe (Cassells 2016)³. The aims of public investment in education are especially important at present, given the increasing necessity of postsecondary education for economic well-being. The historian David Labaree (1997) articulates three goals for education: 1) democratic equality, preparing an informed, engaged citizenry; 2) social efficiency, the need to create a productive and innovative workforce; and 3) social mobility, education as a commodity which advances individual standing in social hierarchies. The first two goals advance the public interest, while the third characterizes education as a private

³ In the US, there is significant variation in the cost of higher education depending on the institution. However, most students pay fees for higher education and they may receive student financial aid which they can use in combination with student finance (loans). In the UK, student higher education fees are charged at different rates depending on institution. There is a student loan system available to help with these costs. In Ireland, registration or tuition fees are charged for most higher education institutions and up to half of the student body gets some state support for living costs. There is no formal student loan system linked to the registration fees.

good. Labaree (1997) cautions against a system that inclines ever more towards this third goal, arguing for a balanced consideration of all three. The global challenges now facing higher education demand a continual re-balancing of these three goals. Similarly, through applying the principles from John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971; 1999), St John (2003; 2006) identified three aims for higher education: 1) equal rights to access for all, based on qualifications (an individual right); 2) adjustments for fairness in access, due to prior economic or educational inequality (social/democratic); and 3) efficiency in public finance ensuring cross generation uplift (economic). Since education is necessary for economic wellbeing, St John contends that it is timely to reconsider individual rights for primary, secondary, and postsecondary educational opportunities.

A higher education qualification has never been more important. In the UK, for instance, 83% of all new employment in the next decade will be in professional areas (Milburn 2012b). The average earnings premium associated with an undergraduate degree for working-age adults is approximately 27% compared to possession of two or more General Certificate of Education A-Levels (final second level examination) (Million+ 2013). In Ireland, labour force participation rates increase as the level of education attained increases. In 2011, those with a third level qualification had an 87% likelihood of being in the labour force, while only 46% of those with primary level education were employed (Central Statistics Office 2011). This demonstrates the importance of high post-secondary education levels to the continued development of knowledge-based economies.

Employment structures in developed economies have also fundamentally changed, with three quarters of growth in employment since 2000 at the top and bottom of the occupational ladder, creating what Sissons (2011) refers to as an hourglass economy. Young people will therefore also need 'more advanced technological know-how...to literally jump from the lower into the upper end of employment' (Stuart, 2012). Higher education is a potential inoculation against the vagaries of the market and shape-shifting employment structures. As Holmes (2011) observes, when workers are displaced from routine roles, gaining higher education qualifications may be the difference between falling down or moving up. The historic shift in the scale of professional and managerial roles, facilitated by the development of public administration of health, education and social welfare provision, coupled with industrial and commercial organisation is unlikely

to be repeated (Goldthorpe and Jackson 2007). This does not, however, remove the need for graduates or imply that there is no space at the top for working-class students. Instead, as Stuart (2012: 150) argues, ‘society is far more fluid than has previously been understood’ and the hollowing out of middle tier employment has created an even greater imperative to develop high level skills. In Australia, the Bradley Review (Australian Government 2008) concluded that a 40% target of graduates in the 25-34 age cohort was needed to meet skills needs (Birrell and Edwards 2009). Similarly, China and India are investing in higher education with the latter setting a target to increase graduate numbers from 10% to 30% of the population within a decade (Altbach and Salmi 2011).

Recent economic shifts have re-focused education policy and identified areas in which there are specific ‘skills gaps’ across the workforce. The impact of the recent economic crisis on millennials has been notably stark. Nineteen per cent of Europe’s youth are currently unemployed, rising to between 38% and 47% in Spain and Greece. There is an EU ‘over-education’ incidence which averages at around 30% (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training 2010). The situation is only marginally better in the United States, where the ‘skills gap’ is reflected in the four million millennials who are un- or underemployed, alongside three million moderate to high-paying jobs that cannot be filled. A recent McKinsey report (2012) estimates there could be 23 million workers in advanced economies without the requisite skills by 2020. Global economic competition has altered the mix of skills necessary for employment in most nations. There is a strong push to emphasize technical skills within nations highly engaged in the global economy.

Yet there is disagreement about the causes and ultimately the strategies needed to address these problems. Some suggest that it is not a gap at all, but a power imbalance related to those with the most resources driving economic inequality (Krugman 2013). The US Chamber of Commerce contradicts this view, suggesting that education and the workforce cannot keep pace with our rapidly-evolving economy, and the answer lies in increasing degree attainment rates and developing innovative business/education partnerships (US Chamber of Commerce 2015). Others have argued that the emergence of the skills gap is attributable to the inadequacy of public financing of higher education (Piketty 2014). Regardless of the reasons for the skills gap, however, the gap between labour supply and demand disproportionately affects working-class populations.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) evidence shows that, for young people, the higher their educational attainment at the start of the economic crisis, the more likely they were to be employed throughout the Great Recession (OECD 2014). The movement toward higher employment rates clearly involves an expansion of higher education, but there are debates within nations about how much to emphasize technical versus traditional higher education. Some leading economists now question the assumption that increased technical education will solve the growing wealth inequality in developed nations, especially in the United States (Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2012).

Antonucci's study of working-class students across Europe found striking similarities between the experiences of young people in the UK and Italy. Both had a materially disadvantaged experience of higher education, over-reliance on families without adequate resources, cycles of debt and poor mental well-being. She also found that this was the experience for many young people in the 'squeezed middle'. Transitions through university tend to enhance rather than limit existing social inequalities. While young people who are not in education or training face the worst employment prospects, even graduates face a long process before securing employment (Antonucci, 2016). Indeed, Antonucci refers to young people as the new precariat. The argument is not against widening participation per se, it is that access to university is not enough. For Antonucci, student lives are in crisis because of egregious policy flaws since the 1990s which have aimed at pushing the cost of expanding higher education back to families and students. While cultural capital is important for higher education, what is under-explored is the material and psychosocial disadvantages experienced by some young people, specifically as related to finances, housing, wellbeing and the educational experience of higher education.

Understanding how inequalities are reproduced through higher education requires an exploration of the paradoxes of mass expansion. The expansion of higher education and increased efforts to diversify access have focused on democratization dividends at the entry and exit points of the system, however they have focused less on what happens to young people while in higher education and the extent to which inequalities develop through this experience (Antonucci 2016). In the systems explored in Antonucci's book, Sweden, Italy and the UK, inequalities have been exacerbated by geographical differences in institutional prestige in Italy, while in Sweden and the UK, the systems are

binary but the transition of more vocational institutions into university status has not changed their social class composition. Working-class students are progressing to higher education in greater numbers but they are much more likely to be found in the technical or vocational higher education institutions, which are less well-resourced, have higher withdrawal rates and represent different currency in the employment market. This echoes the Irish experience, where working class young adults are much more likely to progress to the institutes of technology than to the universities with similar outcomes regarding retention and resources (Higher Education Authority 2017). The majority of young people will not have the experience of an elitist institution but just a normal university, which leads to two types of higher education experience: privileged and difficult (Antonucci 2016). The conclusions are: university experience is very different depending on what kind of institution you progress to and the way young people have to rely on family and labour market sources to fund their university experience creates ‘one of the most pervasive mechanisms of the reproduction of inequalities in contemporary societies’ (Antonucci 2016:161).

High Participation Systems (HPS)

Marginson (2016) expands on this ‘privileged and difficult’ (Antonucci 2016) juxtaposition by providing a compelling overview of evidence on high participation systems (HPS) and ways in which they protect or exacerbate existing structural inequalities, concluding with a series of conditions under which such systems can promote greater equality of outcome across social groups. HPS are defined as those at or beyond 50% participation in higher education. He suggests that the formative effects of higher education are experienced as a structure/agency dialectic, where families strive for position under conditions they do not control (2016: 4). States and higher education institutions structure forms of provision, their cost and value. HPS present varying ‘slopes’ in this stratification and families may find their interests conflict with HPS that limit opportunities and intensify competition or within HPS that organise on the basis of the common good and enhance social mobility. It is not always the case that higher education in a more unequal society has an equalising effect. The United States, for instance, is an example of a HPS where participation in higher education is highly stratified and it tends to weaken rather than dilute the effects of social backgrounds

(Marginson 2016b). Progress towards HPS is growing in most countries, including in emerging nation states like China, India and Indonesia (Marginson 2016: 6).

While high participation is presented as a requirement for economic growth, Marginson (2016) cites a number of sociologists who have debunked this notion of demand for educated labour or its value in terms of rates of return (Piketty 2014; Trow 1973; Schofer and Meyer 2005; Teichler 2009; Baker 2011). Instead, relations between higher education and work are uneven, payoffs from participation are unclear and empirical data on rates of return are weak (Hansen 2011; Robst 2007; Arum and Roksa 2014). However, while not all graduates have professional jobs within HPS, the penalties attached to non-participation increase and higher education becomes a defensive necessity. Dorling (2014) demonstrates that some states respond to this pressure by nurturing high-fee private schools and Ivy League universities, to satisfy the demands of social elites and growing middle-classes. This expansion of educational opportunity also shifts the responsibility for social outcomes from the state to families, as it is easier to create educational opportunities than jobs (Marginson, 2016).

Marginson (2016) rehearses five reasons why returns from higher education are not as strong for low income families. First, other social inequalities, like geographical location or membership of excluded minorities, determine whether low income families improve their social circumstances through higher education. Second, low income families tend to predominate in the recruiting rather than selective or elite institutions. HPS often taken on a binary form, with the second sector emphasising technical-vocational education (Germany, Korea, Taiwan) or teaching and local employment (the Netherlands). Third, better off students tend to occupy the courses within higher education that are higher status, leading to higher value graduate outcomes. The main inequality of opportunity is the persistence of significant differences in economic, social and cultural resources between families, for which policy can only partly compensate (Mountford-Zimdars and Sabbagh 2013). Arum et al (2007) argue that stratification persists within HPS, as inequalities in access to elite higher education and career outcomes are not reduced. Policies designed to enhance equity aim to modify the extent to which these stratifications reproduce each other, which is where HPS design makes a difference. Marginson (2016b) suggests that when a determined policy effort is made, in combination with educational practices and student effort, to match growth with

equalisation, then the tendency to reproduce inequality can be corrected. More egalitarian system design is evident in the Nordic countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and German-speaking countries, which have maintained a rough equality in degree standing and research missions. Overall, the effect of these realities on low income families are described by Marginson (2016: 15):

Whereas upper-middle-class families may put great effort into achieving the highest possible position within the HPS, working-class and remote students are less likely to nurture high ambitions, more likely to be deterred by cost, more likely to focus on secure and predictable employment-related paths rather than diffuse intellectual formation, more likely to believe they lack the cultural capital to survive and perform at university, and less familiar with performance and application strategies.

Hoxby and Avery (2013) in the US and Boliver (2013) in the UK report data that high achieving students from working-class backgrounds are much less likely to apply to a selective institution. In both studies, this is attributed to an internalised sense by the students that the selective institutions 'belong' to the privately educated, white upper middle-class. This sense that education belongs to someone else reduces their aspiration and agency (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010). While poor students have most to gain within selective higher education institutions, in terms of an ethos of hard work and intellectual formation, Arum and Roksa (2014) find it is the better off students in selective institutions who make the largest cognitive gains.

Stratification is exacerbated by pricing structures that lead to self-stratification. This is less often the case in low tuition systems, like Northwest and Central Europe or when tuition fees are managed on the basis of income-contingent loans, as in Australia and the UK and more often the case in the US, where social inequality is very high, and where people from working-class backgrounds invest less in education and skills (OECD 2014).

Against these structural challenges, Marginson (2016: 18) outlines five conditions under which there may be a positive allocative role of HPS but cautions that they are resource intensive and rely on a viable tax system. First, where tuition fees are charged, they are done so using income contingent loans and include extra supports targeted at low income groups. Second, private sector provision plays a minimal role or is highly regulated.

Third, institutional stratification is modest through the distribution of research, professional and training functions. Fourth, the quality of teaching and learning, as well as institutional autonomy, are not open to manipulation by powerful families seeking competitive advantage. Fifth, social regulation extends to improve equity in graduate labour market selection.

This section has considered the role of HPS design in perpetuating structural inequalities and the design features required for more egalitarian systems to emerge. Against this wide-lensed perspective on the role of higher education in sustaining inequalities, the next section juxtaposes the role of the university in promoting human development and some ways in which there is potential to reclaim it for individual transformation within unjust structures.

Higher education and human development

Despite the highly stratified topography detailed by Marginson (2016), Sen (2000) argues that HPS remain more socially inclusive than elite higher education by lifting the threshold of human agency, capability and rights, provided that it is sufficiently formative for the individuals concerned. This section considers the contribution that higher education participation makes to human development and considers some ways in which we might resist the impact of the macro-stratification described by Marginson (2016) through using a human development perspective.

Similarly, Boni and Walker (2017: 8) focus on the role of higher education as a site of human development. While universities contribute to inequalities by maintaining social reproduction, they are also sites for public-good creation through the production of new knowledge for society and the potential to highlight issues related to equality, citizenship and democracy. This does not assume that universities will necessarily or always work for the public good (Walker and Mac Lean 2013).

As Boni and Walker (2017) observe, a good higher education for one person impacts well beyond one life and affects families, siblings and has the potential to educate more people out of poverty and into employment. It supports the realisation of individual aspirational goals. And despite the acknowledged challenges of access, equity and

quality, higher education could itself be aspirational towards public-good forms of development.

Global higher education and development policy, driven by the World Bank, has not necessarily fostered human development. It is an economic, knowledge-based development paradigm where poverty reduction is best achieved through economic growth and science-technology innovation. Lebeau and Sall (2011: 143), however, highlight the less neo-liberal and more human rights-focused UNESCO World Declaration on higher education which, in foregrounding a 'knowledge society' is based on a more inclusive and expansive approach to higher education than the World Bank. It focuses on a 'much broader social, ethical and political dimension' against a 'narrow, fatalistic, technological determinism'. As Boni and Walker (2017) remark, the context is ever more complex today with the growth in the private higher education market, which serves over 60% of students in countries such as Brazil, India and South Korea.

Van der Wende (2011) contends that the OECD has a shared outlook with the World Bank, in focusing on higher education as an engine for human capital to generate economic growth, albeit with a focus on the richer rather than poorer countries. However, Van der Wende (2011) acknowledges that while its philosophical inclination may be neo-liberal, the OECD is not static and the destabilising effects of globalisation have increased calls for balanced globalisation with a greater focus on social cohesion. Unterhalter et al (2013) meanwhile call out a number of reasons why higher education has received relatively little focus as a site of human development, including the continuing lack of basic education in many countries, challenges relating to quality of learning in schools, escalating youth unemployment and underemployment and conflicts about whether higher education delivers development and how this might be proven. In their assessment of post 2015 proposals, Unterhalter et al suggest that neither the World Bank nor UNESCO have specific policies on higher education as a stand along goal. The Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015) shows more promise, in that Goal 4 aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' with a number of associated targets. Whether or not higher education features on the global policy development agenda, Boni and Walker (2017) argue that they do contribute to human development, through the graduates they educate,

their engagement in development research and through promoting critical thinking and democratic values.

Indeed, Brennan et al (2013) reviewed the literature for the Department of Business Innovation and Skills in the UK on the wider benefits of higher education and highlighted practices such as increased likelihood to vote, propensity to volunteer lower crime rates, better health outcomes and increased general well-being. The benefits to society from higher education extend to wider society, influencing changes in consumption patterns, as well as attitudes to diversity and multiculturalism (Boni and Walker 2017).

However, as this study explored in Chapter 1: 5-9, Piketty (2014), Marginson (2016) and McCowan (2015) all elaborate on a world in which wealth is concentrated in fewer hands and the benefits of higher education are unevenly spread. Piketty (2014) describes a world where the top 10 per cent have pulled away from the rest, leading to wealth inequalities that will have significant intergenerational impact. Piketty is not convinced that higher education always advances mobility in the face of growing inequalities more generally and as they relate to variation in the perceived value of credentials from different institutions. For example, he argues that parental income has become an almost perfect predictor of higher education access and provides data that the children of parents in the top quartile of income show the highest returns from elite higher education. Marginson (2016) argues that what happens with incomes, wealth, labour markets, taxation, government spending and social programmes are all more important than what happens in universities (Boni and Walker 2017). Meanwhile, Atkinson (2015) asks, do universities produce students who are going to exacerbate the divisions between the very rich and the very poor? These analyses offer a challenge to Sen's perspective that a good education can transform lives and contribute to social change. Within increasingly unequal societies, higher education may be another manifestation of inequalities and therefore play more of a reproductive than a transformative role. While Marginson argues that mainstream thought about global higher education is framed by neo-liberalism rather than human capability and public goods, Sen (2002) disputes this perspective, contending that 'globalism' has also brought gains, including expanded student access, more diverse students, greater gender equity, more international student mobility fuelling graduate and research capacity building (Boni and Walker 2017). Similarly, Unterhalter et al (2013) present ten case studies which link economic growth and poverty eradication to argue

that inequalities can indeed be challenged through focusing on secondary and postsecondary education.

Haq (2003), who was instrumental in framing and developing the human development reports in the United Nations Development Programme, was convinced that a single composite measure was required to convince policy-makers that they should evaluate development by improvements in human well-being, not economic growth alone or as the main focus of development (Boni and Walker 2017). Haq, Sen and other economists collaborated to develop the Human Development Index, a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development. The UNDP explains that the HDI can be used to question national policy choices, such as why two countries with similar per capita incomes can have such different human development outcomes. Haq and Sen consider human development as comprising a plurality of dimensions beyond the economic, which Alkire and Denuelin (2009) have identified as four inter-locking principles of equity (justice, fairness and distributive justice between groups), efficiency (optimal use of existing resources), participation and empowerment (how people act as agents, individually and as groups), and sustainability (advancing human development such that progress endures over time). Ibrahim (2014) contends that an intervention inspired by the human development approach should incorporate all four dimensions. In this respect, human development offers a more integrated concept of development.

Human development is theorised through the capability approach and in turn, expanding capabilities advance human development. Robeyn's (2005: 94) defines it as 'a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies and proposals about social change in society'. Boni and Walker (2017) propose that capabilities have a bearing on education in four main ways, relating to the distributional aspect of education and its substantive values and content. First, the capability approach rejects an approach of equal treatment or equal attainment regardless of individual or group differences. Students could differ along a personal axis (gender, age), environmental axis (wealth, climate) and students with similar educational attainment may have had very different opportunities to achieve those outcomes so cannot be judged in the same terms. Unterhalter (2009: 166) suggests that when we think in terms of capabilities, we need to consider this interpersonal diversity

because ‘people need a different amount of resources in order to transform these into the functioning of being educated’.

The second contribution to education by the capability approach relates to the capability multiplier effect of education. It is valuable for its democratic contributions. It has interpersonal effects by opening up opportunities for siblings, others within a student’s community and school. It can have distributive effects by empowering individuals and groups to advocate for better conditions. Having a good education has the potential to expand other capabilities.

Third, capabilities can have implications for curriculum and pedagogy. It has strong links in this respect with progressive educational theorists like Dewey and Freire (Glassman and Patton 2014). These theories focus on how to empower and give voice to those who are seldom heard and, in this respect, the implication is that if we follow the core principles of the capability approach in developing and delivering a curriculum, then it implies a critical and humanising pedagogy (Walker 2009).

The last contribution of the capability approach is to values. Education is inescapably charged with political and moral values and it plays a critical role in value formation (McCowan and Unterhalter 2013). Boni and Walker (2017: 73) point us towards the central importance of considering the ‘micro-level of student learning and individual flourishing.’ What does each person succeed in being and doing? This is the crucial foundation of the capabilities.

According to Freire (1970), all education is inherently political. Education is central to the production and reproduction of distributive injustices through the tacit expectation that students will work in and through middle-class languages codes. University as an exclusionary experience for some appears as the ‘natural order’ of things, where working-class students accept their subordinate positioning as a response to the ‘logics’ of power (Bourdieu 1994: 177). The pedagogical experience and the selection of content for curricula shape identities and one way or another, students are immersed in these processes of power and control, where not everyone is accorded equal power, recognition and esteem (Boni and Walker 2017). Curriculum determines what counts as valuable knowledge. As Apple (1979) explains, what is included in a curriculum reflects what

powerful groups in society think students should learn and value. Walker (2008: 43) offers some examples of transformatory learning in higher education, where a student at a UK university draws on a history curriculum to critically engage with her own understanding of the world and to broaden it out ‘think outside my small world’. Naidoo (2015) explains how the Rhodes Must Fall student movement in the University of Cape Town is actively challenging power structures within informal learning spaces to figure out a decolonised consciousness, a platform from which to consider what a decolonised university and society may look like. Naidoo then calls for student activists to acknowledge the importance of student-led curriculum and pedagogy. Despite the reproductive role of higher education, it is also a ‘significant capability multiplier’ in terms of how it can strengthen other freedoms (Boni and Walker 2017: 155). However, for education to be transformatory, Freire (1976) proposes it include three features (a) learners should be active participants in creating knowledge, (b) learning should be meaningful and (c) learning should be critical (Boni and Walker 2017).

Employability literature has expanded in recent years (Tomlinson 2012), emerging in the light of connections claimed between economic growth and a highly skilled workforce. The capability approach allows us to probe beyond human capital questions to issues of diversity, inequalities and human development. This helps to consider whether the opportunity to develop capabilities and valued functionings is uneven among students, which can help our understanding of what needs to be changed to enable well-being in each student’s life (Boni and Walker 2017). In her South African case studies, for instance, Walker (2015) found that unequal social and cultural capital can constrain student opportunities and this particularly affects working-class students. Walker contrasts the deep connections of the parents of some students in an excellent state school with the university, with the very limited knowledge and understanding of processes to apply to higher education and for financial aid within the poorest townships. Even with two such students who have demonstrated significant educational capability, the student with strong university networks and deep school understanding of college going processes is already at an advantage at application stage. A narrow understanding of employability fails to highlight the advantages of this social and cultural capital. Similarly, this will emerge through the university process in a greater ability of middle-class students to take up unpaid internships, volunteering opportunities and travel experiences to enhance their ‘employability’. Most working-class students do not have

access to social networks that will enhance their economic opportunities (Greenbank 2009). A capability approach enables us to see how some students have more choice and opportunity than others and even in higher education, they are not operating in fair educational and social conditions (Boni and Walker 2017). The benefits of higher education accrue most to those who have attended selective institutions, who are most likely to come from more advantaged social classes. Universities can challenge these inequalities through considering the teaching and learning environment, process and content, promoting equal access to informal learning opportunities and scaffolding student access to useful employment experiences while in higher education, so that the scales of social and cultural capital are more balanced in favour of working-class students (Boni and Walker 2017). A capability lens enables us to consider whose agency freedoms are being advanced and to explore how conversion factors such as university reputation, field of study, social capital impacts on different students and how these inequalities might be addressed. Walker (2006) has operationalised the capability approach within higher education, to provide a yardstick by which to judge whether the experience is more or less just and fair, together with a focus on actual student functionings within higher education.

Boni and Walker (2017) conclude that universities have the potential to reproduce or reduce inequalities and could work towards more equitable educational opportunities, even in the context of a dominant discourse of neo-liberal discourse. They call for the foregrounding of human development and capabilities as the conceptual, policy and practical lens for analysing, developing and evaluating university education as both educational and political. This section has explored the potential of higher education to counter the structural impact detailed by Marginson (2016) and act more as a site of human development in ways that will increase equalities and challenge injustices. The following sections provide an overview of second and third level education in Ireland.

The Second Level Education System in Ireland

The second level education system comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed whereas schools in the other categories are state-established and managed through education and training boards or boards of management. Almost 60% of second-level schools in Ireland

are still owned by the churches, mainly by the Roman Catholic Church, but they are almost wholly funded by the State. There are 738 second level schools in Ireland and about 6% of those are private, fee-paying schools (Lynch 1998). Lynch (1998) identifies the following powerful partners in education: teacher unions, university and higher education colleges, civil servants, politicians, school authorities, the churches, vocational education committees, and various official advisory and decision-making education agencies. Parent bodies have increased power in education in recent year's but they are not as powerful as the other named agencies and they tend to be predominantly middle-class. In addition, there are a series of State-maintained bodies who manage the education process, including the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the National Council for Educational Awards, the National Council for Vocational Awards, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the School Inspectorate and the Teaching Council. Just over 200 second level schools are within the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme, a programme that targets schools with demographics indicating lower educational attainment and indicators of poverty and deprivation in the local community. Second level education consists of a three-year, Junior Cycle and a three-year Senior Cycle, depending on whether the optional Transition Year in year 4 of second level is taken. Students take one of three programmes in their Senior Cycle, each of which leads to a State Examination: the traditional Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) (Department of Education and Skills 2018). Students taking the LCVP or LCA are more likely to be attending DEIS schools, as the opportunities to progress to higher education are more much more limited from these strands.

The Leaving Certificate carries high social status as it is the longest established and is the main source of entry to universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education through a points system linked to grades achieved. Students take at least five subjects at either higher or ordinary level and a foundation level is offered for Irish and Mathematics. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) was introduced to the senior cycle in 1989 with a focus on technical subjects and subjects like Enterprise Education, Preparation for Work and Work Experience. This programme is completed alongside a minimum of five other Leaving Certificate subjects. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme was introduced in 1995 and is separate from the Leaving Certificate. It is a two-year course which intends to assist in the preparation of participants for adult

and working life. The programme consists of general education, vocational education and vocational preparation. The LCA cannot be used to gain entry to third level education (Kenny et al 2009).

Most students study seven subjects for the Leaving Certificate and there are thirty subjects available from which schools can select. All students, other than those with a language exemption, study English, Irish and Mathematics to Leaving Certificate level and students then add an additional 3-4 subjects to complete Leaving Certificate examinations in seven subjects. Most subjects can be taken at either Higher or Ordinary level and some, such as Mathematics, can be taken at Foundation level.

The performance of a Leaving Certificate candidate is calculated based on a points system linked to grade attainment in the candidate's best six Leaving Certificate subjects. Since 2010, Leaving Certificate candidates who are assessed as eligible on either socio-economic or disability grounds can apply for additional higher education supports and/or for reduced points entry to courses in over twenty higher education institutions including the universities, some of the institutes of technology and the colleges of education through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)⁴.

The Higher Education System in Ireland

There are seven universities in Ireland, which are state-funded and generally autonomous. Fourteen institutes of technology provide programmes of education and training in areas such as business, science, engineering, linguistics and music. Several colleges of education in Ireland provide specialised training for primary school teachers. A number of fee-paying third-level educational institutions offer courses, mainly in professional vocational training and business. The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of 10 levels which allows the different standards and levels qualifications to be compared. Third-level qualifications are Levels 6-10 in the

⁴ The Higher Education Access Route and the Disability Access Route to Education were established as nationwide, modified admissions schemes to all participating institutions in 2010. The nationwide scaling of the scheme was led by Trinity College Dublin, in partnership with all other participating institutions: www.accesscollege.ie. Over 26,000 working-class students and students with a disability have entered the participating institutions via these schemes in the last five years.

Framework (Department of Education and Skills 2018). In 2016/17, there were 225,628 students in higher education in Ireland, 56% were attending universities, 40% were in institutes of technology and 5% in colleges of education and other colleges. Higher education is defined as courses offered in recognised higher education institutions and which normally demand a minimum entry requirement of a Leaving Certificate with at least grade D in five subjects (Higher Education Authority 2017).

In Ireland, the state meets 74% of the annual funding cost of higher education (Cassells 2016). Over 90% of higher education students attend institutions mainly funded by the state. Graduates hold almost a half of all jobs, although they comprise only one third of the working age population and their employment rate is 80%, against a 61% rate for the population at large (Cassells 2016: 20-22). The state gets a cumulative return of 27% over a forty-year span on its costs of supporting a male graduate and of 17.5% in the case of a female graduate (Cassells 2016: 16).

Clancy (2015) charts some encouraging trends in Irish higher education. Ireland has grown from a country with 4% college-going cohort in the early 1960s to one with a participation rate close to 65% by 2011. The proportion of the 25-64 age range with a higher education qualification (38%) is well ahead of the OECD average. Clancy also notes a major change in the gender balance in higher education participation, with women comprising 57% of full-time and 54% of postgraduate students. Although Irish higher education relies heavily on government support, it deteriorated by 21% in the period 2008-12. This decreased core staff levels by 5%, alongside student growth of 16%. Clancy (2015) observes that the staff-student ratios are now at a critically low point. Clancy critiques the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, as overly reliant on an international policy consensus, particularly led by the OECD. He details changing relationships between universities, other higher education institutions and the state, underscoring a fundamental shift in the direction of greater state control of the academy. Clancy identifies higher education as being at the heart of a 'knowledge triangle (2015: 2) of education, research and innovation, where it exists as the primary driver of human capital formation.

An Overview of Access to Higher Education by Working-class Students in Ireland

However, despite some encouraging trends identified by Cassells (2016) and Clancy (2015), under-representation of working-class students in higher education persists and it is particularly acute in urban centres and is exemplified by juxtaposing higher education participation rates in two Dublin postal codes, ranging from 15% in Dublin 17 to 99% in Dublin 6 (HEA 2014).

Five national surveys have tracked the social-class background of higher education entrants. The first four were undertaken by Professor Patrick Clancy (1982; 1988; 1995; 2001), while the fifth was undertaken by Philip O’Connell, David Clancy and Selina McCoy (2004). All five surveys found significant and persistent disparities in social class participation in higher education. The Equal Access Survey is a voluntary survey which collects information on the social, economic and ethnic background of new students who enter higher education for the first time. Table 1.1 below indicates that students from working class backgrounds are much more likely to be attending the institutes of technology than the universities.

Table 1.1: Socio-Economic Group by Sector, 2015/16 and 2016/17

	Universities		Institutes of Technology	
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16*	2016/17
Employers and Managers	19.4%	19.5%	14.4%	16.1%
Higher Professional	14.7%	14.2%	5.5%	6.0%
Lower Professional	10.1%	10.0%	6.6%	6.9%
Non-Manual	9.7%	10.0%	10.3%	10.7%
Manual Skilled	8.4%	8.3%	12.5%	12.6%
Semi-Skilled	4.3%	4.5%	7.1%	7.3%
Unskilled	3.6%	3.6%	5.9%	6.4%
Own Account Workers	6.5%	6.3%	7.2%	7.1%
Farmers	6.8%	6.7%	5.9%	6.2%
Agricultural Workers	0.2%	0.3%	0.6%	0.5%
All Others Gainfully Occupied, and Unknown	16.3%	16.7%	24.2%	20.2%

Source: HEA Key Facts and Statistics 2016-17

Non-progression rates are higher for those in levels 6 and 7 courses (26-27%) compared to 16%, 11% and 6% in level 8 courses within universities, institutes of technology and colleges respectively (Frawley, Pigott and Carroll 2017). In general, courses at National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 6/7 admit students on a lower points range (255-300) than NFQ level 8 programmes (405-450). The findings of the latest higher education progression study (Frawley, Pigott and Carroll 2017) indicate a link between prior educational attainment and successful progression after the first year of student. Those with higher prior educational attainment are more likely to progress to the second year of study than those with lower educational attainment. In total, 3.6% of all students in higher education are repeat students. The institute of technology sector, at level 7, has the greatest proportion of repeat students. The lowest level of non-progression in socio-economic groups is found among Farmers at 9%. The highest level of non-progression is among the Manual Skilled and All others gainfully employed and Unknown groups, at 16%.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) supports targeted provision of resources to schools in areas with low higher education progression rates, through Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) and the Schools Completion Programme. Furthermore, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) provides performance-related funding to higher education institutions (HEIs) based on efforts to deliver outreach programmes to such schools and to develop diversified admissions routes (HEA 2014). While there is value in this policy approach of targeting resources, Power, Flynn, Courtois and Kennedy (2013) suggest that although policy discourse focuses on liberal conceptions of equality, targets set for addressing educational disadvantage and improving higher education access are rarely met. This has been attributed in some research to an increased marketization of education and the emergence of an ideology of ‘consumer choice’, locating educational policy discourse within the broader international process of ‘neoliberalisation’ (Power et al. 2013). Neo-liberalism is a theory of political economic practice that considers human well-being in economic terms and defines well-being as the freedom to buy and sell in free markets (Lolich 2011). In the neo-liberal view, markets will self-regulate if left to their own devices and the laws of supply and demand. Individuals who cannot be defined economically are a burden to society. However, human beings are not always rational or self-sufficient and not everyone is capable to engaging in fair and equal exchanges in the market (Lolich 2011). Neo-

liberalism defines happiness as the freedom to sell and buy in free markets. Humans are seen as rational, calculating individuals who know what is best for them and engage in transactions to obtain what they want. Neo-liberalism argues that if markets are left to their own devices, they will tend to self-regulate due to the laws of supply and demand. However, human beings are not always rational or self-sufficient and not everybody, for a different set of reasons, can engage in fair and equal exchanges in the market, buying and selling products and services.

Lynch (2009) critiques neo-liberalism as a perspective which produces a one-sided picture of education contributing to inefficient policy outcomes. Lynch cites the HEA Strategic Plan (2008) and the government's report on the knowledge-based economy as examples of policy documents that reduce education to its economic objectives and as Lolich (2011: 272) observes 'A society that only values what has the potential to be commercialised is a deeply unequal society in affective terms...However, humans at different moments of their life need to care for, or be cared for by, others. Being loved and cared for is not only vital for survival in infancy, early childhood or times of illness or vulnerability, but throughout human life' (Lynch et al. 2009). In such an economy, the welfare state shrinks and it is up to the individual to provide in matters of health and education. Peters (2005) defined this policy focus as promoting the concept of the citizen consumer, where competitive individualism is seen as a necessary attribute for a constantly reinventing entrepreneur (Apple 2001; Ball 2003).

Neo-liberalism also impacts on pedagogy and Lolich (2011) describes a new pedagogical model that focuses on inputs and outputs, as if education can be reduced to its economic function. Olssen and Peters (2005) identify these dimensions as choice, flexibility, clearly defined objectives and a results orientation. Students are redefined as independent consumers who are free to make their own choices and wholly responsible for how well or badly they do. Gordon (1991) suggests that neo-liberalism draws on a concept of choices as a faculty that overrides all social determinations, which wholly individualises a student's successes and failures. Lolich (2011) argues that in our race towards economic success, students' subjectivities are being reconstructed to reflect a neo-liberal governmentality, where students are reconfigured as neo-liberal subjects.

Ball (1998) alerts us to the tension involved in attending to local policy making in a global landscape with increasing policy convergence, and a strong neo-liberal under-

current, across localities. He contends that the project to democratise education and social policy has foundered because the middle-classes perceive an unmanaged congestion in the professions, impacting on them and their offspring, and that therefore education is increasingly being reformed as an ‘oligarchic good’ (Ball 1998: 121). Ball asserts that there is sponsorship and, in some respects, enforcement of policy solutions by multi-lateral agencies, such as the World Bank. Its preconditions for education can be considered as an ideological stance, which promote an integrated world system along market lines (Jones 1998: 152). Jones (1998: 146) suggests that this means notions of the public good shift to accommodate reduced expectations about what public services and infrastructure consist of, so that essentially the education system becomes an object of micro-economic reform, where education activities are turned into saleable market products within a national efficiency drive (Taylor et al. 1997: 77; Welsh 1998). This matters because, as Ball (1998: 125) reminds us ‘policies are both systems of value and symbolic systems... articulated both to achieve material effects and to manufacture support for those effects’. Gee and Lankshear (1995) suggest that education is taking on characteristics of ‘fast capitalism’, where it is not merely modelled on the methods and values of capital but is itself drawn into a commodity form. Ball (1998: 126) explains that the generic policies are translated into practice in complex ways, that they enter rather than simply change existing power relations and cultural practices. However, this makes it no less important to consider the processes of interpretation and struggle involved in translating these generic policies into institutional practice, as ‘even in their different realisations, this ensemble changes the way that education is organised and delivered but also changes the meaning of education and what it means to be educated and what it means to learn’ so that in relation to this policy convergence in education, we must continue to pose the question ‘whose interests are served?’ (Ball 1998: 126).

In Ireland, then, public policy measures to address educational disadvantage and ‘targeted’ higher education access programmes to increase progression rates take place against the backdrop of these wider national and global policy tensions. Research indicates that working-class parents have fewer financial resources to invest in the education of their children, and less cultural and social capital to transmit to them. A Growing Up in Ireland report demonstrates that participation in cultural activities is strongly differentiated by social class; one in three children from professional backgrounds are engaged in extra-curricular activities compared to less than one in 10 of

the most disadvantaged children (Williams, Greene, Doyle et. al. 2011). This evidence suggests that access to a full range of quality educational choices remains heavily structured by postal code and socio-economic group.

The Recent Historical Context of Higher Education Access in Ireland

The Investment in Education report (1965) has been described by Coolohan as ‘one of the foundation documents of modern Irish education’, in part because it provided the basis for educational planning based on accurate statistical information (Walsh 2009). Loxley, Seery and Walsh (2014) suggest that this report marked a departure point in the dominant educational paradigm, which hitherto had been subject to the hegemony of a Christian view of education, the core purpose of which was to produce moral agents. ‘Investment’ drew on human capital theory as its underpinning. This was emerging as a key strand of economic thinking at the time, due mainly to the work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz. Shortly after the publication of Investment in Education the newly established OECD Education Policy Committee committed to working towards ‘providing employment opportunities for all, improving human capital and social cohesion’ (Loxley et al. 2014: 176). Education was articulated as a central component in the development of human capital, to fulfil the economic drive towards greater technological progress.

The policy decision to initiate Investment in Education transformed the Irish educational sector, because it marked the first, sustained investment in education by the Irish state, which paved the path for the introduction of free second level education in the late 1960s (Loxley et al. 2014: 178). In the current era of reduced public investment in education and an increased trend towards individualising higher education costs to those who benefit, it is noteworthy that the original Investment in Education was underpinned by ‘the concept of education as a means by which society invested in the next generation’ (Garvin 2004: 192).

Loxley et al. (2014) argue that we may now be in an era where the public investment in education has reached a level of diminishing returns. Since human capital theory still forms the core of policy, it is difficult to argue for increased investment if this is not seen to yield corresponding economic dividends (Loxley et al. 2014). The authors (Loxley et

al. 2014: 178) suggest it may be timely to formulate a new view of education that is linked to a reimagined theory of human and social development worthy of investment, ‘as it promises to develop human beings and communities that are creative, adaptable, critical and connected to each other and to the world and nature around them’.

In the context of widening access, Investment in Education is also credited with providing ‘striking evidence of the lack of opportunity for poorer children to proceed to secondary and higher education and exposed the waste of talent which resulted from this lack of opportunity’ (Hyland and Milne 1992: 29). This was not a natural corollary of the first decades of statehood, as O’Connor (2014: 198) observes that educational provision was ‘undermined by a poverty of ambition, an absence of faith in human potential and an aversion among the educated elite towards the notion of state involvement in planning for the expansion of educational opportunities.’ In this context, O’Connor suggests the very conceptualisation of expenditure on education as an investment was revolutionary.

Clancy (1995: 474) suggests that up until the 1960s, the government was quite happy to adopt the ‘principle of subsidiarity’ in education, allowing the various religious orders substantial control over the education system. Murphy (2007) argues that while Investment in Education marked a shift towards more utilitarian concepts of education, the ‘spiritual values’ (Clancy 1995: 153) continued to resonate well after the publication of Investment. This was due to the continuing influence of the Catholic Church, which had throughout the colonial period been the institution associated with the protection and perpetuation of the indigenous Irish culture. In the 1970s, the continued power of the Church, together with the economic downturn, limited the extent to which the promise of progress would be realised through Investment in Education (Murphy 2007). The instrumental role of education in economic growth continues, however, to be to the forefront of educational policy. The Green Paper Education for a Changing World states that the education system ‘must seek to interact with the world of work to promote the employability of its students and in playing its part in the country’s economic development’ (Department of Education and Science 1992: 35). The economic interest is also evident in the White paper on education, Charting our Education Future (Department of Education and Science 1995: 5) which refers to ‘an independent and dynamic educational system which is systematically linked to the economic planning

process'. The economic role of education has been critiqued by Fleming (1998) and Drudy (2003), who suggests that equal focus should be given to fostering personal and social development and to further equality and respect for others. (Murphy 2007).

While Investment in Education paved the way for universal access to second level education, it also precipitated what Walsh (2011) describes as a 'quiet revolution' through the establishment of the Regional Technical Colleges, providing much needed diversity within the post-secondary education system and facilitating the development of an infrastructure to provide education and training in a broad range of emerging occupations. Despite this diversification, however, as McGuire, Collins and Garavan (2003) observe, numerous studies point to an overemphasis on academic achievement as part of the cause for under-participation of particular socio-economic groups in higher education (Breen *et al*, 1990; Callan and Nolan, 1992; Garavan *et al*, 1995; Lynch, 1998; Whelan and Hannan, 1998). Whelan and Hannan (1998) suggest that this over-emphasis on a more academic than technical discourse has created local stratification systems influencing the choice of second level schools, while also influencing the institutional ethos and curriculum and pedagogy through an overemphasis on the goal of reaching higher education.

Higher education access programmes were created as one mechanism for building greater understanding amongst working-class students of the full range of higher education options and the cultures of different higher education contexts (McGuire, Collins and Garavan 2003). However, both Lynch (1998) and Smyth (1999) agree that inequality in education will only decrease when income and life-chances between social classes reduce.

The Irish education system has made considerable progress in the last half-century. School completion rates have risen to 90%, the numbers progressing to higher education have continued to rise and 65% of young adults now participate (Clancy 2015). However, these increases in student numbers progressing to higher education principally advantaged the professional and managerial classes. Internationally, the focus of expansion has moved from secondary to higher education. Entry rates of the relevant age cohorts to higher education rose from 37% in 1995 to 57% in 2005 across OECD countries, with a rate of improvement in Ireland greater than in any other country over that period (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2010: 40).

Despite this progress, there have been growing concerns about the school system, the main progression route to higher education and the continued inequalities of access by some socio-economic groups (O'Connor 2014). McCoy and Smyth (2004:79) observe that the level of additional school funding would have to be set at an extremely high level to compensate for the inequalities that exist between more and less advantaged schools in their access to resources. It is still the case that social selection persists across various second level education sectors, with middle and higher SES groups progressing to schools owned by religious organisations and lower SES groups progressing to the community and voluntary sectors (O'Connor 2014).

These differentiated enrolment patterns have been shown to undermine quality and exacerbate inequalities. Moreover, as O'Connor notes, the state continues to invest €100 million per annum in the salaries of teachers within 51 private fee paying second level schools, a policy that is rationalised on religious grounds. It is estimated that, through fees, the private-aided sector generates a further €100–€120 million per annum (Flynn 2011). This compares to an estimated €38 million invested (after teacher salaries) in an equivalent number of public secondary schools (O'Connor 2014: 204). This subsidisation creates clustering of advantage schools and distorts the social mix in neighbouring schools. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) detail, this structured inequality has broad and long-term costs to economy and society. Segregation of this kind is not found in countries with the highest standards of literacy, where schools embrace the diversity of their local community (O'Connor 2014).

The substantial increases in higher education participation have led to increased pressure on students to contribute towards the costs of higher education and, in the UK, to the gradual dismantling of means tested grants. In Ireland, there was, until recently, pressure to increase individual contributions to higher education, despite evidence from other countries where this model has been adopted. In the US for instance, where 64% of the investment in higher education in 2010 was from private sources (against 23% across the EU (OECD 2013: 204)), higher education tuition fees have risen ahead of inflation levels every year since 1982. This was more surprising, as O'Connor (2014) remarks, since this was an era of greatly improved technological and organisational development, which should have facilitated cost efficiencies. This experience suggests that the increased marketization of education drives prices up rather than down. O'Connor contends that

this relates to the status and earnings potential that qualifications confer, so that in a market context these disproportionate rates of inflation are a ‘Darwinesque mechanism for the perpetuation of privilege’ (O’Connor 2014: 207). This marketization of education represents a threat, therefore, to the ‘character and viability of Irish society’ in this century (O’Connor 2014: 207).

It is within these systemic limitations that targeted higher education access programmes have developed. Fleming and Gallagher (2003) report that access is defined by the European Council as the widening of participation in good quality higher education to all sectors of society; the extension of participation to include currently under-represented groups; and a recognition that participation extends beyond entry to successful completion (Council of Europe 1999). However, they differentiate between widening participation and increased access, as the massification of the higher education system has mainly advantaged higher SES groups. In the UK, there is a further distinction drawn between widening participation, which focuses on the higher education progression of working-class groups and fair access. The principle of ‘fair access’ considers the courses into which working-class groups progress, whether these are classified as proportionately in higher professional areas and across selective institutions (Milburn 2013).

Higher education access programmes focus mainly on barriers to access, which are financial and educational. However, research on access to higher education highlights not only the visible economic effects of broader socio-economic disadvantage but some of the more indirect social and psychological effects as well. Poverty creates cultures in which people lack a sense of ownership in relation to higher education. The sense of being an outsider impacts negatively on students’ hopes and aspirations through creating a sense of inferiority and of social exclusion (Lynch and O’Riordan 1998; Smyth and McCoy 2009; Smyth, McCoy, Darmody and Watson 2014). Meaningful strategies to tackle low progression rates to higher education would therefore require an explicit focus on addressing the socio-cultural impact of poverty on issues like aspiration, identity, trust and social relations.

The development of policy to facilitate wider access and participation in higher education has been framed by a range of acts, including The Higher Education Authority Act

(1971), The Universities Act (1997), The Education Act (1998) and the Report of the High-Level Group on University Equality Policies (2004). The policy papers 'Education for a Changing World' (1992) and 'Charting our Education Future' (1995) together with The Universities Act (1997) were the backdrop for the establishment of structured, access programmes between the universities and schools that were 'designated disadvantaged'. The target in the mid-1990s was for an additional 500 working-class students per year to progress to higher education, inclusive of the institute of technology (then the regional technical college) sector. The Commission on the Points System 1999 recommended a continued focus by the universities on designated disadvantaged schools, as well as strategies to reach working-class students not in such schools. The Commission report also highlighted the need for clearer definitions of target student groups. The Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) concluded that additional interventions were unlikely to bring about radical change without a suitable structural to coordinate and intensify their effect. More recently, a series of reports from the National Access Office, established within the Higher Education Authority in 2003, have set goals in relation to widening participation in higher education, with a corresponding performance-based funding model to incentivise programme development within higher education institutions. The reports have also highlighted the lack of systematic evaluation of the impact of access programmes and the need to involve parents, peers and the wider community within which schools are located, as the day-to-day influencers of student aspiration and attainment (Higher Education Authority 2014). Together, these legislative instruments and policy documents have identified the barriers to equality of opportunity and helped to set the agenda for the development of access programmes.

Research into Higher Education Access by Working-class Students in Ireland

Keane (2013) highlights the relative lack of research in Ireland focusing on widening participation. This means there is a limited evidence base from which to demonstrate impact. She remarks on the urgent need for ongoing data collection and interpretation of different student groups' participation and achievement throughout their educational careers. Smyth and McCoy (2009) note a range of challenges faced by schools within the DEIS scheme, including that DEIS schools have a higher proportion of those from lower socio-economic groups, 'newcomer' (immigrant) students, students with disabilities, and Traveller students than non-DEIS schools. In addition, DEIS schools have a higher

incidence of serious literacy and numeracy problems, emotional and behavioural problems, absenteeism, lower student motivation, problematic student-teacher relationships, and less parental involvement.

Smyth and McCoy (2009) remark that within a short time period, Irish schools transformed from a fairly homogeneous population to a much more heterogeneous intake, through an 87% increase in the number of immigrant children in our system between 2002 and 2006. Several studies have indicated that dominant educational practices disadvantage those from working-class groups, with low teacher expectations and ability grouping practices playing a particularly destructive role (Devine 2011; Keane 2013; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch 1998; 1999; Smyth and McCoy 2011). According to Keane (2009; 2011), research has consistently found that those from lower socio-economic groups report more negative school experiences than other students. It is in the Junior Cycle years that young people begin to have negative experiences of schooling, experiencing negative teacher interactions, poorer attendance rates and non-completion of academic work (Smyth et al. 2004; Smyth and McCoy 2009). Keane (2013) remarks that this, along with underachievement at school, and a lack of family experience of educational success and higher education participation, negatively affects their academic self-confidence, and their expectations relating to academic achievement and progression to further education or higher education. The focus on rote learning causes many students to disengage, particularly those in working-class groups.

McCoy and Byrne (2011; 2013) highlight relative differences in higher education-related 'cultural capital'. Those within the non-manual group who do not progress to higher education have experienced much higher rates of alienation in the school system than those who do progress. In Share and Carroll's (2013) report, Trinity College access graduates made similar observations regarding their comparative expectations of higher education progression versus employment:

Like, there would be an expectation, like, you finish school, you go out to work or you'd become part of the productive economy, as opposed to going on to college, like ... I know blokes who were bricklayers who were bringing in €1,400 a week and so, you know, that was a barrier. (Share and Carroll 2013: 48)

McCoy and Byrne (2011) highlight the barriers presented by limited access to information about the higher education application process, the different routes and financial concerns. Those with limited family history of higher education are also strongly reliant on this information being made available in school, although recent media reports (McLaughlin 2016) underscore the fact that the economic crisis has further exacerbated a guidance deficit in DEIS schools.

Lynch and O’Riordain (1998) classify the main challenges faced by working-class students as economic constraints, institutional constraints, arising from schooling processes and cultural constraints, related to student home and school environment. Their study illuminated some of these processes, including the effect of some students living in financially straitened circumstances and working part-time on their educational attainment. They are further disadvantaged by lack of resources for extra tuition, foreign travel related to language study, space to study, technology and other educational resources, which is a mainstay of exam preparation in private, fee-paying schools and a burgeoning culture since the 1990s. Financial factors also impact on students aspirations as they worried about the impact of their choices on their families and were focused on shorter term financial planning (Lynch and O’Riordain 1998). Students also felt pressure to contribute to the family finances. Teachers were inclined to locate the responsibility for lack of attainment and progression with students and families, contending that the families did not value education. Second level students had little direct experience of higher education and this, together with financial concerns, combined to make post-secondary education progression less reachable. Even students who had progressed to higher education continued to feel like outsiders and to remark that there was little reflection of their lives in the curricula they were studying. These factors were compounded by issues related to subject choice, facilities, school climate, out of school resources for activities and both teacher and lecturer expectations. The study points to the relational nature of inequality, as Lynch and O’Riordain (1998: 471) comment:

The financial, cultural and educational experiences of working-class students need not, in and of themselves, create educational inequality; what creates the inequality is the fact that others have differential access to resources, income, wealth and power which enable them to avail of the opportunities presented in education in a relatively more successful manner.

There has been limited research in the Irish context on the widening participation (WP) student experience in higher education (McCoy et al 2010; Keane 2011; Share and Carroll 2013). This is mirrored in international research where there has been a greater focus on pre-entry than post entry factors (Reay, David, and Ball 2005; Ball et al. 2002), or the transitional experience (for example, McGuire, Collins, and Garavan 2003; Burke 2002; Haggis and Pouget 2002). However, it is by examining the experience of WP students in higher education that we may glean a greater understanding of the features of their schooling that most shape their trajectory.

As Keane (2011) notes, the HE focused literature has highlighted the extent to which students struggle with identity and belonging (Bufton 2003; Burke 2014; Read, Archer, and Leathwood 2003; Forsyth and Furlong 2000). Share and Carroll (2013) in Ireland Crozier et al. (2008) in England and Christie, Munro and Wager (2005) in Scotland examined the social experience of WP students in HE, highlighting the degree to which they focused primarily on the academic aspects of their college lives and compartmentalised their community and college experiences. Aries and Seider (2005) and Goodwin (2002) suggested that working-class students tended to make friendships with similar students and to maintain more superficial relationships with those students they considered to be from higher SES backgrounds. In Ireland, working-class students were also differentiated by being more prevalent in general arts courses rather than in courses leading to higher professional areas (McGuire, Collins and Garavan 2003; Higher Education Authority 2018; Trinity Access Programmes 2010; Geary YEAR). Archer and Leathwood (2003) underscored the concern students felt about losing their class identity, which impacted on the degree to which they integrated or became ‘part of’ the institutional culture. Keane (2011: 458) classifies this as ‘subservient distancing behaviour’, maintaining distance from class peers to better protect their habitus. This conflict is set against the pressures for middle-class students who, because of the massification of HE, internalise a need to better differentiate themselves through social and cultural capital and going to the ‘right’ course in the ‘right’ institution (Brennan 2002). This distancing behaviour is potentially detrimental, as Keane (2011) and Villar and Alterbin (2009) suggest it may limit their ability to convert academic qualifications into post-secondary opportunities.

Taken together, the research indicates that a range of deficits in information, pedagogy and trusted relationships at the school level militate against some students in DEIS schools reaching their full academic potential. Keane (2013) suggests that widening participation interventions should particularly focus on improving student attainment, as this relates closely to socio-demographic factors, and that interventions should also encompass the informational, aspirational, academic and financial aspects of higher education. Nevertheless, she observes that some of the target groups have enjoyed steady increases in their participation levels and there is a strong national commitment to widening participation objectives. However, Lynch (2004) has long argued that significantly more investment and institutional change is required to make substantial gains and to address the inequalities that structure the educational experience of working-class students.

This section has provided an overview of the literature in Ireland relating to higher education progression by working-class students and the challenges therein. The policy, historical and research context established thus far sets the context for the TA21-CFES project, the research question and the structure of the dissertations, which are specified in the following sections.

University-to-School Partnerships to Widen Participation

One strategy used by higher education institutions to increase participation rates in higher education and close the skills gap, is educational outreach programmes, coordinated through higher education access programmes. For example, Trinity College Dublin has developed the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP), which includes a range of developmental outreach activities, university ‘foundation’ courses and other alternative admissions routes (Trinity Access Programmes 2010; The Sutton Trust 2009; Share and Carroll 2013; Hart and Klugman 2016). In 2011, TAP partnered with College for Every Student, a US-based educational non-profit to help students build on their existing social and cultural capital and develop their capabilities, so that they would be prepared to plan for progression to post-secondary education (Dalton and St John 2016). The College for Every Student (CFES) model involves three structured core practices—Leadership through Service, Mentoring and Pathways to College.

The Trinity Access Programmes and College for Every Student partnership aimed to explore how an Irish adapted version of the US model could be used to build capacity within working-class schools. This model moved beyond the standard university outreach model of providing educational opportunities to the students to visit the higher education campus, to one that focuses on using university resources to build the educational capabilities of all students within partner schools. The project—Trinity Access 21 (TA21-CFES)—involves a focused intervention using the CFES model in 11 Irish schools. It began with the entire second year cohort (age 14), as the inflection point at which most research identifies an educational disengagement, along with self-limiting subject choices (Economic and Social Research Institute 2014). Students in this cohort are participating in a longitudinal action research project over the course of their second level education to explore the impact of the TA21-CFES intervention on their educational and personal development. The longitudinal study uses a student survey each year, combined with teacher focus groups, to explore the impact of the intervention.

Chiseri-Strater (1996: 2) explains that ‘the concept of positionality includes the [researcher’s] given attributes such as race, nationality, and gender which are fixed or culturally ascribed. Such attributes require textual disclosure when they affect the data, as they always do to some degree.’ It is acknowledged that positionality is particularly important in the context of this project, as I have been working in educational access for twenty years and I have responsibility for the implementation of the overall TA21-CFES project. I have unpacked my positionality in more detail in Chapter 3: 115-119.

This study is distinctive from the overall research project, in that it 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 project in four schools. Table 1.2 below provides an overview of the project content and the capabilities that emerged over the three-year period, related back to each of the three ‘core practices’ (Pathways to College, Leadership through Service and Mentoring). The process by which these valued capabilities were identified is explained in Chapters 3 and 8.

The TA21-CFES project (see Appendix D) aims to address the challenge of unequal access to higher education by working-class students. It is a university-to-school

partnership that aims to tackle school-based challenges to student development using four ‘core practices’: Pathways to College, Mentoring, Leadership through Service and 21C Teaching & Learning. The aim of TA21 is to build capacity within partner schools so that all students are informed and prepared to make post-secondary educational choices which will support them to realise their full educational potential. The goals of the TA21 project are to support:

1. educational attainment and post-secondary progression in geographical areas where progression to higher education is historically low.
2. schools to develop and promote 21st Century Teaching & Learning practices.
3. development of an evidence base that has systemic impact by informing policy and structural change.

The **mentoring** core practice aims to mobilise volunteer mentors to help improve access to education for students in low progression schools. The **leadership** core practice helps in the development and encouragement skills like teamwork, project and time management, by engaging students in small projects to help their school or local community. **Pathways to College** seeks to address the growing inequality in career guidance for second level students. Research emerging from the Growing Up In Ireland study has shown that students in DEIS schools are much more likely to experience teacher directed rather than active learning pedagogical approaches. This difference in style can also relate to classroom behavioural issues. In 2014, the TA21 team developed a Postgraduate Certificate in **21 Century Teaching and Learning**, in collaboration with Trinity’s School of Education. This course aims to provide teachers with the theoretical and practice tools to leverage technology to create more active, student-led pedagogical approaches, while also preparing them to identify and change structure and culture across the school. Figure 1 below is a representation of a school combining its existing activities within the four core practices with those provided by the TA21-CFES project:

Figure 1: A Whole School Approach to Student and School transformation

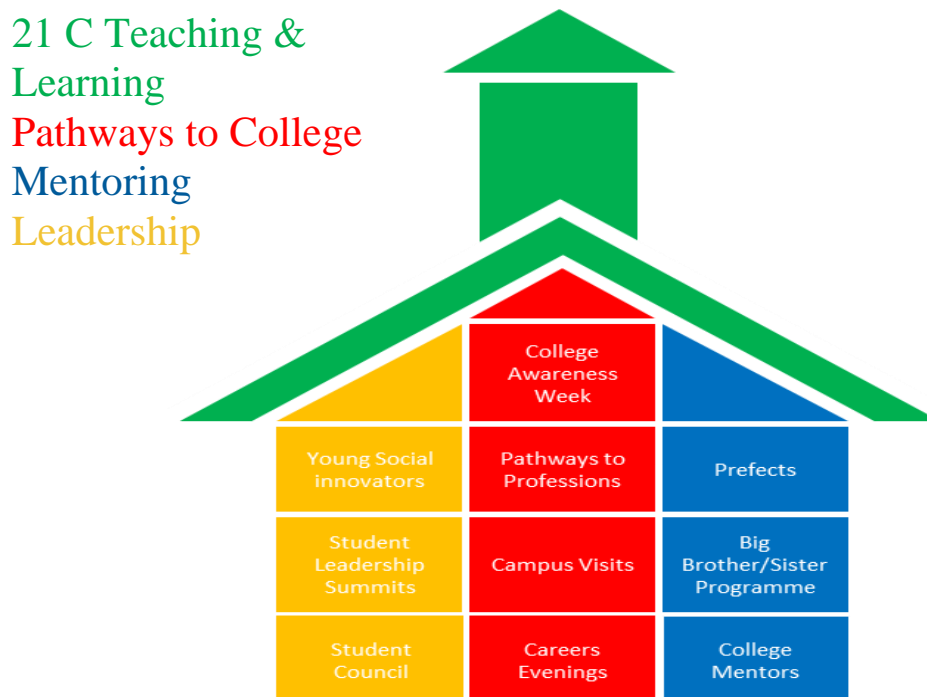


Table 1.2: The TA21-CFES project overview in partner schools

Valued Capabilities identified through this research and related social and cultural capital themes	TA21-CFES Core Practice	Example of Activity
Autonomy, practical reason and knowledge, identity, hope Understanding College Costs Understanding Career Pathways	Pathways to College	College visits, gaining course knowledge, building information on financial processes.
Autonomy, practical reason and knowledge, social relations and social networks College and Career Knowledge Overcoming Barriers Goal-setting	Leadership Through Service	Redeveloping an unused school room as a 21 st Century Learning space, identifying funding sources, project planning and implementation.
Social relations and social networks, hope, identity Networks Trustworthy Information Navigational capital/educational resilience	Mentoring	6 structured mentoring workshops per year with a mentor who has recently progressed from local school to college.

Research Question

The study 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 qualitative 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. The research question is:

How do social and academic support services for students, provided within the context of a school-university partnership, contribute to the development of student capabilities?

The sociological value of this study is that it provides insight into the processes by which student educational potential is impacted through their social and personal arrangements. It explores ways in which student agency can help in navigating structural obstacles and it contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of social stratification in schooling and how it effects institutional culture. The research continues an exploration of some of the key questions posed by Alkire (2002: 109), such as: (a) what are the enabling and inhibiting social conversion factors experienced by working-class students in developing capabilities for higher education progression? (b) which capabilities matter most in developing post-secondary education opportunities and choices? The research also adds to Alkire's focus by asking the questions: (c) how do programmes that aim to broaden the education opportunities of working-class students' impact upon their developing capability set? And (d) what is the value in using the capability approach as an alternative to the neoliberal focus on education outcomes? The capability approach is explained in detail in Chapter 3. While Alkire's (2002) work was developed to formulate different ways of considering and measuring economic development within developing world contexts, her study identifies systematic and participatory ways of identifying valued changes in participants' capability sets and these have informed subsequent approaches to operationalising the capability approach within different disciplines, such as sociology, as is evident in the work of Walker (2006, 2008, 2012), Hart (2011, 2012, 2013) and Watts et al (2006, 2008).

Drawing on the capability approach and theories of social and cultural reproduction, it explores how capabilities are developed as usable forms of capital through participation in ‘core practices’ focusing on ‘Pathways to College’, ‘Mentoring’ and ‘Leadership through Service’ in a range of schools linked to the Trinity Access 21-College for Every Student (TA21-CFES) project in Trinity College Dublin.

The key idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements should aim to expand people’s capabilities. Its relevance to education is an area of emerging interest for education researchers. Through an examination of social and cultural capital and the development of a capabilities list specific to working-class students, this study explores the processes that best support widening capability in students aspiring to progress to post-secondary education.

Structure of the Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 offers a theoretical framework for exploring the impact of the TA21-CFES project on the socio-cultural experiences of working-class students in second level schools linked to a higher education access programme. The framework draws on theories of social and cultural capital, social justice and critical pedagogy, as well as the capability approach. Chapter 3 explains the research design and methodology for exploring the student experience of this project, as it unfolds over time. Chapter 4 focuses on factors influencing the development of student autonomy, such as teamwork, planning, leadership and trusted networks. Chapter 5 examines the emergence of the capability of practical reason and college knowledge, facilitated by factual and experiential knowledge, an emerging college-going identity and enhanced confidence. Chapter 6 highlights some ways in which students are managing ‘identities in flux’ and are building a self-concept that is college-focused but capable of using ‘navigational capital’ to assess and circumvent obstacles and challenges. Chapter 7 explores the importance of the capabilities of social relations and hope in helping to build social capital for working-class students as they navigate the complex terrain of their institutional and community contexts. It gives some insight into the emerging capability of hope, which is supported by exposure to relatable role models, a sense of new possibilities, navigational capital to move beyond barriers, trusted relationships and

new knowledge from which to make informed choices. These chapters also explore some of the personal, institutional and community factors that may inhibit students from developing their full educational potential. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the key findings of the study and its theoretical, empirical and methodological contribution; presents a critical analysis of the research design, methodology and theoretical framework, and makes some recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: The Capability Approach and Access to Higher Education

This chapter presents the capability approach as a theoretical framework through which to explore the development of social and cultural capital related to higher education aspirations in second level students from working-class backgrounds. It begins by explaining the capability approach and defining its key terms. It then progresses to outline theories of justice as the background to the emergence of the capability approach. It draws a distinction between the capability approach and the predominantly neoliberal discourse, which foregrounds the role of education in creating more human capital over that of a rights-based approach that seeks to redress social injustice. In combination with other theories of social and cultural reproduction and educational change, it makes a case for the use of the capability approach in developing widening participation policy. It presents some examples of research using the capability approach in education. Finally, it provides a rationale for creating a capability list for working-class students aiming to progress to higher education and it proposes such a list in relation to this research.

The Capability Approach and Widening Participation

This research proposes that the capability approach provides a useful framework within which to consider widening participation policy and practice. The capability approach has been selected for this study as it enables an exploration of individual development through a justice-based framework, seeking to examine the impact on young people of the TA21-CFES project. Rather than consider the project outcomes after three years, it seeks to identify potential emerging capabilities, in the knowledge that not all of these capabilities will convert into functionings, due to inhibiting conversion factors in the young people's environment. We can then consider to what extent the social arrangements within this project inhibit or enable the young people's development. This is useful as a study as it provides an evaluative lens to consider the range of capabilities that emerged over a three-year period of working longitudinally with a group of young people in the TA21-CFES project.

The capability approach is a theoretical framework with two core normative claims. First, the claim that freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance and second,

that this freedom is to be understood in terms of individual capabilities, that is their real opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value (Robeyns 2016). An individual's capability represents her freedom or real opportunity set (Commin, Qizilbash and Alkire 2008). In recent times, the capability approach has been used to explore policy and practice in education, as an alternative framework to human capital theory, through which the process, purpose and impact of education can be evaluated (Unterhalter, Vaughan and Walker 2007; Hart 2012).

Developed by Amartya Sen (1992, 1999, 2005, 2009) and subsequently elaborated by Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2005, 2011), the key idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements should aim to expand people's capabilities, which is their freedom to promote or achieve functionings that are important to them. According to Sen (1999), there is greater equality in society when there is parity in people's capabilities to do or be what they consider valuable. A key concept in the approach is people's 'functionings': these are the 'beings' or 'doings' that are important to them; such as being able to access adequate food, accommodation, or having time to read. The capability to achieve a functioning depends on a range of personal and social factors that vary across geographies and contexts. Focusing on the individual's capability to achieve a functioning, rather than the function alone recognises the different circumstances of people and their varying preferences (Hart 2013). The capability approach has four central concepts (Alkire and Deneulin 2009; Hart 2009; Nussbaum 2000; 2006; Sen 1979; 1985; 1993; 1999; Wilson-Strydom 2012). These are:

1. Capabilities: the freedom an individual has to enjoy valuable functionings (opportunity freedom). Capabilities are the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for a person to achieve.
2. Functionings: beings or doings that an individual values and has reason to value (achieved outcomes). Functionings are the states and activities constitutive of a person's being. Examples of functionings can vary from elementary things, such as being healthy, having a good job, and being safe, to more complex states, such as being happy, having self-respect, and being calm. According to Nussbaum (2013: 24-25), a functioning is the active realisation of capabilities.
3. Agency: the ability of an individual to realise the goals that they value and have reason to value. Sen defines an agent as follows: 'Someone who acts and brings

about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well' (Sen 1999: 19).

4. Well-being: the appropriate focus for assessment of how well an individual is doing, defined by the links between material, mental and social well-being (Crocker and Robeyns 2009; Wilson-Strydom 2012). Robeyns (2008: 90) argues that regardless of whether we focus on structure or agency, individual well-being should be the 'ultimate unit of moral concern'.

Individuals differ in their capacity to convert capabilities into functionings and conversion factors, such as structural or social arrangements, influence their exercise of agency (Crocker and Robeyns 2010; Wilson-Strydom 2012). For Loots and Walker (2015), equality in this sense does not just mean equal opportunities but also the opportunities people have to convert their capabilities into functionings. Enabling or inhibiting personal, social and geographical conversion factors are ways of exploring the intersection of individual agency with structure and mechanisms by which students may develop 'navigational capital' or educational resilience to circumvent such challenges.

Wolff and de Shalit (2007) have added two additional important concepts to the capability approach: 'fertile functionings' and 'corrosive disadvantages'. Fertile functionings (or capabilities) refer to functionings (or capabilities) that may promote other functionings or capabilities, they are interwoven, one with the other. Similarly, corrosive disadvantages are those that can cluster together and create patterns of disadvantage, so that interventions should seek to identify not just what can be done to address the development of capabilities and their conversion over time into functionings, but also what interconnections exist between capabilities and functionings. These interconnections may make them more fertile or corrosive over time and interventions may seek to tackle corrosive interconnections (Wilson-Strydom 2012).

Nussbaum (2013) describes the capability approach as 'an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorising about basic social justice', the central question of which is 'what is each person able to do and to be?' (Nussbaum 2013: 18). For Nussbaum (2006), three capacities should be realized through education. First, the examined life, which she defines as a life that accepts no belief as authoritative simply

because it has been handed down by tradition. Nussbaum contends that we need Socratic teaching to fulfil the promise of democratic citizenship. Second, people need an ability to see themselves as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern. Third, narrative imagination, the ability to imagine what it might be like to walk in another's shoes. The narrative imagination is cultivated, above all, through literature and the arts. Nussbaum (2006) argues that education should have the goal of increasing the mind's freedom rather than diminishing it, as formal education may sometimes do.

The capability approach is applicable to children as it relates to future freedoms. For both Nussbaum and Sen, formal education is not enough, it is the quality of education that matters (Saito 2003). At the heart of the notion of a capability is a conception that a person can develop a reasoned understanding of valued beings and doings. This is a powerful argument for forms of education through which an individual can explore her own conception of what it is she has reason to value. Brighouse (2000: 65) argues that 'all children should have a realistic opportunity to become autonomous adults because autonomy enhances dramatically the ability of individuals to identify and live lives that are worth living.'

There are, however, acknowledged lacunae within the capability approach. It is described by Robeyns (2005) as 'underspecified'. It does not have a normative account of the distinction between personal and collective responsibility, a core aspect of many theories of justice (Saito 2003: 192). Neither, in Sen's formulation, does it specify which capabilities should be on a list. This debate on the use of lists in the capability approach is elaborated on in pp.37-45 below. There are issues too with the selection of educational capabilities in relation to children, where they may relate to future, rather than current, freedoms. Moreover, Nussbaum (2006) articulates the challenge of 'adapted preferences', which may impact on the range of choices and freedoms that working-class students can conceptualise. This challenge is explored in more detail in pp. 51-54 below and in Chapter 6.

Robeyns (2005), Walker (2006), Unterhalter (2003), Alkire (2010), Biggeri (2007) and Wilson-Strydom (2015a) have all taken up this challenge to further specify the capabilities that matter most in developing agency and autonomy for educational

opportunities and life choices. Robeyns (2006) suggests that the capability approach will often require the use of additional social theories and the selection of these can lead to quite divergent assessments. Alkire (2010) too observes that because of Sen's concept of assertive incompleteness, additional theories are required to complement the capability approach. Garratt (2011) argues in favour of widening capability in learning, to produce a more socially just pedagogy. He references Walker (2012), who argues that widening participation in the U.K. has been more closely linked to human capital development than to the notion of widening capability. Operationalising the capability approach is therefore specific to each circumstance and it is not a one-time thing. In Sen's formulation, the capability approach is deliberately underspecified to allow for democratic discourse that is context-specific in the formulation and defence of relevant capabilities. Robeyns (2005) proposes procedural criteria for the selection of capabilities. Biggeri (2007) and Alkire (2010) both combine Robeyns's steps with participatory methods to support children to identify capabilities most relevant to their well-being, while Walker (2006) and Wilson-Strydom (2016) have developed capability lists directly relevant to working-class students' progression to higher education.

Access to Higher Education and Social Justice

Access to higher education is a matter of social justice, in the Rawlsian sense, where the object of concern is 'the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages and disadvantages from social cooperation' (Rawls 1999: 6). This section outlines a range of social justice theories to establish the usefulness of the capability approach in examining social justice in higher education. In developed economies, where it is the norm to have moved from universal second level access to mass third level access to education, there is a growing tension in the aim to open public universities to all socio-economic groups. As Brennan and Naidoo (2008) observe, selective universities remain elitist institutions, where access is limited to a minority and graduates are granted a privileged status.

In her study of the transition of working-class students to a moderately selective South African university, Wilson-Strydom (2012) explores key theories of social justice to determine the usefulness of the capability approach in examining access to higher education by different SES groups. She begins with Rawls (1999), who in *A Theory of*

Justice creates a thought experiment called ‘the original position’, where the thinker is placed behind a ‘veil of ignorance’ in the sense that the individual has no knowledge of societal position, gender or ethnicity. Rawls identified two principles as the basis for a just society. The first is the liberty principle, which is the idea that each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties.

Rawls’s first principle ‘is that the distribution of income and opportunity should not be based on factors that are arbitrary from a moral point of view’ (Sandel 2010: 153). Rawls contends that our socio-economic position is largely the outcome of a ‘natural lottery’ and so it cannot be said to be just and therefore should not be the basis for distribution (Sandel 2010; Wilson-Strydom 2012).

The second principle is in two parts: fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle. The difference principle argues that inequalities are only just if they are of greatest benefit to the least advantaged groups in society (Rawls 1999). These groups are identified by assessing their holdings of primary goods that are necessary to pursuing the good life (Rawls 1999). In a perfectly just society, primary goods would be equally distributed.

Sen (1979) and Nussbaum (2000) both argue against this focus on primary goods, on the basis that it does not take enough account of the differences between individuals in respect of making use of the resources in their lives. Rather than striving for a perfectly just system, Sen advocates that we act intentionally to reduce injustices in our institutional contexts. Young (2001: 6) argues that assessments of inequality should take place at the group rather than individual level, as ‘groups are positioned by social structures that constrain and enable individuals in ways largely beyond their individual control.’ Hart (2011: 2) refutes Young’s suggestion because while helpful in indicating patterns of inequality, it does not adequately detail the nature of individual disadvantages. As Hart remarks ‘we cannot assume that all first-generation students for example are grappling with the same transition issues, although we know that there will be areas of commonality’.

Similar charges are levelled at Nancy Fraser (1996: 31), who proposes parity of participation as the grounds for equality, which would permit all adult members of

society to interact with one another as peers, requiring a levelling of how resources are distributed and 'ensure(s) equal opportunity for achieving social esteem'. Leibowitz (2009) critiques Fraser because she discounts the role of individual agency in overcoming barriers to education progression, privileging structure to such an extent as to be somewhat deterministic. Higher education admissions practices aimed at students in working-class groups offer an example of where neither Young (2001) nor Fraser's (1996) approach to distributive justice would realise greater gains for the most disadvantaged. These systems can use a combination of 'proxies' for educational disadvantage, such as postal code, school attainment and school type, which may qualify students within these 'groups' for special consideration in admissions. However, the outcome may be that the more advantaged students within these broad groups are those who are most likely to be put forward by their teachers and to have the confidence to apply for special consideration in admissions. An admissions and outreach approach that was designed to consider and assess the applicant's individual socio-economic circumstances would be more effective in realising distributive justice, notwithstanding the fact that the capability approach is about more than distributive justice.

While some of this is the subject of structuralist accounts of educational value, it does not take account of individual experiences, values and differences within groups. It is this concern with human diversity within unjust structures that the capability approach attempts to grasp. Unterhalter et al. (2007) suggest that post-structuralist work lacks an overarching normative framework that can assist an evaluative study to investigate issues of distribution, justice and equality. They suggest that all mainstream approaches fail to deal with questions of rights, needs and how one might develop a more complex idea of disadvantage in education settings. The capability approach connects individual biographies and social arrangements by focusing on equality in the capability to convert resources into functionings. Instead of looking at similar levels of inputs, we can question the extent of freedom people have to participate in education and the extent to which there is equality in this freedom (Unterhalter et al. 2007).

The capability approach has also been criticised on the grounds of excessive individualism. These criticisms focus on the claim that any theory should regard individuals as agents embedded within their social environment and not as atomised individuals (Gore 1997; Evans 2002; Deneulin and Stewart 2002; Stewart 2005).

Robeyn's (2017) defends it against this claim by distinguishing between ethical and ontological individualism. Ethical individualism proposes that individuals are the only units of ultimate moral concern, in that when we assess different contexts, our interest is in the effects of those states on individuals. Ontological individualism, on the other hand, claims that all social phenomena are to be explained in terms of individuals and their properties (Bhargava 1992: 19). In this view, Robeyn's suggests, society is built up from individuals only and it is therefore nothing other than the sum of individuals and their properties (2017: 185). A commitment to ethical individualism is not incompatible with an ontology recognising connections between people and their social embeddedness.

Francis Stewart (2005) argues that the capability approach should focus more on groups, which she defines as the average of the individual capabilities of all the individuals in a selected group. She suggests this focus is essential to understand sources of group conflict, which contribute towards understanding of wider processes affecting people's lives, such as violent conflict. There is already a large body of literature focusing on comparing the capabilities of one group to another (Kynch and Sen 1983; Nussbaum 2000; Robeyns 2003, 2006a). Alkire (2002), Nussbaum (2000), Iversen (2003) and Robeyns (2003a) resist the position that people are rational actors and will resist social and moral pressure stemming from groups and pay much more attention to the influence of social norms and other group-based processes on choice and well-being (Robeyns 2017). Robeyns therefore concludes there is no reason why the capability approach would not be able to take the normative importance of groups into account but recommends that this is a theoretical choice made when engaging with her modular conceptualisation of the approach. Robeyns (2017) concedes, however, that many capability scholars focus on measuring and documenting inequalities, rather than in explaining them, or questioning how they are sustained and might be decreased.

Challenges to the capability approach are also levelled by those who argue it should pay more attention to collective features, such as social structures, social norms and institutions (Robeyns 2017). However, Robeyns disputes this on the grounds that the approach recognises the social, environmental and personal conversion factors which influence the conversion of capabilities into functionings. It also accounts for social structures by distinguishing between capabilities and functionings, which requires an act of choice. The choices made are informed by structures and constraints operating on

those choices, and depend in large part on the degree of agency of the individual within their specific context. Robyens (2017) concedes that there may be uses or accounts of the capability approach that do not pay sufficient attention to social structures or group dynamics but it is not a valid critique against the capability approach in general.

Criticisms of the capability approach in the domain of political philosophy are usually linked to different views of justice. The first issue concerns the various theories of justice that have been proposed. For Rawls, the 'space' in which equality is to be assessed is primary goods. In the capability approach, Sen focuses on the 'difference principle' in Rawls (1971) theory of justice. Sen is mainly preoccupied with the fact that, when using the maximin criterion, one only takes account of the primary goods themselves, and not of how they affect people. Martins (2012) explains that the key difference between Rawls and Sen is that while Rawls adopts a prescriptive approach to justice, which focuses on what is likely to happen given the circumstances, Sen adopts a descriptive approach, identifying what should happen for social justice to be realised. Nevertheless, Sen considers the capability approach as an extension of Rawls' concern with primary goods, since it shifts attention from goods to what goods do to human beings (Sen 1982: 368).

In summary, Sen suggests that theories of justice can be seen as a *space* to which a criterion is applied, he proposes the space of capabilities as the appropriate space, or focal variable, for assessing equality. Competing approaches within political philosophy and welfare economics propose *other spaces*, such as primary goods or resources, as the focal variable. This is the primary difference between this and other paradigms for considering human development. Martins (2012: 3) explains that Sen's (1982; 1999) argument is that equality should be assessed considering not only achieved functionings, but rather the potential to achieve. This means it should be evaluated within the space of potential functionings, which he and Nussbaum (1993) describe as capabilities. The central concern of the capability approach is a focus on describing the space in which equality is to be assessed. In this study, identifying the space in which the potential to achieve is evaluated is a critical departure from more instrumental approaches to educational development and outcomes. The Irish Leaving Certificate uses the points system to evaluate the educational outcomes for all students, regardless of the context in which their points are achieved. While all students are treated the same in this system, using the capability approach highlights the fact that they are not treated equally. Students

internalise the message that the Leaving Certificate points system is a fair and transparent metric of ability but there is no contextualisation of performance with individual potential and the circumstances in which outcomes are achieved. If the focal variable moves to assessing student capabilities, then there is scope to consider the capabilities of individuals and the extent to which they are enabled or inhibited in developing their capabilities.

Pogge (2002: 54) meanwhile juxtaposes a social point of view as either horizontal or vertical. He remarks, 'We can think of humankind as displaying a wonderful natural diversity rather than... a natural hierarchy of persons more or less able.' He observes that the resourcist approach is supported by this conception of inequality as horizontal, whereas the capability approach requires that natural inequality be conceived as vertical. Taking the example of income tax within a country, a horizontal view of equality, for instance, implies that we give the same treatment to people in an identical situation (for example, two people earning the same amount should pay identical income tax). This view would preclude discrimination on grounds of gender, race or different types of work. A vertical view of equality would focus on redistributing income within society, implying that those with higher incomes should pay more tax.

In this respect, Pogge argues, that when a capability theorist asserts that institutional schemes should be biased in favour of some persons on account of their natural endowments, she is characterising these endowments as deficient and inferior in respect of the shared public criterion of social justice. Indeed, Pogge (2002: 55) argues that this defence of the right of individuals to have access to the full range of valuable human functionings is destructive of any social conception of human natural diversity as horizontal and in this respect, it constitutes a social loss. Pogge (2002: 61) describes the capability approach thus:

A metric of advantage that governs the compensatory fine-tuning of the distribution of resources to take account of persons vertically diverse capacities to convert resources into valuable functionings. This involves grading all citizens for their natural aptitudes toward each of the capabilities on the list, determining their specific deficits, and ensuring that these deficits are duly neutralized through suitable compensatory benefits.

This research challenges Pogge's contention that the capability approach proposes a vertical conception of human capabilities, which could reduce our appreciation of 'wonderful human diversity' and argues instead that the capability approach endeavours to safeguard our conception of individual difference and diversity within unjust structures, recognising that some of what Pogge may suggest is simply an aspect of 'human diversity' can also place individuals at a marked disadvantage when attempting to fully participate in society.

Clark (2017) rehearses a range of other objections to the capability approach. Beitz (1986) criticizes its usefulness because it makes inter-personal comparisons of well-being in the context of potential disagreements about the valuation of capabilities and the relative weights to be assigned to these capabilities. Sen, however, asserts that the intersections of different people's rankings are typically quite large. He also proposes the use of dominance ranking and the intersection approach for incomplete orderings (Sen 1993; 1995). Clark also raises concerns that the informational requirements of the capability approach can be extremely high (Alkire 2002: 181-93; Sen 1994).

Nussbaum's work is also the subject of criticism particularly in relation to the way in which her list is compiled. Nussbaum (2000, 2003, 2006) proposes a list of capabilities which, she argues, should be enshrined in each country's constitution as being the moral entitlements of every person. These are: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment (Nussbaum 2006: 76–78).

Further criticisms have focused on notions of agency and personhood (Clark 2017), calling for more distinction between internal powers and skills and actual opportunities or outcomes (Nussbaum 1988; Crocker 1995; Qizilbash 1996; Gasper 1997; 2002). Nussbaum (2000: 20-22), for instance, distinguishes between basic, internal and combined capabilities. Basic capabilities are the innate equipment of individuals necessary for developing more advanced capabilities. Many of these are transformed into internal capabilities and become developed states of the person. Combined capabilities

are internal capabilities combined with suitable external conditions for the exercise of the function.

Nussbaum (2000: 84) uses the term ‘basic capabilities’ to refer to “the innate equipment of individuals that is necessary for developing the more advanced capabilities”, such as the capability of speech and language, which is present in a new-born but needs to be fostered. Nussbaum (2000) makes a distinction between combined capabilities which are the various opportunities available to a person and internal capabilities which are fluid and dynamic characteristics of a person. Internal capabilities are a type of personal power needed to be able to function, given supportive external and social conditions (Crocker 1995). As Wilson-Strydom (2012) highlights, the concept of internal capabilities captures the notion of skills but personal powers imply more than skills. Developing skills rather than capabilities places too little emphasis on the integration with social, economic, familial and political environments that define what skills can be developed and by whom. This distinction is particularly important in considering higher education, where preparedness requires more than academic skills and where opportunities to develop. While Nussbaum asserts that it is open to revision, its core categories have not changed between 1990 and 2005. Clark suggests that no categories have been added or deleted over that time. Moreover, almost all of Nussbaum’s original capabilities are derived from the writings of Aristotle. Some critics have suggested that more participatory approaches to developing capability lists should be employed (Stewart 2001; Clark 2002). However, perhaps Nussbaum’s list may be best regarded as a hypothesis about what would be acceptable starting points for discussion, or a ‘primer’ within development contexts, rather than a prescriptive template.

Finally, Clark cites critics who have suggested that Sen does not pay adequate attention to the means to freedom (Qizilbash 1996), others have underscored the links between human capital and capabilities (Streeten 1984; 2000; Haq 1995; Bebbington 1999). Clark suggests that while both these approaches put humanity at the centre of attention, the narrower view of the human capital approach fits into the more inclusive perspective of human capability, which takes note of the direct relevance of human capabilities for well-being and their indirect role through facilitating social change and promoting economic activity (Sen 1997: 1959-1960; 1999: 292-297). Sen’s more recent iterations of the capability approach considers five broad categories of instrumental freedoms: political

freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security, which contribute to the expansion of human capabilities (Sen 1999).

This section has provided an overview of some of the criticisms of the capability approach and positioned this study within the context of some of those arguments. However, it is beyond the scope of the study to provide a detailed analysis of these arguments. Essentially, the capability approach proposes that the overriding objective of development is an expansion of human capabilities rather than economic growth, on the grounds that growth may not always be sufficient to guarantee development. This study argues that this focus on education as a vehicle for the expansion of human capabilities will better serve the objective of preparing working-class students for progression to a post-secondary choice that is of value to them, and it is therefore worth operationalising. This is important to understanding how working-class students develop higher education aspirations, as it provides scope to explore how their potential interacts with enabling and inhibiting conversion factors to develop capabilities and to examine whether these convert into functionings. It is a focus on pursuing what Sen (2006) describes as the practical realities of injustice, rather than striving for a perfectly just system, that is the subject of this research, as it endeavours to explore the impact of the development of 'actionable knowledge' on the capability set of working-class students and their aspirations for post-secondary education (Argyris 1993). The following section will juxtapose the capability approach with the predominant, neoliberal discourse which foregrounds the role of education in producing more human capital for enhanced economic productivity.

Human Capital Theory, the Capability Approach and Widening Participation

Human capital theory is relevant to higher education access as it posits that by enabling more people to access higher education and to achieve post-secondary qualifications, we will generate a greater economic contribution and therefore create more opportunities for all. Indeed, the human capital argument was the vehicle used in the 1960s to expand access to second level education in Ireland and over the following few decades, the investment in education that the human capital argument precipitated yielded significant growth in those progressing to higher education, from 20% in the 1980s to over 66% at present (O'Connor 2014; Higher Education Authority 2015, Clancy 2015). However,

reports on higher education participation (Clancy and Wall 2000; O'Connell, Clancy and McCoy 2006) demonstrated that most of the advantages of progression to higher education were accruing to those in higher socio-economic groups and this pattern of access by socio-economic groups had become entrenched.

Human capital theory has a greater focus on the instrumental value of education. The implications of this for widening participation practice are that national education policy may prioritise specific 'capital' domains which are relevant to the climate in which the programme is developed, for example some programmes may be aimed at leading to productive engagement in areas of the economy currently showing skills deficits. Therefore, while the human capital argument was historically used to good effect in Ireland to encourage increased investment in education, it has implications for policy development. As Sen (1997: 1959) points out, the benefits of education exceed its role in commodity production, 'The role of human qualities in promoting and sustaining economic growth tells us nothing about why economic growth is sought in the first place'. Melanie Walker (2006), in the South African and U.K. contexts, has written extensively on the limitations of a human capital approach to education. She argues that it assumes labour markets are efficient at placing people in work suitable to their skills and that opportunities are shared equally. However, Ball et al.'s (2000) study of young people's education choices in London did not find evidence that they were 'rational calculators' in relation to their education and career planning and human capital theory also overlooks the fact that often people with the same amounts of human capital face unequal employment opportunities in coveted labour market roles. Walker (2012) remarks that developing widening access to higher education as primarily useful in building human capital is a persuasive and verifiable, market-aligned model, but it offers an impoverished model for education as it does not prioritise well-being, human agency or the transformative potential of education. She concludes that the human capital model is not sufficiently expansive to address social justice, given that what is really at stake in the model is economic growth.

Taking a capability approach, the dimension for measuring equality would be each person's capabilities. Walker (2012) advocates that we ask the question 'What is each person able to be and to do?' rather than 'What resources do they have?' Policy, Sen argues, should not just aim to increase income and educational qualifications but to

increase access to the resources that enable these freedoms (Sen 1997). From this perspective, for instance, it may be that some students within schools with low progression rates do not choose higher education because they are ‘low achievers’ or have ‘low aspirations’ but instead they have ‘different aspirations’ – the freedom to choose higher education must include the freedom to reject it (Watts 2006).

Walker (2012: 390) juxtaposes an education system designed with human capital needs at its heart with one that focuses on developing human capabilities. She observes,

Most importantly, the language used to talk about education would be different – expansive rather than reductive, political rather than technical, human well-being led rather than market-led, transformative rather than adaptive. Education would pay attention to the conditions to engage in and succeed in education; being able to participate in community, social and political life as an equal among others.... Education would work to secure capabilities to all students.

Walker explores whether the capability approach can help us to advance policy that will yield economic progress and good lives for all, similar terrain to studies recently undertaken by Walker et al. 2009; Tikly and Barrett 2011; Wang 2011; Wilson-Strydom 2012. She argues that in privileging economic growth in how we consider progress, we fail to explore what it means to live a fully human dignified life and how education can contribute to the realisation of quality of life for all. This matters, because unless we are clear about our policy objectives in education, we are not clear about what we value in society and what we wish to maximise (Basu 2006). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) suggest that these different normative frameworks give rise to different education policies, which are configured by values and histories. Chiappero-Martinetti and Sabadash (2010), however, suggest that the capability approach can be complementary theoretically and empirically to policy rhetoric that focuses on widening participation as a vehicle for increasing human capital, as it can offer the prospect that we move beyond ‘estimating the market determinants and gains from education to something which more comprehensively embraces plural dimensions of people’s lives to better understand the role education plays’ (Walker 2012: 387).

Unterhalter et al. (2007) explain that the capability approach was a response to the limitations of assessments that measure only desire satisfaction, resources or outcomes. In education, most standard evaluation tools are based on what people say they want from schooling. Focusing on capabilities requires us to evaluate not just satisfaction with individual learning outcomes but to question the range of real educational choices that achieve a valued educational functioning. The capability approach invites a range of more searching questions about equality than just a focus on desire satisfaction. It is a challenge not just to evaluate resources and inputs but to consider whether learners are able to convert resources into capabilities and thereafter potentially into functionings.

This section has contrasted a human capital approach to widening participation, which is currently to the forefront in neoliberal discourse on education, with a human capability approach, to draw some distinctions between the two and to specify how policy might be different if the starting point were a consideration of each person's capabilities and the opportunities they have for converting these into functionings. The next section continues this exploration by making a case for the transformational effect of education in precipitating individual change, which in turn has the potential to effect social change.

Education as 'the Practice of Freedom' and the Capability Approach

This section explores widening participation with reference to theories of social and cultural reproduction, theories of critical pedagogy and the capability approach. Structuralism is one of the principal theoretical models proposing to explain social class inequalities in education. There are two main traditions within the paradigm, Marxism and Functionalism. According to Althusser (1972), Bowles and Gintis (1976), for example, the role of education in reproducing class inequality is inevitable. Similarly, Functionalists also interpret class outcomes in education in a deterministic manner (Lynch and O'Riordain 1998; Davis and Moore 1945; Parsons 1961, Dreeben 1968).

Willis (1977) and McRobbie (1978) have criticised structuralism from a neo-Marxist perspective, suggesting that this kind of economic determinism can be self-fulfilling by presenting social class outcomes as inevitable. Resistance theorists draw on the work of Paulo Freire (1972) to challenge these deterministic models through deploying critical pedagogy, radical democracy and transformative education (Lynch and O'Riordain

1998; Giroux 1983, 1992, McLaren 1995). Lynch and O’Riordain (1998) suggest that this work identifies spaces to challenge social relations and to precipitate change. However, resistance theorists can assume a level of political and social interest in change on the part of social actors that may not be the case and Lynch and O’Riordain (1998) suggest that much of the research in this area is written about the working-class rather than with them.

Drawing on a liberal political perspective and a functionalist sociological tradition, equality theorists have, according to Lynch and O’Riordain (1998) dominated the discussion on social class and education (Karabel and Halsey, 1977; Hurn, 1978; Trent et al, 1985; Blackledge and Hunt, 1985; Arnot and Barton, 1992; Torres and Rivera, 1994; Pink & Noblit, 1995). The solution is defined as the promotion of greater equality of opportunity to move upwards in a stratified society. Equality is measured through proportionate representation of the target group at different stages of education. This is an explicit acknowledgement of stratification.

Lynch and O’Riordain (1998: 451) argue that rational action and resistance theorists fail to engage with the structure/agency debate in the sense that structures are themselves maintained by dynamic actors, with agents shaping structures from within:

The public naming and challenging of those collective bodies which are powerful partners in education, and which thereby play a key role in the perpetuation or reduction of educational inequality is an important procedure for the mobilisation of resistance in a small society where the agents are visible and known. Ireland is a relatively small country with a highly centralised decision-making system.

This research draws on the work of resistance theorists and theories of social and cultural reproduction, in combination with the capability approach, to identify spaces within deterministic structures that may be sites of change. It aligns too with Lynch’s (1998) point that the structures created by powerful bodies within education are themselves shaped by dynamic actors and may be open to change. Bourdieu’s (1984) paradigm of cultural reproduction, the dominant explanation for inequalities in social mobility (Donnelly and Evans 2016), highlights habitus and cultural capital as central to these barriers. Habitus is ‘the practical mastery which people possess of their situations’ and cultural capital is the skills, tastes, material belongings, and credentials, acquired through

being part of a particular social class. According to Bourdieu (1986), each class has a different habitus, which informs their values, practices and beliefs. He argues that we have internalized embodied social structures which function below the level of consciousness and impose limits on what we feel we can and cannot do. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977: 495) argue that "the educational norms of those social classes capable of imposing the criteria of evaluation which are the most favorable to their children" are the ones that prevail and work to exclude the minority classes from participating in higher education. Therefore, cultural capital reinforces social inequalities by valuing the cultural capital of the dominant social classes above the lower SES groups. Research has shown that when students lack access to forms of social and cultural capital that are valued by the dominant social classes then educational outcomes are limited (Reay et al. 2005; 2008; 2009; Higher Education Funding Council of England 2015).

However, this focus on social and cultural capital 'deficits' of working-class students has informed the development of widening participation practice, as activities can be designed to build their social and cultural capital to facilitate effective 'transition' to the habitus of the dominant culture. Fox (2016) contends that framing interventions in this way implies a lack of legitimacy and recognition accorded to those social and cultural assets of working-class groups. Therefore, while widening participation programmes may aim to build social and cultural capital to improve higher education progression, the deficit discourse places the locus of responsibility for progression with the individual, neglecting to challenge the role of structure in reproducing social inequalities.

The capability approach provides an alternative framework to this deficit model of widening participation under which individual educational progress can be considered. In widening participation practice, this would reconfigure the focus from an outcome driven approach, based on academic attainment and progression within the existing system, toward an empowering and critical engagement by each student in how future educational options relate to what they value and what they have come to believe they can choose to be or to do. Exploring the capability set that working-class young adults need in order to progress to post-secondary education from this perspective allows us to explore more humanly rich goals for development through education (Walker 2012). In this context, 'educational capabilities' refer to working-class students being empowered and informed to choose an educational path that they value.

The literature on the capability approach in education has expanded significantly in recent years. In combination with theories of social and cultural reproduction and theories of critical pedagogy, education researchers have operationalized the capability approach as a useful framework for understanding the complexities of ‘meaningful’ access to university, and argued that it should be used to consider how education impacts on human development (Biggeri 2007; Glassman and Patton 2014; Unterhalter 2003; Walker and Unterhalter 2007; Walker 2006; Wilson-Strydom 2012; 2015a; 2016;). Unterhalter (2003) has applied the approach to gender justice in education, while Walker and Unterhalter (2007) examined education both theoretically and empirically, considering education and skills, gender and adult education. Walker (2006) explored higher education and widening participation for working-class students in the U.K. Wilson-Strydom (2012) examined access to university for students from diverse schools in South Africa and tracked students through their first year of study. Biggeri (2007) found that education as a capability was highly valued and unequal social structures, which restrict access to education for some groups, can impact on future well-being and have serious societal repercussions. Watts and Bridges (2006) contend that for some young people the challenge of pursuing higher education lies both in the financial implications and in the lack of available social and cultural capital within their community; they assert that the capability approach provides an alternative lens through which to consider long standing theories of social and cultural capital formation. All have concluded that the capability approach provides a useful normative framework to consider how education impacts on human development.

This research proposes that an explicit consideration of widening participation from a capabilities perspective allows for consideration of differences in opportunity to convert capabilities into functionings. For example, a student in one of the TA21-CFES project schools who is expected to progress to higher education may be given the opportunity for campus visits and summer schools at senior cycle level. She may have a strong academic track record and ambitions to progress. However, she may not have support at home and may be working to contribute to the domestic economy, thereby potentially compromising her attainment. While her ambition has been nurtured by the widening participation programmes and her attainment is strong, she will be less likely to convert her capabilities into functionings in a higher education setting because of demands on

her time at home. This student may adapt her preferences to a choice that will enable her to do both, to stay close to home and contribute, as well as further her education despite her ability and promises of future earnings potential.

The capability approach refocuses our evaluation of equality from outcome to opportunity by foregrounding this capability to be educated. Watts (2012) highlights the importance of the repositioning; he states that Bourdieusian analyses normally engage with the application and acceptance rates to higher education and emphasise the scale of cultural capital required of students to progress, whereas the capability approach allows for the possibility that the freedom to make choices includes the freedom to reject what is viewed as the higher or better option, measured by greater potential for individual economic productivity. Watts (2012) nevertheless acknowledges that students from working-class communities may be bounded by the limitations imparted by their social, academic and cultural capital, which means that even students who qualify for entry into higher education may not have the opportunity to make informed and reflective choices about what to do with their human capital. They adapt their preferences, based on their environment, so that they do not consider certain higher education institutions as within their reach (Watts 2012). Sen (1992) says that individuals often adapt their preferences to make it easier to live in deprived conditions and Nussbaum argues that ‘habit, fear, low expectations and unjust background conditions deform people’s choices and even their wishes for their own lives’ (Nussbaum 2005: 114) therefore young people from working-class communities adapt their preferences to suit their environment and develop capabilities that are ‘within reach’ (Watts 2012). Institutional culture is critical to influencing preference formation, as Sen observes, because ‘opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function’ (1999: 142). Similarly, Nussbaum (2002: 20) argues that institutions have,

Both cognitive and causal power that individuals do not have, powers that are pertinent to the allocation of responsibility [and it therefore] seems plausible that such facts give us a further reason to think of the responsibilities for promoting human capabilities as institutional.

As Unterhalter and Walker (2007) note, education is not an uncomplicated good and the formation of identity takes place within dominant norms and values, as well as struggles

relating to power, history and language. These histories are brought to bear in the educational environment, and as Watts (2007) discovered, can cause individuals to adapt their preferences to prevent a discontinuity with their life experience thus far. The educational environment is therefore not a neutral one and it is important to consider how the resources available to individuals in different educational contexts might best facilitate the development of substantive freedoms to convert the available resources into functionings. As Watts, Comim and Ridley (2008: 3) remark, ‘without those freedoms, education may become part of the adaptive preference problem.’ They conclude that adaptive preferences may be positive when they are based on a recognition of individual limitations but negative when ‘flourishing is prevented by acceptance and resignation as forms of living below standards of humanity.’

The capability approach is critiqued because it is excessively individualised and fundamental change will not be realised without more recognition of the impact of structures on individual agency and group behaviour. Walker (2012) defends the capability approach in this structure/agency conflict, aligning it educationally with the participatory, progressive educational theory of John Dewey (1916-2009), who proposed that education is the only sure method of social reconstruction, as it creates social change by mediating a process of sharing in social consciousness and the adjustment of individual activity based on this consciousness. Therefore, the expansion of capabilities to choose lives of value creates the possibility of reform. This echoes Paulo Freire’s (1972) view of education as ‘the practice of freedom’, empowering students to develop a critical view of themselves in society (Walker 2012).

Similarly, Glassman and Patton (2014) argue that the theories of Dewey and Freire offer processes through which human capabilities can be expanded. Dewey’s approach stresses democratic values and the ability of individuals to stretch towards new possibilities. Freire underscores the importance of praxis, a cycle of everyday action, reflection and re-creation of action that leads to productive changes in individual lives. Glassman (2011) contends that Sen, Dewey and Freire together offer a way of understanding education which recognises that individual needs and aspirations can be lost in the pursuit of better aggregate test scores and enhancing our human capital. Glassman and Patton (2014) identify several connecting points across the three theoretical approaches of Sen, Dewey and Freire. First, each framework recognises the importance of information to

expanding freedom of choice in everyday living. Second, access to information is not linked to any specific social directorate. Third, new information can help to develop new capabilities and fourth, the use of such information as ‘actionable knowledge’ to make free and productive choices in life. Together, they offer the possibility of overcoming the ‘poverty of information’ (Glassman and Patton 2014).

Glassman and Patton (2014) propose that the capability approach is an inductive approach to establishing individual well-being, so the construction of a more democratic pedagogy advocated by Dewey will support the development of a more democratic, engaged citizenry. Freire (1970) suggests that marginalised populations internalise the social inequalities of the oppressors and that limited information can serve as a tool in maintaining a culture of silence. Sen (1999) offers concrete examples where people from working-class groups complain less about ill health and adapt to see their circumstances as a reflection of their true capabilities (Glassman and Patton 2014).

Dewey, Freire and Sen each suggest ways in which oppressed populations can escape this fate by challenging socially constructed knowledge systems. Freire identifies praxis (action-reflection-action) as a critical component in helping individuals understand what they are doing and why they are doing it (Freire 1970). As Walker puts it ‘education is something students do, rather than something that is done to them’ (Walker 2012: 390). Glassman and Patton (2014) posit that to integrate these ideas into educational practice requires access to new information to develop the capability to use the information as actionable knowledge to make critical choices. This requires self-efficacy to transcend the previous boundaries. They conclude (2014: 1361):

Community does not determine development, it enables capabilities. This idea, we believe, captures a critical component of Sen, Dewey, and Freire’s thought: development is continuous and based both in agency and the ongoing freedom to use that agency in pursuit of choice.

By taking a qualitative longitudinal approach with individuals in the four project schools, this research is exploring the iterative process of ‘actionable knowledge’ in students, and how this affects their choice-making as it relates to post-secondary educational pathways. In each of the three years of the study, the students are engaged in action across a range

of domains, they are then engaged in a reflective process through interviews and focus groups, where their observations from the previous year are explored in relation to their present reality. They use this experience and their newly formed knowledge as the basis for ‘action’ in the following year. Taking this human capability perspective to students’ development of higher education aspirations articulates a way of considering the relationship between goals and fields of action, where ‘fields’ provide a way of viewing the types of games people engage in as they live in communities and participate in education (St John 2013). Nussbaum relates capabilities to fields of action but St John contends ‘there is a greater need to focus on fields of action. . . in order to build a better understanding of the process of moving towards capabilities as goals.’ (St John 2013: 190; Nussbaum 2001). Therefore, in addition to recognizing human capabilities as goals, we need to be cognizant of how capabilities develop as usable forms of capital through engagement in social, political and economic systems.

This section began by outlining theories of social and cultural reproduction as they related to widening participation in education and some ways in which these theories have been appropriated to endorse a ‘deficit’ approach to the development of widening participation programmes, where it is framed as something that is ‘done to’ students, rather than something that they themselves as autonomous individuals can be empowered to navigate. It proceeds to argue that the capability approach provides a framework through which to reconfigure an outcome driven approach to widening participation to a critical, empowering engagement by each student in their future educational trajectory, using additional critical and progressive theorists, like Freire and Dewey. It provides scope to explore how students might adapt their preferences because of circumstances and that this might therefore be explicitly acknowledged in programme design, so that it is more successfully mitigated. While there are acknowledged limitations in using an ‘underspecified’ approach to exploring widening participation in education, there are also a range of relevant examples available in the literature. These studies point towards the significant potential of the capability approach, in combination with other theories, to impact on how we view the development of policy and practice in widening participation and to take it more concretely in the direction of a rights-based, empowering and transformational approach, where education, as a vehicle for greater choice, freedom and agency, arguably belongs. The following sections provide an account of how the capability approach has been operationalised in relation to children, education and

widening participation and how existing approaches in the literature have been adapted for this research.

Children and the Capability Approach

Biggeri and Santi (2012: 374) discuss the relevance of the capability approach in considering the development of children, contending that considering educational development as demonstrated by outcomes is a limited metric of student success. Instead, they propose we need systems to capture the “expansion of student, group and community capabilities defined in terms of potentialities and choice opportunities in which achievements are employed.”

Biggeri and Santi (2012) raise two aspects of the capability approach and children which are discussed in the literature. These are the dynamic nature of capability development, introduced by Ballet et al (2011) and the idea of capable agents, elaborated on by Bonvin and Galster 2010; Andresen et al 2011; Biggeri et al 2011a; Nussbaum 2011. The evolution of children’s capabilities is strongly interdependent on individual and social conversion factors which act through the education system and their parents/guardians. These factors may impact on the ways in which children in different circumstances can convert resources, or commodities into capabilities and subsequently into functionings (378). Because children have a more limited locus of control on institutional factors, the degree of their individual autonomy is critical. Indeed, Ballet et al (2011) suggest that the process by which children make choices is more important than the choices themselves. It is important therefore that children have the opportunity to learn but also to have voice in the learning process and a role in determining choice-guiding rules. This enables children in more constrained environments to have critical agency in shaping the rules that guide their own learning experiences. This idea is taken up by Hart (2010) in discussing aspiration, when she proposes that the capability to aspire is contingent on an exploration of the process behind aspirations. Having multiple opportunities is useful but it is essential that young people are engaged in a reasoned process of choice making and consideration of their aspirations in order to actively develop themselves as capable agents (Biggeri et al 2011b). Biggeri (2011b) argues that fostering this proactive behaviour in children, where they are engaged in decision-making about themselves and the institutions of which they are a part, is central to evolving their capabilities.

Brighouse (2000), for instance, distinguishes between autonomy-facilitating education and autonomy-promoting education, where the former aims not just at promoting the passing on of instrumental knowledge to make better employment choices as adults but encourages the development of a capacity to evaluate choices.

The relative importance of certain capabilities varies according to age, for instance autonomy and mobility are more important as they emerge into young adulthood. This underscores the importance of not seeing children as homogenous in terms of age, ethnicity, social class and gender. Their development is heavily path-dependant on adults and institutions in their lives and their capabilities will not all develop at the same rate or at the same time.

The implications of children's capability development in the realm of education are significant. They point towards the fundamental importance of moving beyond instrumental education and foregrounding instead life skills such as autonomy, cooperation, teamwork and critical evaluation (Unterhalter and Brighouse 2003; Walker and Unterhalter 2007).

Capability development is arguably of most importance in children, as it provides the foundation of an individual's development (Biggeri et al 2011). We cannot, however, view children as miniature adults, as they are rarely in a position of control in the institutions, whether societal or familial, of which they are a part. Indeed, Biggeri et al (2011) notes that children often suffer lifelong capability failure within adult-crafted institutional contexts.

Biggeri et al (2011) propose that a step towards avoiding capability failure in children is to regard them as active agents in capability development. Using the example of education, current metrics focus closely on achieved outcomes (literacy, numeracy), rather than the process aspects of human development. It is therefore essential to find ways in which children can collaborate in describing their developmental experiences and the factors that enable or inhibit their capabilities as they mature and how these factors change over time and maturity. It follows that we should consider how best to engage children in co-construction of capability lists and in participatory operationalising of the CA to ensure that we have made efforts to equalise power imbalances and to cultivate their agency.

Operationalising the Capability Approach

In order to understand the complexities of how students adapt their preferences and develop their perception of what is valuable, education researchers have operationalized the capability approach and developed lists of capabilities that are considered important within education. This section provides an overview of some of these studies.

According to Walker (2008a) supporting the continued development of students' agency, including the freedom to decide and 'the power to act and be effective' (Crocker and Robeyns 2009: 75; Wilson-Strydom 2012; 2016) is essential for education progression. Similarly Robeyns (2003) states that autonomy is important in education as it relates to the students' capacity to make informed choices, including decisions regarding planning a life after school, having space for reflection, independence, and empowerment. Wilson-Strydom (2016) explores this in detail and suggests the distinction between being able to act and being effective is particularly important in the context of education, as it functions to build skills and capacity.

This study adapts a 'top-down and bottom-up' approach to developing a capability list for working-class student progression to post-secondary education (Wilson-Strydom 2016). It proposes an ideal-theoretical list (Walker 2006), which combines the literature on access, widening participation and education policy with the body of research on using the capability approach in education (top-down). Wilson-Strydom (2015a) tests this approach as a way of avoiding the challenge of adaptive preferences that students may have developed due to their school and home environment and 'peer effect', while ensuring the agency of students in contributing to the list which identifies key capabilities for their successful progression (bottom-up). In this research, the 'ideal-theoretical' list is tested through a longitudinal qualitative research study with second level students to determine the key capabilities that enable them to plan for higher education progression. The use of qualitative longitudinal research strengthens the participative element of the 'bottom-up' approach, as the development of a capability list is iterative and re-worked with the students each year in response to key themes emerging from their previous interviews and focus groups. As Wilson-Strydom (2016) remarks, there has been limited

study to date in developing capability lists in the context of widening participation. The use of qualitative longitudinal research with students offers the possibility to refine the list with students over a three-year period to determine which capabilities really anchor their choice-making capacity in relation to post-secondary educational progression.

However, there is continued debate in the literature about whether to produce a capability list at all and how this might constitute a breach of the fundamental assumptions on which the capability approach is built, namely agency, choice and freedom, underpinned by a commitment to public dialogue and participation (McReynolds 2002; Sen 2004; Charusheela 2008; Wilson-Strydom 2016). Sen provides five types of freedoms but does not specify their content and detail: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security (1992). Nussbaum criticises this on the grounds that more concrete specificity is required to make use of the capability approach (2001). For Sen, however, the capability approach is not a theory but an approach and its under-specification is justified because no universal list of capabilities could possibly address all contexts. Nussbaum defines a list for guidance and debate but also because without these capabilities, humans would find it difficult to realise ‘valued beings and doings’, her list is: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, control over one’s environment.

In line with his commitment to individual agency, freedom and choice, Sen (1999; 2004; 2006; 2009) argues that it is preferable to avoid specifying capabilities and rather to allow those affected by a list to identify their own valued capabilities based on participatory and deliberative processes (Wilson-Strydom 2016). This is contested by Robeyns, who argues that it is difficult to apply the capability approach to specific issues, such as what capabilities are most essential to preparing working-class students for post-secondary education progression, without some basis from which to choose the capabilities and estimate their relative importance. Moreover, Nussbaum argues that specifying a list of capabilities is essential to avoid the problems of omission and power (Nussbaum 2000; Alkire and Deneulin 2009; Wilson-Strydom 2016). Omissions here refers to the possibility that some groups may overlook a capability that is important to them, this may be especially true in respect of preparation for post-secondary progression where the

students' knowledge base of the requirements could be particularly low or affected by adaptive preferences.

Walker (2006) also makes the case for a capabilities list for higher education, providing three reasons for her rationale. First, a targeted list is needed to focus the capability approach on the specificities of widening access and participation. Second, this can provide the basis for advocating for education environments that explicitly seek to foster capabilities and equality. Third, a targeted list permits us to test the efficacy of the capability approach in this context and help us with the design of better, more suitable interventions.

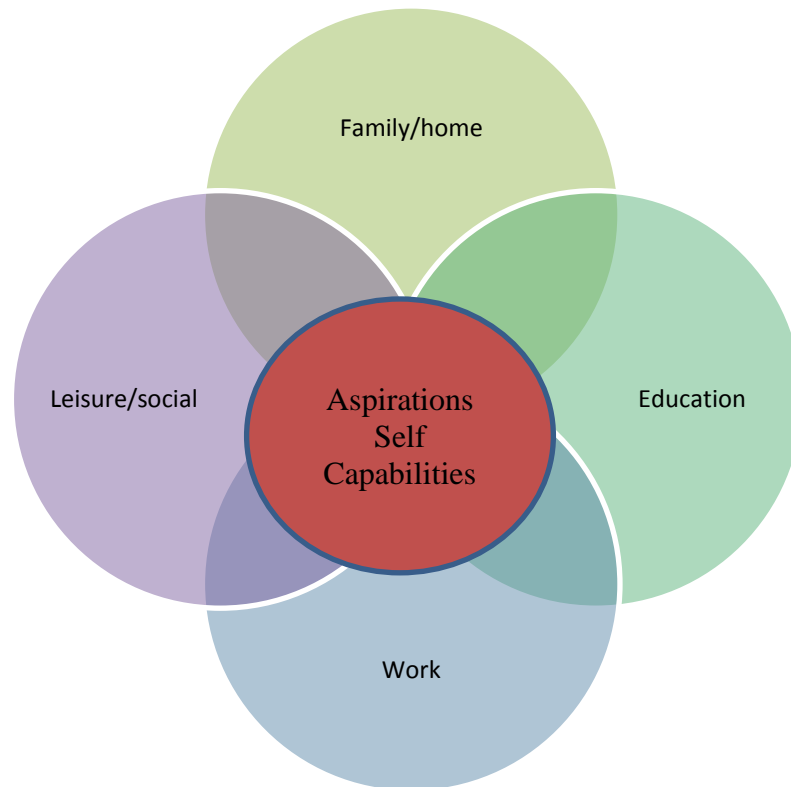
Hart (2012) developed the Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework (SBAF), taking into account that the capability approach offers a framework that can be complemented with additional theories (Sen 1999a; Robeyns 2005a; Walker 2006b). Hart draws on Bourdieu to assist in theorising about individual students and their relationships with school, college and higher education institutions. Hart observes that Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital provides greater depth to our understanding of the commodities and resources that can be converted into what Sen terms capabilities. It can also complement Sen's work by enabling a dynamic understanding of conversion factors that help or hinder the development of capabilities. In Bourdieu's work, this is supported through the concepts of habitus and fields of action. What is unclear, however, is the extent to which habitus is a determining factor within an individual's future direction. Bourdieu also argued that while individuals may accrue different forms of capital over their life-course, this does not mean that they all have equal ability to convert cultural capital, for example, into other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986). From Sen's perspective, Bourdieu's varied forms of capital can be considered commodities which may be converted into capabilities. As Laureau and Horvat (1999) demonstrate, it is also important to learn how to apply different forms of cultural capital in different fields. Even where individuals can convert capital into capabilities, the capability approach still questions our understanding of advantage by underscoring the importance of the freedom to achieve valued ways of being and doing as well as the achievement itself.

Bourdieu (1992) draws on the concept of 'field' as a dynamic representation of the relations between individuals and institutions. However, it does not take account of

differences in individual ability to convert capital into capability. Hart (2012) proposes a conceptual model, based on findings from two of her research studies which aims to highlight this dynamism. Ball et al (2000: 148) had identified four ‘arenas of action’ in a Venn diagram, representing the overlap between different areas of young people’s lives, these are family, work/education and leisure. Hart (2012) positions the self, aspirations and capabilities at the heart of this interactive dynamic with these different fields and she proposes that young people will vary over their time in education in the extent to which they prioritise one field over another. Similarly, specific power relations within a particular field, either work or family for example, may impact on their position in relation to education. In this respect, Hart’s work is examining the interaction of individual habitus with social structures and she suggests that this approach will develop Robeyn’s work on conversion factors (Hart, 2012). As Hart (2012: 62) remarks, “using the capability approach to understand the nature of conversion factors allows a reinterpretation of the way in which capital is transferred between individuals.”

Hart’s (2012) work is relevant to this study as it explores the school experience of young working-class students the UK and the interaction of their habitus with the fields illustrated in Figure 2 below. At different times in their schooling and development, each field may take greater priority. While Hart’s research explored the broader experience of students within their contexts, this study focused more specifically on what a university-to-school partnership might add to the student experience of these fields of action and it drew on the capability approach as a way of assessing the impact of the project on the students’ capability development.

Figure 2: Framework of conversion factors influencing the development of aspirations and their conversion to capabilities and functionings, adapted from Hart (2012: 61).



Robeyns (2016b) distinguishes between the capability approach, as a general, open and underspecified approach and a capability theory, analysis, account or application for a specific use of the capability approach. She proposes a modular conceptualisation of the capability approach, to support the construction of capability theories and accounts. Robeyns’s elucidation of the choices theorists make within the capability approach is an important contribution to its evolution as a theory or set of theories and as an approach that can be adaptable and operationalised across different disciplinary domains, to address a range of social and economic questions. She suggests that a capability theory is constructed from three different types of module: A-modules consists of several propositions which a capability theory should not violate. B-modules include a range of non-optional modules with optional content, on the basis that one has to be clear about one’s purpose but there are a range of different possible purposes. Finally, C-modules may be contingent on a B-module choice or they may be fully optional (Robeyns 2017). Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 below illustrate in brief how this study responds to the

requirements of Robeyns’s modular conceptualisation, to establish its contribution and its theoretical positioning within the literature.

Table 2.1: The content of the compulsory module A adapted to this study (Robeyns 2017: 38)

<p>A1: Functionings and capabilities as core concepts</p>	<p>This study seeks to explore what capabilities are being developed through TA21-CFES project involvement, to ascertain what post-secondary options might effectively be possible for the young people. It focuses more on the capability to aspire to higher education (the freedom or opportunity) than the actual functioning (achievement or outcome) of second level education. While the functionings are important, the study aims to explore the broader process of student development through project engagement. This is why there is a stronger focus on capabilities than functionings.</p>
<p>A2: Functionings and capabilities are value-neutral categories</p>	<p>Not all functionings are positive (for example the functioning of being affected by a debilitating illness). Some beings and doings have a negative value. The notion of functionings and capabilities as value-neutral takes into account that there may be bad functionings or negative capabilities. As Robeyn’s (2017) says, this allows for the possibility that there are functionings that are always valuable, never valuable or valuable depending on context. This study make a normative judgement that endorses the capability to aspire to a range of informed post-secondary options as valuable but it is value-neutral about whether students’ progress to higher education (functioning), provided they have developed the capability to make informed choices.</p>
<p>A3: Conversion factors</p>	<p>This study draws on a range of enabling and inhibiting conversion factors to explore student development through involvement in the TA21-CFES project.</p>

<p>A4: The distinction between means and ends</p>	<p>The ends in this case would be progression to further or higher education. The means are the extent to which the young people involved have access to a high quality education system, communities that support them and structures that help them to navigate personal and interpersonal difficulties as well as the information required to make decisions about their future. This study focuses mainly on the means or the preconditions required for young people to aspire to higher education, to ascertain whether it is realistic for the capabilities that might support their post-secondary progression to emerge in present circumstances.</p>
<p>A5: Functionings and/or capabilities form the evaluative space</p>	<p>The normative theory used in this study, which proposes that the capability to aspire to a range of informed post-secondary options is better than not developing the capabilities that might support the capability to aspire, is the focus of the evaluative space. It specifically focuses on how participation in the TA21-CFES project supports or inhibits the development of the capability to aspire to higher education and in that sense, it is evaluating the intervention from a capabilities perspective.</p>
<p>A6: Other dimensions of ultimate value</p>	<p>In this study, the capability to aspire to higher education is of ultimate value (things that we value as ends in themselves), the functioning of being in higher education is of both ultimate and instrumental value. However, students who make an informed and reasoned decision to forego higher education in favour of another post-secondary route, such as an apprenticeship, a job, travel also demonstrate capabilities of ultimate value provided they can in future convert those aspirations into functionings.</p>
<p>A7: Value pluralism</p>	<p>Capabilities and functionings are not all that matters, for example if a student demonstrates the capabilities</p>

	<p>identified in this research and develops strong higher education aspirations, s/he may continue to encounter social class, ethnic or gender prejudices within or outside of her own community, which may negatively affect future functionings. Therefore, there are other values that matter for the realisation of functionings, such as valued opportunities to be in good health, engaging in social interactions, to be sheltered and safe. These values may be compromised by structural circumstances and this study has referred to some of these factors - negative social interactions, stress induced by exam pressure, worries about financial security.</p>
A8: Valuing each person as an end	<p>The principle of ethical individualism considers that only individual persons are the units of ultimate moral concern. This focus requires us to focus on how the interests of each person are served or protected. This is not the same as other concepts of individualism, which consider human beings can live and flourish independently of others. This study aims to explore individual experiences of the TA21-CFES project, to see what factors enable and inhibit different people's experiences of capability development within the four schools. It is concerned with the optimum outcome for each individual, understanding that this will then contribute positively to wider social groups, such as those within school, family, community.</p>

Table 2.2: The B-modules: non-optional modules with optional content adapted to this study (Robeyns 2017: 60)

B1: The purpose of the capability theory	<p>The purpose of this use of the capability approach is to evaluate the impact of the TA21-CFES project on student capability development and to explore enabling and inhibiting factors in their experience of the project. It is</p>
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	not to consider their whole student experience or their out of school experience in detail, while acknowledging that these other contexts and experiences will inevitably affect their development.
B2: The selection of dimensions	This study follows Robeyn's (2005) criteria for selecting capabilities, which are the subject to revision over the three years of data collection. This iterative process is a protection against researcher bias and facilitates participation by the research subjects.
B3: An account of human diversity	This study proposes an account of human diversity focusing on social class and influenced by theories of social and cultural reproduction, resistance theorists such as Freire and progressive educationalists such as Dewey.
B4: An account of agency	This study explores ways in which student involvement in the TA21-CFES project supports and inhibits their agency and other schooling and family factors that affect their agency.
B5: An account of structural constraints	Several structural constraints are explored in this study, for example: the different resources and cultures within different school types, limited higher education knowledge within family and community, the impact of the Junior Cycle examination system on student motivation, limited educational guidance.
B6: The choice between functionings, capabilities or both	This study focuses on the development of capabilities, as the functioning is the longer-term view of what students choose to be or do when they complete second level education. Focusing on their capability development allows an exploration of the individual process behind their involvement in the TA21-CFES project.
B7: Meta-theoretical commitments	This study assumes that social class impacts on school experience and choice making for working-class young people and that taking a capability approach, in combination with theories of social and cultural

	reproduction and critical pedagogy, will enable a narrative description of their experience, to illuminate areas where policy and practice might better intervene.
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Robeyn's (2017) optional C-modules provides scope for additional ontological and explanatory theories and weighing dimensions. However, one can proceed with an application of the capability approach adapting the A and B-modules alone.

As Wilson-Strydom observes, there is a growing body of research on the development of capabilities lists and it is the subject of much debate between those who have a preference for the less defined, participatory approach advocated by Sen and the clearly articulated 'universal' list of capabilities proposed by Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2000; Alkire 2002; Robeyns 2003; Flores-Crespo 2004; Walker 2006; Terzi 2007; Wolff and de-Shalit 2007; Alkire and Deneulin 2009; Walker et al. 2009, Wilson-Strydom 2012; 2016). Robeyns (2003) has formulated a specific list of steps to developing capabilities lists and she has used these in her work on gender equality. This study adapts the approach used by Wilson-Strydom (2016) to developing a capability list for equitable transition to higher education, modelled on Robeyns's (2003) and Walker and Unterhalter's (2007) processes.

This research takes the view that the capability approach will have greater impact on policy and practice if there is scope to operationalise it in a participatory manner, while taking account of the fact that young people from working-class groups will have adapted preferences and be unclear about the scope of future freedoms that are not currently visible in their day to day context. As Clark (2013) points out the value of a capability list depends in part on the criteria and processes used to formulate the list, its purpose and the way in which it is used. This section therefore presents an argument for the usefulness of producing a capability list for progression to post-secondary education and adapts Robeyns's (2003) process for capability list development. This provides a focus on the specific processes that support the development of capabilities that will better prepare students to plan for higher education progression. This deeper understanding of the processes informing their planning and choice-making could inform the development of widening participation interventions and the opportunities they have more broadly in their schooling to develop key capabilities for progression to post-secondary education.

It also provides an evaluative lens to consider the range of capabilities that emerge over the three-year period of working longitudinally with a group of young people in the TA21-CFES project.

This research is distinctive from other focused widening participation studies, in that it is assessing the impact of a widening participation project on the development of social and cultural capital in young people and how this contributes to the emergence of their capability set for higher education progression over a three-year time. The extent to which these capabilities are realised through their involvement in a specific project is therefore evaluated, which can provide a basis for further programme development in widening participation interventions.

Robeyns (2003) proposes that the capability approach is operationalised through a set of criteria for selecting capabilities. These are:

1. Explicit formulation: The list should be made explicit, discussed, and defended.
2. Methodological justification: Clarification and scrutiny of the method that generated the list and its defensibility.
3. Different levels of generality: If a selection aims at an empirical application or wants to lead to implementable policy proposals, then the list should be drawn up in at least two stages. Each stage will generate a list at a different level, ranging from the level of ideal theory to more pragmatic lists. Distinguishing between the ideal and the second-best level is important, because these second-best constraints might change over time.
4. Exhaustion and non-reduction: The capabilities on the list should include all elements that are important to that specific context: no dimensions that are relevant should be left out.

Walker (2007) and Alkire (2010) have adapted this set of criteria into a series of steps to follow in developing a context specific list of capabilities and this study will draw on their approach.

The development of a capabilities list in this context is, as Walker (2007) describes it ‘ideal-theoretical’, it does not claim to be universal to all similar contexts but rather illustrative in intent. As such, it is open to dialogue on what are important capabilities for public and education policy. Walker defends this process because ‘unless we do this we risk saying, as Nussbaum argues (2003), that we are for equality and justice (in education) but that any old conception of equality and justice is all right with us.’ (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 179).

Walker (2007) further argues that it is important to address the specificity of education within the human development paradigm. In selecting what we understand to be education capabilities, we work towards an understanding of what is and is not a process of education. This research adapts the approach to developing a capability list for working-class student progression to higher education from Wilson-Strydom’s (2016) article which used a similar process to explore their transition into higher education in South Africa.

Stage One: Developing an Ideal-Theoretical Capabilities List (Top-down approach)

The development of a capabilities list for working-class students’ preparation for higher education progression began with a review of literature on educational disadvantage, widening access and participation, social justice theories, theories of social and cultural reproduction and theories of critical pedagogy. These were considered in the context of the growing body of literature related to the capability approach and its usefulness in exploring education and, specifically, widening participation. In this regard, the work of Hart (2011), Wilson-Strydom (2012; 2015b), Robeyns (2003; 2005; 2006), Walker (2006; 2007) and Walker et al. (2009) were invaluable.

Wilson-Strydom (2016) has taken up the challenge to operationalise the capability approach by finding a ‘middle ground’ between the open-ended, participatory approach advocated by Sen and the more directive approach proposed by Nussbaum and supported by Walker. This research therefore adapts the approach taken by Wilson-Strydom (2016) in developing a capability list for higher education progression by working-class students but adapts the process used by Walker (2006) to formulate a capability list, which

reviewed six education-related capability lists and drew on empirical work with university students in the U.K.

Walker (2007) considers the capability approach and the specificity of education, making a case for selecting capabilities, such as if they were not present there may not be a process of education. Walker cites Sen (1999), who foregrounds the primacy of agency and reflective choice in any educational context, so that it facilitates student autonomy and empowerment. Sen (1999, 2007) ascribes an instrumental role to education in preparing us for the labour market and to its importance in preparing us for our social role with others in the world. In this context, the quality of our educational experience, including institutional culture, supportive teachers, pedagogical styles and interaction with peers, all form an important part of our future capabilities to integrate, connect with others and feel part of wider society. Walker (2007) therefore derives three educational capabilities from this argument: autonomy, employment and affiliation/social relations.

It is proposed that the following are the capabilities we can extrapolate from an overview of key Irish educational policy documents that are relevant to the experience of working class young people in second level education and their post-secondary transitions⁵:

⁵ The following policy documents were reviewed to inform the development of a preliminary capability list for working-class students to develop the capability to aspire to higher education: A Description of the Irish Education System. Available at: <http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/A-Brief-Description-of-the-Irish-Education-System.pdf>. Accessed 11th July 2018.

Article 42 of the Irish Constitution. Available at: https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/CRAConstitution_0.pdf.

Accessed 11th July 2018.

Junior Cycle National Council for Curriculum and Assessment framework for reform, 'Innovation and Identity'. Available at:

<http://ncca.ie/framework/doc/NCCA-Junior-Cycle.pdf>. Accessed 11th July 2018.

OECD Project Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work. Available at:

<http://www.oecd.org/ireland/49624509.pdf>. Accessed 11th July 2018.

The National Access Plan. Available at: <http://hea.ie/policy/national-access-plan/national-access-plan-2015-2019/>. Accessed 11th July 2018.

The DEIS plan 2017. Available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/DEIS-Plan-2017.pdf>. Accessed 11th July 2018.

The National Strategy for Higher Education. Available at: <http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Strategy-for-Higher-Education-2030.pdf>. Accessed 11th July 2018.

- Knowledge for values, citizenship, participation, workforce preparedness.
- Autonomy to support the development of identity and greater freedom and to enable full participation through the ‘learner voice’.
- Respect for self, others and the diversity of the school environment, underscored by the primacy given to the concepts of inclusion, diversity and human dignity throughout policy documents.
- Aspiration, related to what is within one’s scope to achieve within an institutional and family culture, which will inform workforce preparedness, future life chances and opportunities.

The overlap between other capability lists with those already identified was then considered. Walker (2007) argues that the capability to aspire should be a standalone capability, because of its importance in redressing adapted preferences. Following a seven step process for capability definition, Walker (2007) generates a draft ideal-theoretical, multi-dimensional list taking up the specificity of the capability approach in relation to education but with no weighting attached to the capabilities. She suggests: Autonomy, Knowledge, Social Relations, Respect and Recognition, Aspiration, Voice, Bodily Integrity and bodily health, Emotional integrity.

Appadurai (2004) argues for a ‘thick’ aspirational map, rather than a ‘thin’ one, which includes hope, the sense of possibility that life can offer. Its enemy is a sense of entrapment and poverty. Appadurai links the capacity to aspire to voice. Where schooling fosters voice, here understood as the capacity to debate, contest, inquire and participate critically, it simultaneously nurtures aspiration. She contends that the capability of voice is fundamental to education and that both voice and aspiration are something on which other capabilities can build. The knowledge gained at school may be intrinsically valued, instrumentally valued (work) or positionally valued (a better university, expanded career options). Having this knowledge and the credentials that would not be possible without it expands opportunities, agency and freedom.

Biggeri (2007) in Walker and Unterhalter (2007) identify 14 codified capabilities: life and physical health, love and care, mental well-being, bodily integrity and safety, social relations, participation, education, freedom from non-economic exploitation, shelter and

environment, leisure activities, respect, religion and identity, time autonomy, mobility. Robeyns's (2003) list of 14 capabilities for gender inequality assessment mentions a number relevant to education – education and knowledge, respect, social relations, bodily integrity and safety. Alkire (2002), in her development work identifies the following as relevant to education: Empowerment, knowledge, work, relationships. None of these lists make claims for universality, rather they relate directly to the use of the capability approach in education where this specific focus on a student's capability set is seen as contributing to social justice.

Taking this multi-dimensional approach of reviewing literature related to the capability approach in education, analysing Irish educational policy documents and examining other capability lists provides ballast against challenges of omission and power raised by Robeyns (2005). Based on the evidence elicited through this process, this research proposes the following capability set as 'ideal-theoretical' in the context of the TA21-CFES project for working-class students within the four case study schools: Autonomy, aspiration, bodily integrity, critical thought (practical reason), identity, knowledge, participation, respect, social relations, 'voice', work preparedness.

Stage Two: Participatory List Development through Qualitative Longitudinal Research

Stage two involved an empirical approach to the development of the list by interrogating its usefulness with young people in the case study schools. This mitigates the top down process of developing an ideal-theoretical list and engages with Sen's concern that it is critical to have a participatory process with those involved in the development of their own capability set. The final step emphasises public debate and discussion. This process aligns the formulation of a list more with Sen's approach than Nussbaum's, to ensure there is a participatory element in its formulation that is respectful of each context. This research therefore involved young people in the discussion and development of the capability list for higher education progression, through a qualitative longitudinal research approach and specifically focused on their engagement with the TA21-CFES project. Student interviews and focus groups were designed with the ideal-theoretical capability list in mind and they involved discussions with the students of 'valued doings and beings', to explore the development of capabilities relevant to education for working-

class students and their ability to convert these to valued functionings. It should be noted that the capabilities that emerged frequently in thematic analysis are not all-encompassing of the young people's lives, they are focused on the impact of the TA21-CFES project, as that is the focus of the evaluative lens of this study. Students are also reflecting on the experience of a project they have undertaken while they are aged 14-16 years old and as such, they cannot fully anticipate the capabilities that they may develop in the future, nor the enabling or inhibiting factors that may affect them converting capabilities into functionings as they make the transition from school to post-secondary destinations. While all the 'ideal-theoretical' capabilities for preparation to progress to higher education were alluded to, some clearly emerged as significantly more important than others. Others emerged as reducible to the core capabilities. For example, student voice figured more as an aspect of the capabilities of autonomy and hope than a capability. Practical reason and the ability to critically evaluate information was closely linked to the emerging capability of knowledge and therefore it is presented as a combined capability. Respect was alluded to by students but it did not emerge as a distinct and separate capability, rather it was an aspect of improved, more trusting relationships with teachers, mentors and family members within the capability of social relations and social networks. While students were invited to discuss 'bodily integrity', it did not emerge as a core capability in respect of preparation for post-secondary education. Neither did work preparedness emerge as a distinct capability, rather it was discussed as one aspect of having reached a 'good life' in considering future capabilities. Finally, participation did not emerge as a distinct capability, instead it is important aspect of the capabilities of autonomy and social relations and networks, where the opportunity to participate and articulate their views is clearly impacting on students. While the ideal-theoretical list is drawn from both policy and previous research in this area, this study suggests that the broader list with from which the research set out relates more closely to the capability to be educated in the broader sense, rather than the specificity of the capability for working-class students to aspire to higher education. This research therefore proposes a pragmatic list of education capabilities to prepare working-class young people for higher education. These capabilities are viewed as non-reducible to each other and emerged strongly in all three years of the study. The capabilities most commonly referred to in the data (in order of frequency) were autonomy, practical reason and knowledge, identity, social relations and social networks and hope.

Table 2.3 below adapts Wilson-Strydom’s (2012) approach to specifying how she has met these criteria in developing a capability list for higher education transition:

Table 2.3: Criteria for developing a capability list for student aspiration to higher education

Criteria	Descriptions (Robeyns 2003)	Application to this study
1. <i>Explicit formulation</i>	The list should be made explicit, discussed, and defended.	In Chapter 2, the ideal theoretical list was explained, discussed and defended.
2. <i>Methodological justification</i>	Clarification and scrutiny of the method that generated the list and its defensibility.	The methodology was explained in Chapter 3. This study aimed to move from an ideal-theoretical capability list to a pragmatic one, using QLR with students over a three-year period, to capture their perspective on emerging capabilities over time. The research instruments were adapted each year based on the previous year’s data.
3. <i>Sensitivity to context</i>	The level of abstraction of the list should be appropriate for the context for which it was formulated. The list should speak the language of the debate with which one wants to engage.	The emerging capability list was also aligned to research on barriers to access within working-class communities and schools so that its development reflected key issues previously identified. It also uses previous literature relevant to the capability approach and education, such as Walker (2006; 2012), Robeyns (2003), Wilson-Strydom (2016).
4. <i>Different levels of generality</i>	If a selection aims at an empirical application or wants to lead to implementable policy proposals, then the list should be drawn up in at least two stages. Each stage will generate a list at a different level, ranging from the level of ideal theory to more pragmatic lists.	This study followed the two stages proposed by Robeyns (2003), starting with an idea-theoretical list and refining it over time to a more pragmatic list. The final list was different to the ideal-theoretical list as these were the capabilities repeatedly described and discussed by students throughout the three years as important to developing their future aspirations. This list is then used to inform potential areas for collaboration between schools and universities interested in raising

		the higher education aspirations of working-class students.
5. <i>Exhaustion and non-reduction</i>	The capabilities on the list should include all elements that are important.	Each capability has been generated with reference to the data over the three years of the study. They are each defined and defended with reference to the literature and they are the capabilities repeatedly emerging as students discuss their engagement in this project. While the capabilities are inter-related – for example increased autonomy helps with student practical reason and vice-versa, they are non-reducible each to the other.

Having followed Robeyns’s (2005) process for operationalising the capability approach and adapted Wilson-Strydom’s (2016) ‘top down / bottom up’ approach, this study proposes that there are five key capabilities which students develop through their engagement in this university-to-school partnership project, TA21-CFES. These capabilities are enriching student ability to make informed choices about their future, to feel more autonomous as young adults, to build trusted networks of relationships across their communities and to engage constructively with their own ‘identities in flux’ to refine and embellish their hopes for the future. The capabilities emerging through this application of the capability approach are defined in Table 2.4 below:

Table 2.4: A pragmatic capabilities list to prepare working-class students to aspire towards higher education

Capability	Definition
1. Autonomy	Being able to have choices, having information on which to make choices, planning a life after school, reflection, independence, empowerment (Walker 2006).
2. Practical reason and college knowledge	Being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent, and reflective choices about post-school study and career options. Knowledge is system knowledge rather than academic skills or abilities and aligned to practical reason, as the capability to assess and evaluate this new knowledge base and incorporate it into a new frame of reference (Wilson-Strydom 2012).
3. Identity	Identity as a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’, belonging to the future and the past, taking place in the

	spaces of relations in which individuals are embedded (Hall 1990; Ballet and Radja 2005).
4. Social relations and social networks	The capability to work with others to solve problems or tasks. Being able to form networks of friendship, belonging and mutual trust to support the development of navigational capital for progression to higher education (Walker 2006; Wilson-Strydom 2012).
5. Hope	Aspiration, motivation to learn and succeed, to have a better life, to hope (Walker 2006).

Conversion Factors

The pragmatic capability list provides a framework for what is required to successfully enable working-class students to aspire to higher education. However, as Wilson-Strydom (2012) observes, it is also important to identify conversion factors that impact on a person's ability to convert resources into opportunities or capabilities. This draws attention to the point at which agency and structure intersect and therefore provides a mechanism to explore how individual agents can engage with positive or negative structural processes, or conversion factors, to realise their goals. In this analysis, it is proposed that the TA21-CFES project provides a range of social processes through which students interact differently with their environment and that this project has the effect of creating both enabling and inhibiting conversion factors. These are producing a range of emergent functionings which could support working-class student progression to higher education. However, they are also causing some inhibiting factors to the development of capabilities and the project is limited in what it can achieve with students by some structural arrangements related to school, family and community.

This section has provided an overview of educational studies that have operationalised the capability approach. It has drawn on the approaches of Robeyns (2003), Walker (2007) and Wilson-Strydom (2015) for this research, to understand the complexities of how working-class students adapt their preferences and develop their perception of what is valuable in planning for their educational future. It presents a rationale for a pragmatic list of capabilities for working-class students to aspire to higher education. This emerged from a ‘top down and bottom up’ approach to capability list development (Wilson-Strydom 2016). The following sections provides a brief review of literature relating to each of these capabilities.

Agency, Autonomy and Educational Choice in Working-class Students

Sen defines an agent as ‘someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well’ (Sen 1999: 19). He sees this work as “particularly concerned with the agency role of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions” (Sen 1999: 19). Saito (2003) proposes that the education that best articulates Sen’s capability approach is one that develops autonomy and judgement about how to exercise that autonomy. This is critical, because as Alkire (2002: 108) notes, education is a process of identity formation, ‘as we learn mathematics or history in formal educational institutions, we gain knowledge and cultural understanding, that is we are also learning to be persons (kind, fair, competitive, selfish)’. Alkire argues that agency and autonomy are ‘core education capabilities, such that if schools were failing to develop children’s agency and autonomy we might have reason to ask if a process of education (as opposed say to training or indoctrination) was in process.’

Walker (2008a) proposes that providing a student with agency, including the freedom to decide and ‘the power to act and be effective’ (Crocker and Robeyns 2009: 75; Wilson-Strydom 2012; 2016) is essential for education progression. Similarly, Robeyns (2003) contends that autonomy is important in education as it relates to the student’s capacity to make informed choices, including decisions regarding planning a life after school, having space for reflection, independence and empowerment. Wilson-Strydom (2012; 2015a) explores this in detail and suggests that providing students with the opportunities to

explore their capacity to act and be effective is particularly important in the context of education, as it functions to build skills, and provides students with the capacity to build a vision of their own futures, and to act in accordance with this vision.

Wilson-Strydom (2012) asserts that providing students with the opportunity to develop agency, and to experience their full capacity for autonomy, is essential when considering post-secondary education choices. Students who understand their own capacity to fulfil their goals and exercise their autonomy, are more likely to make decisions to pursue goals that they themselves have come to value. Wilson-Strydom (2012; 2015b) says that it is important to develop students' capabilities to participate in higher education while empowering them to agentially choose what they deem to be the most valuable option. This decision-making process is mediated by the relationships, resources and experiences available to students in their school, family and community environments. Enabling conversion factors also matter when considering developing autonomy, and there is debate about which is most important when considering education decision making – agency or structure. Leibowitz contends that privileging structural issues over agency is potentially deterministic and “seems to fail to account for the existence of agency or the will to succeed against the odds, despite one’s social class background (Leibowitz 2009: 95). As Wilson-Strydom (2012; 2016) identifies in her work, there are ‘bottom up and top down’ factors to consider when developing students’ capabilities to participate in higher education and these factors require strong student autonomy to identify and mitigate structural barriers. Nevertheless, many working-class students manage to develop the navigational capital and resilience to overcome structural deficits within their environment and this research explores some of the processes that underpin the development of such capabilities.

This section has explained the importance of students developing the capability of autonomy, particularly in circumstances where structural factors may militate against students’ educational engagement, knowledge and attainment. The next section briefly defines the capability of practical reason and college knowledge and some key focus areas within this study.

Practical Reason and Knowledge to Widen Student Capability

Wilson-Strydom (2012) defines practical reason as ‘being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent, and reflective choices about post-school study and career options.’ Robeyns (2003) states that knowledge is fundamental to educational uplift. In her definition, it relates to knowledge of others with whom they can identify and knowledge for critical thinking and active inquiry. Having this knowledge and the practical reasoning capability that would not be possible without it expands opportunities, agency and freedom (Appadurai 2004: 186). Knowledge is discussed therefore as system knowledge rather than academic skills or abilities and practical reason, as the capability to assess and evaluate this new knowledge base and incorporate it into a new world view.

The Role of the Capability of Social Relations and Networks in Shaping Higher Education Aspirations

Students build their knowledge, confidence and hope from a set of trusted relationships in school, family and community and this helps to shape their habitual patterns, deepens their cultural capital and provides them with a strong interpersonal foundation from which to explore their future educational trajectory. Robeyns (2003: 70–71) identifies social relations as central to the capability to be educated, she defines it as:

The capability to be a friend, the capability to participate in a group for friendship and for learning, to be able to work with others to solve problems and tasks, being able to work with others to form effective or good groups *learning* and organizing life at school, being able to respond to human need, social belonging.

Sen ascribes an instrumental role to education in preparing us for the labour market and to its importance in preparing us for our social role with others in the world. In this context, the quality of our educational experience, including institutional culture, supportive teachers, pedagogical styles and interaction with peers, all form an important part of our future capabilities to integrate, connect with others and feel part of wider society.

Wilson-Strydom (2016) suggests seven pragmatic capabilities for the transition to university, based on a review of literature and empirical evidence. This includes social relations and social networks. She suggests that in a supportive educational environment, students perform better, as this cultivates positive working and social relations among students. In examining whether there is a supportive culture within a school environment, for instance, questions might focus on the extent to which the school promotes good relations between students, between students and teachers, provides appropriate support to students to perform to their full potential, helps them to cope with personal and social challenges and to build a sense of social belonging (Wilson-Strydom 2016: 77).

The importance of social relations in education and in progression to higher education has been covered extensively in the literature (Narayan and Petesch 2002; Biggeri 2007; Walker 2006; Walker and Unterhalter 2007; Robeyns 2003; Wilson-Strydom 2012; 2015; 2016). Social relations emerged as a theme from students' descriptions of their school experience, as there is evidence that the capability to engage with others is building their cultural capital, extending their networks, deepening the range of trusted relationships in their lives and influencing their habitual patterns.

In her 2012 thesis, Wilson-Strydom adapted Walker's (2006) definition of social relations and networks to the following:

Being able to participate in a group for learning, working with others to solve problems or tasks. Being able to form networks of friendships and belonging for learning support and leisure. Mutual trust.

This study adapts Wilson-Strydom's (2012) definition to a specific focus on exploring interventions that will support the development of higher education aspirations. Social relations and networks in this context means the capability:

To work with others to solve problems or tasks. Being able to form networks of friendship, belonging and mutual trust to support the development of navigational capital for progression to higher education.

Given the prominence accorded by capability approach researchers to social relations and social networks in supporting students during their development in second level education, alongside the emphasis many students placed on this capability when interviewed, it is proposed that social relations should be included in a pragmatic capabilities list to develop aspirations towards higher education.

Institutional Culture, Identities in Flux and Adapted Preferences

This section explores the interrelationship between institutional culture, identity and adapted preferences. This is to help develop an understanding of some ways in which the TA21-CFES project may be influencing institutional culture and the corresponding effect on students. Drawing on Narayan and Petesch's (2002) and Biggeri's (2007) work on capabilities and on Freire's (1970) work on education as 'the practice of freedom', it is proposed that the capability of identity is central to a working-class young adult's ability to imagine and work towards a future in higher education. Identity is also identified in Irish educational policy documents as central to the continuing process of values formation in students. For working-class students, this requires a shifting self-concept and an ability to see education and work possibilities in one's future that do not exist in one's own immediate context. This study explores student identity formation through the academic constructs of networks, trustworthy information and increased knowledge on how to navigate the educational system. Identity is also bound up with the concept of adapted preferences. Bridges (2006: 15) defines adapted preferences thus:

In choosing what they will do, how they will spend their time or resources or what kind of life they will lead, people are affected by or consider, for example, what they can afford, the likely responses of others to their choice, and the values and practices which shape them and the communities in which they live.

Bridges (2006) suggests that the concept of adaptive preference draws attention to the way in which external constraints become internalised (for example, as low aspirations, limited imagination). This is relevant to this study, as the premise of the intervention is that if students had more information at an earlier stage, relatable role models and a

stronger sense of autonomy, then they would be able to make more informed choices about post-secondary options.

However, Bridges (2006: 18) questions in what circumstances we should brand any choice as ‘adaptive preference’, since we make most of our choices in life based on incomplete information. Bridges (2006) is sceptical of intervention strategies aimed at raising aspirations, as it requires participants to take a normative view of a different choice and their social world. Significant life choices imply new identities, new sets of social relations and new social norms. Bridges (2006: 25) cautions,

If we are intervening in other people’s lives with a view to achieving this sort of change, then we had better have some pretty confident reasons not just for viewing the principle of choice as desirable but for regarding the substantive alternative which we are opening to that individual as superior to whatever it is we are inviting him or her to leave behind.

Nevertheless, he acknowledges that there is ‘good evidence to support claims that some people’s decisions not to proceed to higher education have been influenced by, for example, ignorance of the options available’ (Bridges 2006: 20). Bridges (2006: 22) outlines some circumstances in which we are justified in intervening to address ‘adapted preferences’, one of which is where the choice is limited by an individual’s own perception and construction of herself. Bridges suggests that we have a role in creating our identity as well as living it out. But it is also formed by the social context in which we live and we have less control over these spaces. He remarks,

Choice is not something engaged in the abstract; it is inexorably made in a context at a time and on the basis of a finite body of available knowledge and it is made by a person whose identity (and whose need to express and reinforce that identity) itself provides the source of the choice which will be made. (Bridges 2006: 22)

In sum, we do not exercise choice in a social vacuum and even our individual identities are borrowed from the present and past into which we are born. Bridges suggests that we can justify intervening if the choice-making is adaptive and not the one which people would have made with greater awareness of the possibilities. However, such

interventions should aim to address the issue of low aspirations and aimed at a community level rather than at an individual level, so that people are not then expected to change against the norms of the people to whom they have the closest allegiances (Bridges 2006: 25). As Ballet and Radja (2005: 8) argue, ‘. . .the shaping of identity is a function of the spaces of relations in which individuals are embedded. In these relational areas, conformity of norms and values results in an adjusted identity’.

As Unterhalter and Walker (2007) note, education is not an uncomplicated good and the formation of identity takes place within dominant norms and values, as well as struggles relating to power, history and language. These histories are brought to bear in the educational environment, and as Watts (2007) discovered, can cause individuals to adapt their preferences to prevent a discontinuity with their life experience thus far.

Institutional culture is therefore critical to influencing identity and in shaping preference formation, as Sen observes, because ‘opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function’ (1999: 142). Similarly, Nussbaum (2002: 20) argues that institutions have,

Both cognitive and causal power that individuals do not have, powers that are pertinent to the allocation of responsibility [and it therefore] seems plausible that such facts give us a further reason to think of the responsibilities for promoting human capabilities as institutional.

London (1989) and Share and Carroll (2013) explored the impact of institutional power on working-class student experiences of higher education and its consequences for their behaviours, choices and identities. Share and Carroll (2013) explored working-class students’ experiences of a selective university as contributing to multiple identities and a compartmentalised experience of higher education, where the students attempted to navigate several communities by developing a series of identities, some of which conflicted with each other.

Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) also observe how different UK institutional ‘habitus’ result in a range of working-class student experiences of fitting in and standing out in higher education; some students manage a productive tension between belonging and

standing out but this is more challenging for first generation students in selective institutions who face greater discomfort and occupy a space where the clash between habituses is more pronounced. Institutional culture can, therefore, support and empower working-class student autonomy, identity and choice making but it can also inhibit it, conflicting the students' identities, removing them from one community without embedding them in the other, creating an emotional dissonance for students that can continue long after their schooling and higher education has been completed (Share and Carroll 2013).

Indeed, Burke et al. (2016: 34) pays close attention to the symbolic and emotional level of identity-formation, experience and confidence. She proposes that 'identities are produced through the politics of recognition in which a person must simultaneously master *and* submit to the discourses that name and make that person in relation to particular discursive formations. To be recognised as 'academically capable', for example, the person must both master and submit to the discourses of 'capability'. Burke et al. (2016) discovered that although the students and staff expressed explained the significant impact of family, school and other life experience factors on capability and perceptions of it over time, they also explained capability in terms of individual choice and decision-making and there were clear emotional aspects to this. Burke et al. (2016) concluded that despite an awareness among school staff of the wider structural factors influencing student choice making and behaviour, they still tended towards individualising student choice as taking place in a vacuum, without necessarily being informed by the wider context.

Taking all of this into account, it is important to consider how we might integrate the recommendations of Bridges (2006) and Burke et al. (2016) into intervention strategies. Both articulate a need to address the emotional dissonance students can experience when they are encouraged to move beyond their community of origin towards another 'brighter' future. Both argue that change needs to take place at the institutional and community level, so that students can bring with them social and cultural capital from their own contexts, maintain supportive networks and explore new possibilities. This section has considered the importance of the capability of identity in preparing working-class students for higher education. The following section examines the capability of hope as it relates to higher education progression.

The Capability of Hope and Educational Resilience

Building the capability of hope is central to planning a life and interwoven with the capability of voice. Walker (2006) argues this should be a standalone capability because of its importance in addressing adapted preferences. Appadurai (2004: 184) links the capacity to aspire to voice; where schooling fosters voice, here understood as the capacity to debate, contest, inquire and participate critically, it simultaneously nurtures hope. The capability of voice may be silenced through the pedagogical arrangements of power and privilege, yet it is fundamental to education (Walker and Unterhalter 2007). The capabilities of voice and hope are foundations on which other capabilities can all build. Appadurai (2004) proposes a ‘thick’ aspirational map, rather than a ‘thin’ one, since hope offers a perspective on future possibilities not linked to income level. It is the opposite of a sense of entrapment and poverty. This chapter explores the development of hope through expanded, trusted networks, greater knowledge about college and careers and the critical role of educational resilience in persisting through obstacles to realise aspirations.

Webb (2013) remarks that without hope there is no way we can even start thinking about education. He suggests that the model in which hope is experienced is the result of a complex process of social mediation (Webb 2013: 398). This means different socio-economic groups will experience hope in different ways. However, Webb (2013: 399) cautions that ‘pedagogies of hope’ can serve to reproduce social relations as well as to transform them. Nevertheless, this study takes the position that hope is essentially an interpersonal journey, rather than a destination and that, as Dauenhauer observes (in Webb 2013), hope is about being *en route* with an indeterminate outcome; what the hoper seeks is transformations in their relationships with other humans and the non-human world, these transformations being of value for their own intrinsic worth.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a case for the use of the capability approach in developing widening participation policy and it provides some examples of research using the capability approach in education, including its applicability to educational work with children. In

combination with other theories of social and cultural reproduction and educational change, it begins by describing the capability approach and its key terms, as well as highlighting some challenges in its application to specific practical contexts. It proceeds to argue the merits of using the capability approach, in the context of other theories of social justice. It then contrasts a capability approach to widening participation with a human capital approach, which is currently the dominant paradigm articulated in neoliberal discourse on education. It proposes that distributive justice would be realised in widening participation practice by shifting the policy focus from an outcome driven approach, which considers academic attainment and progression in an existing system, to an empowering and critical engagement with what each student values and has reason to value and what additional social and cultural capital they may need to freely make an informed choice and build their aspirational map. In order to move towards policy informed by the capability approach, it provides a rationale for creating a capability list for working-class students' capability to aspire to higher education. It reviewed some examples in the literature drawing on the capability approach, including recent relevant applications of the capability approach and education by Hart (2012) and Robeyns (2017) and it proposed a process and a capability list for working-class students' aspirations for higher education in the specific context of this research. The core argument of this chapter is that we can reclaim widening participation policy and practice from a predominantly neoliberal discourse, which foregrounds the role of higher education in building human capital for greater economic productivity, through synthesising social and cultural capital theories with the capability approach. In so doing, it builds on the recent work of Lanzi (2007), Chiappero-Martinetti and Sabadash (2010), Walker (2012), Wilson-Strydom (2012) and St John (2013), all of whom contend that education policy formation would be strengthened by the greater use of the capability approach. This catalyses the development of an alternative discourse, policy and practice on the potential of widening participation, not just to prepare more students to be individuals who generate economic value but also to play an essential role in providing them with greater freedom to develop a 'life of value'.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will provide an overview of the research design and methodology used to explore the development of higher education knowledge and aspirations in working-class students in Irish second level schools. It is divided into six main sections. It begins by locating the project within qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) and explores the benefits and drawbacks of using this approach. It then provides a description of the sample, explains the rationale for focusing on this age cohort and provides some detail on how access was gained to the research sites and participants. It proceeds with an overview of the tools being used to collect data, which include semi-structured interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis across the four case study sites. It describes how the data were analysed and it addresses ethical issues relevant to this study. Finally, it offers some reflections on the fieldwork process.

Qualitative Longitudinal Research

The research focuses on the experience of working-class students involved in an educational project, Trinity Access 21-College for Every Student (TA21-CFES), which aims to ensure students are capable of making informed choices regarding their post-secondary educational trajectory across four case study schools. It takes place within the context of an overarching project involving 11 schools in the Greater Dublin area 2014-17 which focuses on (a) implementation of four ‘core practices’: Pathways to College, Mentoring, Leadership through Service and 21st Century Teaching and Learning (b) delivery of a Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching and Learning, or modules thereof, to 1,000 teachers nationwide and (c) a research project to build the project evidence-base. Research on the eleven schools adopts a longitudinal quantitative approach with students and teachers. It focuses on exploring the impact of the whole project, using an action-research approach. The survey instrument for the wider project was developed by the project team from a range of pre-validated instruments focusing on young people, their educational and psychological development. Teachers participated in focus groups to discuss the impact of the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching and Learning, which the project had developed and implemented with partner schools.

This qualitative research was undertaken separately by the researcher, as a study into the student experience of the project from a capabilities perspective. It is important, however, that my own positionality as director of the overarching project, TA21-CFES is acknowledged. As I have worked in widening participation for twenty years, there is no doubt that I bring to this research my own perspective on the issues that working-class young people encounter in making informed choices about their post-secondary lives. The findings herein are not, therefore, presented as fixed processes or the ‘truth’ in a positivistic sense, rather they reflect an honest and reflexive exploration of a context in which, to some extent, I am both an insider and an outsider. This positionality will affect the research as it also impacts on my interpretation and indeed selection of research sources from which to build my understanding of the research site. While participating students were not aware of my position in relation to the overall project, it is acknowledged that school personnel were aware of my position and their responses may have been influenced by the perceived importance of the project within the school. However, I have drawn on colleagues from the wider project, who would not share my own positionality, to engage with me as ‘critical friends’ in the process of designing the research instruments and interpreting the data. I have also used the wider research literature to explore and challenge my own perspectives and to support me in learning how best to approach this study from an insider-outsider position. I have triangulated school personnel data with data provided by student focus groups and student interviews. The data in this study have not yet been used as part of the action research project to inform the development of the project. It has been undertaken separately to the overarching research project with critical insight from colleagues not directly involved in either study. While the two research studies have been implemented alongside each other, I have had access to data from the longitudinal quantitative research study. I have reflected on each of the assertions and conclusions drawn herein, as an honest outcome of this distinctive research study, rather than a composite of the two studies. The quantitative study did not take a capability approach and it had greater emphasis on teacher development through the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching and Learning.

This study uses Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR) with a group of 35 research participants, who are (age 14) students. All students are from families where the parents

did not initially progress to higher education, although two of the students had parents who had more recently undertaken higher education qualifications. Participating students were therefore all from families without a long-established tradition of higher education progression and they were all attending DEIS schools. The study begins with students when they are age 14-years and continues with the same students as they progress through second level education for the following 3 years (age 17) (see Table 3.1 below for timeline for the three phases of data collection as they relate to student stage in the second level cycle; blue corresponds to Junior Cycle years; yellow to Transition Year and Green to Leaving Cycle years). Student focus groups (FG) and interviews (INT) are triangulated with teacher focus groups and principal interviews. This is to check the validity of the proposed findings and contribution. The study aims to determine if there is a specific set of educational capabilities, the development of which will support the capability to aspire towards post-secondary education in working-class students (Elliott and Timulak 2005).

Table 3.1: Phases of data collection corresponding to year of study by second level students

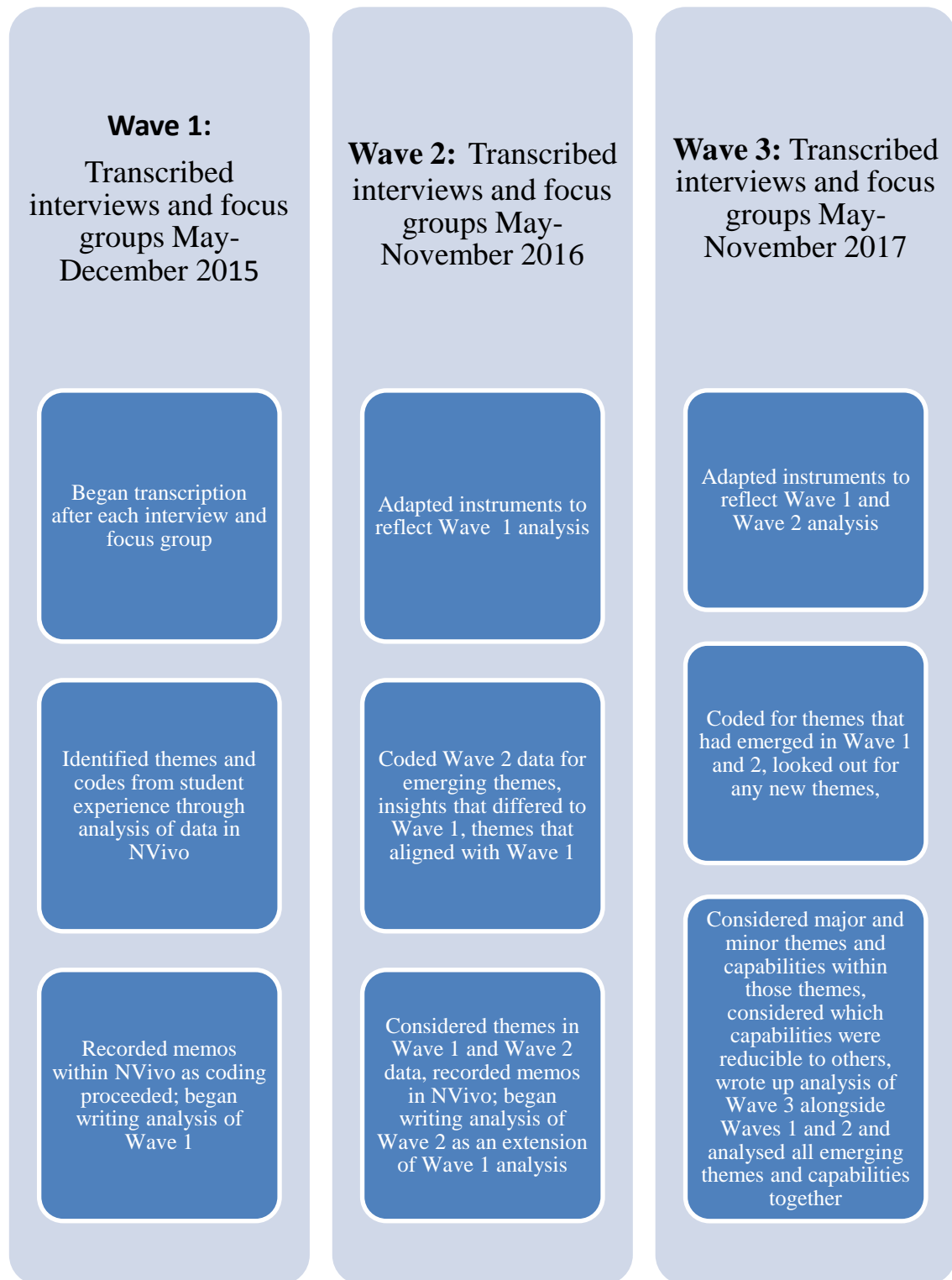


QLR is useful in this study, as it can capture development processes as they unfold. Taking a longitudinal, qualitative approach supports an examination of individual change in the young participants over the course of the three years, as such it is a useful tool to use as an evaluative lens in considering the processes behind change and the factors that either inhibit or support human development within the TA21-CFES school context. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of QLR is the deliberate way in which temporality is designed into the research process making change a central focus of analytic attention (Thompson et al. 2003: 185). Temporality seeks to capture the ‘messy, moving relations between past, present and future’ (McLeod 2017: 13). Foley (2017) uses temporality in her QLR exploration of the Post-School Pathways of Russian-Speaking Students in Ireland to explore key transitions and the factors informing parental and student decision making. Taking a QLR approach provides valuable scope for her to capture in real time the factors that inform the aspirations and decision making processes for immigrant students and their parents, and how their development and educational experience impact on these processes over time. QLR is, however, time and resource intensive, as repeated waves of qualitative data collection and analysis require time to unpack. Change can also take time to emerge and may not be captured within the study timeframe. The research design needs to be carefully considered, so that respondents do not feel the experience is repetitive or too onerous. Thomson et al. (2003) suggest that this can be addressed by using data from the previous wave to individualise and contextualise questions in the subsequent waves, so that follow up interviews plan to ask specific questions relating to their previous answers and experiences. This study adopts this technique, signalling to the respondents that time was spent considering their previous responses. Farrall (1996) notes that this approach has improved the quality of responses he has elicited. This is time consuming but it offers ways of addressing question fatigue in respondents and could therefore elicit potentially richer data. Interview and focus group schedules can also be adjusted to reflect information gleaned in wave one, so that respondents are given the opportunity to respond to reported project impact and reflections on the data. This kind of detailed exploration offers scope to examine whether any change in the responses is the result of experiences related to the TA21 project or is caused by other mechanisms (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

QLR is also suitable for this study because it can help to inform more effective policy, as it focuses on processes of structuration. It is used in this study to explore the unfolding

of a change process related to a particular education intervention (Thomson et al. 2003). This study explores what is different for respondents at each of the three data collection points, how and whether they consider their own capabilities have changed or deepened because of their project engagement. The first wave of data collection took place in April of Project Year 1. Schools had completed almost a full academic year of involvement in the TA21 project at that stage and the data collection tools aimed to explore their experience of the project and their reflections on what is required to be educationally well-prepared for post-secondary life. Data were collected at the same point again in 2016 and 2017 to explore with participants any ways in which their experiences and opinions had changed and what had contributed to these changes. Over time, this approach led to the development of a picture of each individual's development of capabilities and social and cultural capital, related to higher education aspirations (St John 2006; Walker 2008a). It also enabled an exploration of what was missing in their responses, what might be expected to emerge over time but was not evident. This approach is therefore a critical reflective approach to qualitative data as it uses the capability approach and the core concepts of social and cultural capital theory, as they relate to higher education aspirations, as a guide for examining the data. This allows for an inductive and deductive analysis of the data, whereby the participants' processes can be examined against these concepts, while building a larger understanding of other factors which influence change in the student cohort. The following diagram summarises the focus of each of the three waves of data collection and the main processes within each phase.

Table 3.2: Overview of data analysis phases



As Morrow and Crivello (2015: 267) remark, QLR can illuminate complexities that may be hidden by quantitative data. It can provide insight into social processes underpinning behaviour in areas like social responsibility, resilience, education (Thomson and McLeod 2009: 62). Returning to the same students over a few years meant the researcher could

explore how student capabilities related to higher education aspirations had developed over time and the impact of the project on their educational resilience, aspirations and choice-making. QLR allows for a dynamic, repeated discovery and exploration of sense and choice making, in a way that survey data cannot. Jeanine Anderson suggests that is through using methods like QLR that we can track shifts in values and aspirations over time and capture the ‘detailed, bumpy and irregular rhythms of social change’ (quoted in Thomson and McLeod 2015).

The two projects in the Irish context using QLR with young people are the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams, Greene, Doyle et. al. 2011) and the *Longitudinal Study of Post-School Transitions* (2014). Both of these studies used QLR to provide greater validity and insight to quantitative findings. However, Holly Ann Foley (2017) used a QLR approach to examine the post-school progression pathways of Russian students in second level school in Ireland. In Foley’s (2017) study, the majority of students did achieve their post-secondary choice, indicating that at some point in their second level education there was a shift between ideal outcomes and more realistic ones. However, her study focused on immigrants and to that extent these positive post-secondary outcomes could relate to ‘immigrant optimism’, which helps them to defy the expectation/achievement paradox some students may be subject to. As Foley (2017: 126) observes, aspirations influence decision-making processes. Foley notes that decisions taken early in a young person’s educational career may have many far-reaching implications for their future life chances. She draws on the example of a student studying a subject at ordinary level when they enter second-level school. This automatically eliminates the option for them to study this subject at a higher level later in their school career which reduces their final grade and influences what type of college course they can apply for (Darmody 2012; Smyth et al. 2011; Gillborn 2010).

This thesis differs in that it is a qualitative study focusing on four schools with the objective of providing a unique insight into how the TA21-CFES project, which aims to prepare students for post-secondary educational progression, is lived and experienced and how it contributes to the development of student capabilities through building their social and cultural capital (Thomson and McLeod 2009).

The qualitative method employed in this study aims to provide description, analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon, rather than measurement of the phenomenon. As Bryman states (1988), it is an approach to studying the social world which seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied. By taking a predominantly qualitative approach, the study adopts an open-ended, exploratory approach, where the definition of success will be in discovering something new, rather than confirming what was hypothesised (Elliott and Timulak 2005). While the uniqueness of qualitative research encounters constrains its ability to speak for all students in the study, it generates data to deepen our understanding of the research context and the process of change.

The Capability Approach as an Evaluative Lens in Education Studies

The capability approach has been used by several authors to explore either second or third level experiences in recent years (for example, see Hart, 2009; Nussbaum, 2006; Saito, 2003; Lanzi, 2007; Walker, 2006; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Terzi (2007) argues that the provision of quality education for diverse learners is a matter of social justice and that the capability to be education should be seen as a fundamental entitlement. Watts and Bridges (2006) use the capability approach to critically explore injustices in widening participation discourse within the United Kingdom. Deprez and Butler (2007) also draw on the approach to argue that post-secondary education is essential for working class women with children because of what it enables them to be and to do. Walker (2006, 2008) proposes that the capability approach is used as a framework to evaluate higher education pedagogy and student learning, bearing in mind that these arrangements will be influenced by inequalities in student opportunities. Hart (2009: 295) makes clear the potential for the use of the capability approach in examining educational access and inequalities:

When looking at what a person is able to be or do this encompasses (but is not restricted to) looking at what a person has. For example, a young person may be able to gain a university place providing they achieve certain qualifications (having). However, their capability to achieve the functioning of ‘doing’ going to university is contingent on the individual being able to operate effectively in that environment socially, psychologically and from a practical point of view. For

example, an individual may risk being alienated from family and friends if they come from a social milieu in which participating in higher education is not the norm. This in turn may affect whether they take up and maintain their university place. The capability approach draws our attention to the myriad of complex social, personal and environmental factors which affect what a person is able to (and chooses to) do and be.

In her 2011 PhD thesis, Wilson-Strydom focused on the transition from school to university drawing on the capability approach. She argued its value in that it is a lens to help us understand what each young person wants to be or do and what limits their being and doing. The capability approach therefore requires that we move beyond measurable access statistics to a deeper level of understanding of the agency and well-being of students entering university. Wilson-Strydom's study focused on a cohort of 2816 learners in 20 feeder schools to a South African university using the South African High School Survey of Learning Engagement (adapted from a United States equivalent). A smaller sample of 33 completed qualitative reflections on their school experience, plans for universities and their 'university knowledge'. Following a presentation of the empirical results, Wilson-Strydom asks what the outcome of a successful transition to higher education should be. She argues that measurable performance should be considered alongside other dimensions of success, such as educational resilience, which she defines as:

- Being able to navigate the transition from school to university within individual life contexts;
- Being able to negotiate risk, to persevere academically and to be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive constraints; and
- Having aspirations and hopes for a successful university career (2011: xvii)

Wilson-Strydom (2011: xvii) then proposes a pragmatic capabilities list and framework for transition to university. These are:

1. Practical reason
2. Knowledge and imagination
3. Learning disposition
4. Social relations and social networks

5. Respect, dignity and recognition
6. Emotional health and reflexivity
7. Language competence and confidence.

The thesis concludes by considering what the University of the Free State in South Africa could do differently to facilitate the transition as well as what it could do in partnership with schools.

Hart's (2016) paper draws on the capability approach to explore the complex roles of aspirations in human development. Her paper extends existing theory through further work on Hart's (2012) dynamic multi-dimensional model of aspiration. She explores UK 17-19 year old student aspirations on leaving school and reviews wider empirical and theoretical literature in this field. The discussion contributes to capability theory by extending understanding regarding first, the way that aspirations are connected to capabilities and functionings, secondly, the processes by which aspirations are converted into capabilities and thirdly, how certain capabilities become functionings. The paper reflects on the criteria that inform choices about the cultivation and selection of different aspirations on individual and collective bases. How individuals approach their roles as educators, policy-makers, parents and lawmakers is influenced by how aspirations are conceptualized. Acknowledging that not all aspirations can be realized and that choices have to be made, the discussion challenges policy-makers and other community representatives to be more explicit about the criteria by which aspirations are both judged and determined. Ultimately, Hart (2016) argues for the need to "reclaim" a multi-dimensional concept of aspiration in order to pursue human development and flourishing for all.

Walker (2006) operationalises the capability approach by producing a provisional, situated list of education capabilities focusing on gender equity in South African schools. The lens of the capability approach directs attention towards sources of unfreedom that might constrain genuine choices. For example, violence and harassment of female students by male peers and teachers is endemic. Schools cannot therefore be places of substantive freedom or easily of active, empowered capability. Walker (2006) and Unterhalter (2003) both argue that while all children in South Africa have the right to be educated, they do not all have the capability to participate in what we understand to be educated: a process that enhances agency and well-being.

Sampling and Access

Elliott and Timulak (2005) suggest that qualitative research typically tries to sample broadly enough and to interview deeply enough that all the important aspects and variations of the studied phenomenon are captured in the sample. Qualitative researchers most commonly use the criterion of saturation (Strauss and Corbin 1998), which means adding new cases to the point of diminishing returns, when no new information emerges. Opinion is divided on what the smallest acceptable sample size should be in predominantly qualitative studies. Some authors (Bertaux 1981; Guest et al. 2006) suggest 15 interviewees, while others (Lee, Woo and MacKenzie 2002) contend that repeating in-depth interviews with a smaller sample will yield sufficient data. Mason (2010) states that samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than quantitative studies. He suggests this is because a single piece of data, or a code, is all that is required for it to be part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are not usually important in qualitative research as a single occurrence can contribute to understanding a topic. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) conclude that this is because qualitative research focuses on exploring meaning rather than making generalised hypothesis statements. In selecting an appropriate sample size, Jette, Grover and Keck (2003) assert that expertise in the chosen topic can reduce the number of participants required for the study. Lee, Woo and Mackenzie (2002) propose that when using more than one method, qualitative studies could use a smaller sample size, as could studies that use multiple, in-depth interviews with the same participants, such as longitudinal studies or panel studies.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that saturation should be focused on whether the study has reached the point where further data collection would be counter-productive, as sometimes the problem researchers encounter in developing a conclusion is not a lack of data but an excess of it. Mason (2010) examined 560 PhD studies undertaken in Great and Ireland, undertaken across a range of disciplines, which stated they had used structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews as a method of data collection. He found that studies using between 10 and 40 participants were the most frequently occurring, with a median of 28 and a mean of 31.

There are 35 research participants across the four case study schools and 16 school personnel. Focus groups were conducted with 21 students across the four schools in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 students across the four schools. In addition, the school Principal and three teachers in each of the four schools were interviewed in the final year of the study, totalling 16 research participants (2017).

Sample attrition can be an issue in longitudinal research, however as these participants are in schools with engaged in the TA21-CFES project, it was expected that the attrition rate would be low. Only two of the student interviewees were unavailable after Year 2. The sampling technique used in the research is purposive sampling, as the subjects are selected because they fall into a category or meet specific criteria being studied. The schools selected all have in common a high percentage of working-class student intake and are located within postal codes with low progression rates to higher education. The four schools within the QLR study were selected based on an affiliation with the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) and an expression of interest in the study aims. The four schools were approached as they represented different school types (e.g. secondary, community), they were located in different geographies within the greater Dublin area (e.g. Dublin Inner City, South Dublin suburb, North Dublin satellite towns) and there was some variation in size and gender mix. They are:

Table 3.3: School Information

School	Eagle Park School	Lucky Lane School	Morning Star School	Hope Avenue School
Type	DEIS Catholic SS Founded by Sisters of Mercy in 1960s. Located on periphery of County Dublin. Former all girls and current (boys and girls) mixed school.	DEIS Catholic SS Dublin Inner City located all-girls school established in the 1970s by a religious order.	DEIS Community School Located in South County Dublin. Mixed school.	DEIS Community College Mixed school located in a town outside of the city in County Dublin.
	Mixed	All girls	Mixed	Mixed
Location	Greater Dublin	Dublin Inner City	Dublin suburb	Dublin suburb
Interviews (with identifier code) ⁶ – once a year for three years	Brenda (EP1) Jack (EP2) Olivia (EP3) -	Emily (LL1) Sonya (LL2) Kiara (LL3) Carly (LL4)	Dylan (MS1) Conor (MS2) Lubimir (MS3) Kelsey (MS4)	Aga (HA1) Ashley (HA2) Georgia (HA3) -
Focus groups (with identifier code) – once a year for three years	Thibaut (EP4) Kevin (EP5) Nicola (EP6) Daragh (EP7) Ciaran (EP8) -	Katie (LL5) Amanda (LL6) Francesca (LL7) Szantina (LL8) Casey (LL9) Sophie (LL10)	Vladyslav (MS5) David (MS6) Alex (MS7) Sarah (MS8) Deolu (MS9) Zoe (MS10)	Eric (HA4) Elaine (HA5) Ben (HA6) Holly (HA7) - -
Progression to HE 2014	40%	13%	31%	26%
Progression to FE 2014	47%	47%	20%	23%
Total number of students in 2 nd year	120	40	45	136
Total students in school	707	160	380	510

⁶ In Chapters 4-7 below, Year 1 refers to wave 1 data collection. INT(s) is two individual interview quotations. FG is a focus group conversation. INT is an individual interview quotation.

Participants in the interviews and focus groups were selected randomly using student numbers. Pseudonyms are used for student participants. The same students participated in subsequent waves of data collection to facilitate a longitudinal, individualised exploration of the development of their post-secondary aspirations.

Data Collection Tools

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Theories of social and cultural capital, the capability approach and relevant policy literature were drawn on to develop the interview and focus group schedules (Appendices B-D). Open ended questions were devised using the following themes: higher education knowledge, the impact of the three ‘core practices’ which are mentoring, leadership through service and pathways to college, networks and trust, family, peer, community and school relationships and the capabilities students require to develop the capability to aspire to higher education. The focus group schedule was used to elicit information from participants on their perspectives on school, their networks, the TA21-CFES project, and their aspirations. Focus group responses helped to inform the development of the interview schedule, as students highlighted some areas of specific focus for them in that school year and pointed towards some of the ways in which the project might be supporting or challenging them. The instruments were piloted with a small sample of second level students who were not participating in the study, within a separate link school. This pilot group checked the questions for language and structure. The schedule was then revised for clarity in line with their suggestions. While some of the capabilities were not deemed of relevance by students in the pilot, they were retained in questions related to the ‘ideal-theoretical’ capability list, to see if these emerged as a focus for the wider group of students within data collection wave 1. At wave 2 and wave 3 the research generated from the individual schools after wave 1 was used to adapt the interview schedules to incorporate specific themes that emerged in the schools. This moved the focus group and interview schedules more towards the pragmatic capabilities focus in waves 2 and 3. Revising the focus group and interview schedules to reflect student data from wave 1 is in line with Thomson et al.’s (2003) and Farrall’s (1996) recommendations described above, regarding the use of QLR and potential interviewee fatigue across repeated data waves.

First, focus groups were conducted with between four and six students in each of the four schools in 2015, giving a focus group size of 21 students. Wave 1 focus group data were used to inform the interview schedule by identifying relevant themes to supplement those selected from documentary research; semi-structured interviews were then conducted with four students in each school. Student data was triangulated through interviews with the principal and a teacher in each of the four case study schools in wave 3 of data collection. Each of the three waves of semi-structured interviews was preceded by a student focus group. In waves 2 and 3, the focus groups drew on themes emerging in wave 1 interviews and focus groups. Each wave of data collection informed the focus group and interview schedule for the following wave. Focus group discussions were used to highlight group level themes that emerged from the project engagement, so that these could be used alongside the previous year's data to adapt interview schedules. Principal and teacher interview schedules used open questions to elicit a critical assessment of the project in their school, areas where it may have had positive and negative impact, external factors influencing its implementation and ways in which it could be improved. These interviews were also used to triangulate the emerging themes from student interviews and focus groups.

Interviews

Semi structured interviews are a formal process using an interview guide, which is a list of topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order. However, it also allows for the interviewer to follow topical trajectories. The researcher also used active listening skills such as repeating, summarising and paraphrasing during the qualitative interviews to ensure an accurate understanding of the student responses. The interview guide facilitates comparison across the data set but provides flexibility to pursue emerging themes of interest (Creswell 2003).

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a useful method to discover how groups think and feel about a topic and why they hold certain views. They can create a deeper understanding of quantitative data and they are cost and time effective. Some individuals find this format of small

group contribution an easier one in which to offer their views, and other people's comments can trigger their memories (Stafford, Laybourn and Hill 2003). However, focus groups can be difficult to analyse and there can be challenges in encouraging some people to participate (Creswell 2003). Williams et al. (2011) remark that developing a strong rapport in focus groups is just as important as it is in an interview setting. In this study, the researcher used an ice-breaker, where each participant introduced themselves and told us something unique about themselves. Group discussions of this kind can influence the data, as students may feel pressured to offer up certain responses, or indeed may not contribute at all (Reay 2006). Hill et al. (1996) suggest interviews lead to more in-depth exploration of feelings.

Taking the limitations of semi-structured interviews and focus groups into account, this study uses both in the qualitative data collection so that data is drawn from a larger student sample, generated from a variety of sources, to strengthen the validity of findings. Participants for both focus groups and student interviews have been selected randomly using student numbers linked to the survey, to minimise teacher and/or researcher bias. A teacher within each school was asked to inform the students they had been selected. The teacher and researcher worked together to agree times that would suit the students' timetables and it was made clear to students, both by the teacher and researcher, that their participation in both focus groups and interviews was optional and there would be no negative consequences arising from choosing not to participate.

Data Analysis Techniques

This study adopts what Brannen (2005) refers to as an 'elaboration/expansion' approach to data analysis, where the sequential waves of qualitative data collection are used to shed further light on emerging findings. However, it is also 'sequential/iterative', as in the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, which takes account of the phased nature of the study, so that the design of the data-collection waves is informed by the results of previous waves (Williams, Greene, Doyle et. al. 2011). Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman (1997) describe thematic analysis as the search for themes to emerge that are important to the description of the phenomenon. Boyatzis (1998: 161) defined a theme as "a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon."

Rice and Ezzy (1999) suggest this involves careful reading and re-reading of the data to help recognise patterns within the data and where emerging themes become the categories for analysis. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) explain that the coding process in thematic analysis involves seeing an important moment and encoding it prior to interpretation. Boyzatis (1998) describes a good code as one that captures qualitative richness of the phenomenon.

According to Elliott and Timulak (2005), checking and auditing all steps of qualitative research is of paramount importance, as is the careful archiving of each step of the analysis for later checking. This study uses NVivo as the main digital tool to support data auditing and analysis. NVivo has 'memo' facilities to support researcher reflexivity and record field notes. All study data are password protected and accessible only to the researcher. Data were collected with a recording device and then transcribed verbatim using a transcription device and uploaded to NVivo for analysis.

Following wave 1 collection, the whole data set was considered to get a picture of the studied phenomenon. Data insights were recorded in NVivo as memos. Each meaning unit was ascribed a consecutive code connected to existing categories, so that it could be traced back to the original protocol (Elliott and Timulak 2005). Next, categories were generated from the meaning units, with the categories evolving from the meanings in the meaning units (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Meaning units that did not fit the existing categories were considered separately and discussed with two 'critical friends' with knowledge of the field, so that reflexivity is supported and researcher bias is mitigated. Meaning units were refined as more categories emerge (Elliott and Timulak 2005). To ensure all qualitative data are used, Elliott and Timulak (2005) advise that first order categories with meaning units, categories of the second order that categorise those of the first order and so on, with the bottom level including the meaning units and more abstract categories evolving. In this process, it is important to delineate the category relationships, which may be pictured in the form of figures or diagrams. Essentially, this process maps the entire data set in terms of discrete and interrelated categories of meaning.

NVivo was used to analyse the focus group and interview data. This allows the researcher to manage and shape unstructured data and it also assists in analysis, by supporting the

development of interrelated categories (Bazeley 2007). Each school was allocated a folder, which included a database of documents, including transcripts, and memos relating to my observations. A coding structure was created using categories drawn from studies with young people using the capability approach and those relating to theories of social and cultural reproduction. Each tree node relates to these categories, which groups emerging themes and allows linkage of the content across the same theme. However, the researcher was also looking for new themes not highlighted in existing literature and for evidence that the themes identified to code the data were the most useful ones. Ultimately, while NVivo is a very useful tool for organising the data, it does not undertake the analysis. The selected categories were used as ‘guides’ rather than definitive categories and it was anticipated that additional themes would emerge through analysis. Additional themes here refers to other capabilities or social capital constructs not identified through the ‘ideal-theoretical’ list development in Step 1 of Robeyns’s (2003) process. Had these been identified, they could have been added to the coding structure in any of the three years. However, through the analysis the ‘ideal-theoretical’ list was refined rather than expanded, as the capabilities emerging through participation in the project were more limited than the literature review implied, as most of the studies reviewed were on the wider process of education rather than a specific project. However, it is acknowledged that this approach was not entirely inductive, since the researcher brought her own theoretical viewpoint to the data interpretation.

Once a complete draft of the data was produced, it was validated through presenting it back to the original informants and to colleagues, to obtain feedback and correction. The qualitative data was also critically considered in the context of previous theory and research in the area.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was gained from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science Ethics Committee on 20th March 2015. Informed consent was required of all participants and it was made clear they could withdraw from the study or stop their involvement in interviews and focus groups at any time. Consent was sought from participants as part of an overarching consent to all studies relating to the TA21-CFES project (Appendix A: Consent Forms). Interview and focus group participants were

randomly selected from the list of student numbers associated with the survey data for the wider TA21 project. Pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect student and staff identity. To address issues of power and their potential impact on student engagement, as well as to minimise the degree of intrusion into participants' lives, interviews and focus groups took place during school hours within the schools, as a familiar environment (Alderson and Morrow 2004). The researcher endeavoured to put the students at their ease by explaining the importance of their views and contributions and their entitlement to stop me at any point or to refuse to answer a question.

Before commencement of the overall TA21-CFES project, it was necessary to obtain permission from students, teachers, school principals and the Boards of Management. As the students were under 18 years of age, they required parental consent in order to take part in the project. Parents were contacted through the school with details of the project and its possible consequences. Consent forms were accompanied by information sheets. One overarching TA21-CFES consent form was provided to each participating school, teacher and student. The overarching consent forms were detailed enough to cover the current research study. Additional information sessions were held with the Board of Management, school principal, class teacher, parents and students as required.

As this study is being undertaken by an individual directly involved in the project development and implementation, it was considered fundamental to have a strong in-built process of reflexivity. This is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the specific effect of the researcher, on the research process. Reflexivity involves examining and being aware of the impact of the researcher's life and work experience, gender, ethnicity, age and social class on the process of research and it also requires an acknowledgement and exploration of the power dynamics within the research relationships. As Malterud (2001: 483-484) observes, 'A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions'. Different researchers will bring different perspectives to a study situation, leading to the development of diverse but equally valid understandings on the study context.

Qualitative research seeks to understand meaning but it does not assume that meanings are fixed and stable. Rather, it involves a continuous process of reflection on the research through reflexivity. This involves examining assumptions and preconceptions, as well as how these effect research decisions, particularly the selection and wording of questions for interviews and/or focus groups. To facilitate an exploration of one's own assumptions, Kirby and McKenna (1989: 32) recommend practices focused on 'conceptual baggage' which they define as 'a record of your thoughts and ideas about the research question at the beginning and throughout the research process. Recording conceptual baggage will add another dimension to the data, one that is always present, but rarely acknowledged'. The interpretation of qualitative data requires reflection on the entire research context. Reflexivity involves making the research process itself a focus of inquiry.

In this study, the reflexive process was undertaken through testing assumptions and perspectives in discussion with students and key school personnel and through the memo facility in NVivo. This allowed me to assess my interpretation of the findings against the input of individuals invested in the overall project. Findings were therefore considered to be 'emergent', allowing for a deepening of insight through the research process. Interview and focus group questions, and even the project design itself, was revised and updated as the project unfolded. The study involved a close examination of interview transcripts that went badly, to identify rebuffs, clashes in perception and the degree to which these may have developed due to 'conceptual baggage'.

To be reflexive, the researcher had to examine how her own ideology and political beliefs would influence the study. It was important to be aware of the power relationship between adults and young people and its effects on the research relationship (Hill 2006). The study aimed to mitigate this by making clear to the participants how their contribution would inform the kind of focus and areas explored the following year, so in a real sense they were partners in shaping the project and the data. Each year, the data were brought to participating students to elicit their views and observations. Regular meetings with 'critical friends' were also organised, to examine researcher assumptions about the project, and the potential for bias in how we design, examine and implement it.

As Chapter 1 signalled, it is also important to consider my positionality, in terms of power dynamics and bias, and how these have been reflected upon and addressed, as a person directly involved in managing the implementation of the TA21-CFES project. Before joining Trinity nineteen years ago, I worked in a range of educational non-governmental organisations and I undertook an MA 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 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 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 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 autonomy and control over their local environment.

I have been working in educational access for twenty years and I am the director of the Trinity Access Programmes (TAP), which has a longstanding relationship with participating schools. TAP 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. TAP 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. TAP has adapted models from other countries to Irish widening participation practice, such as the CFES model (the subject of this research) and the pathways to the professions model (adapted from the UK) 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 2000's to admitting over 300 such students a year in 2017 and about 10% of the student population are working-class young adults who entered via TAP. Over 2,300 students have entered Trinity via TAP since 2001, 1,272 have graduated and the current TAP TCD undergraduates (c.1,050) have a 91% completion rate in higher education.

The brief description of my professional activity above illustrates that I am both an insider and an outsider in this research process. An insider is a researcher who has a complete membership role with the community under research. This can have disadvantages, as interviewees may over-identify and therefore conceal important information out of fear and self-protection (Fay, 1996). Kanuha (2000) compares insider and outsider status and argues that insiders can be too close to a project and have too many similarities with respondents. Fay (1996) suggests that outsiders have a useful distance from respondents and may be better able to appreciate the wider context.

I am an insider, in the sense that I have worked in this area for some time and therefore I have some experience of witnessing and engaging with the day-to-day obstacles working-class students face. The first eight years of my work in Trinity focused on managing the Foundation Course for Higher Education, which involved daily interaction with students and frequent interaction with their families and schools. It also involved evaluating the course formatively and summatively each year, including through anonymised, confidential processes, which enhanced my understanding of student experience and the wider context within which they made the decision to progress to higher education. I tracked the experience of Foundation Course students as they progressed into higher education and explored with them each year the social, personal, academic and financial impacts of the experience. I also secured funding to undertake a research study in 2010, exploring the experience of TAP graduates of TCD as they progressed to different post-graduate destinations and an external research study in 2013, examining the family and community impact of TAP graduates of TCD (TAP 2010; Share and Carroll 2013).

Moving from the role of practitioner to researcher requires an awareness of how my position may affect the power dynamic between me and my respondents, both students and school personnel. As a white, middle-class, middle-aged woman, I am also an outsider in this research process, as I do not have a complete membership role with the community I am researching. My personal characteristics, as well as my position as researcher, define me as an outsider. Students and school personnel were aware of my professional position. I am aware that I bring a particular worldview about the social, political and economic enablers and obstacles encountered by young people in working-class environments. In this research I was both an insider and an outsider. Considine (2014) draws on this insider-outsider description by using Aoki's (1996) description of the hyphen as a space to capture the paradox and ambiguity of this position. The hyphen also potentially represents the fluidity in a researcher's position towards their respondents. The assumption that only an insider can study its own community ignores the innate heterogeneity of our social identities (Fletcher and Spracklen, 2014). I believe that having worked directly with working-class young people for some time and having built programmes which have all involved participatory planning and review processes, I have experience of modifying my worldview to respond to the direct experience of the students involved and to take account of wider structural implications. I consider my 'insider' status an advantage, in that I am used to making young people feel comfortable in new situations. Similarly, my 'outsider' status gives me a different perspective from which to see the students' lived experiences and a wider frame of reference by virtue of age and professional experience.

In addition, there are implications relating to power imbalances between myself and respondents, by virtue of my position. Robeyns's procedures for capability list development (applied to this research in Chapter 2 below) are "a sort of "check and balance" that help address the fact that every policy maker and researcher is situated in a personal context and therefore needs to take special care to avoid biases that are introduced by their (personal and disciplinary) background (Robeyns, 2006: 356). I have also endeavoured to address power imbalances by drawing on my professional experience to put students at their ease and to explain that they can withdraw from participation at any time without fear of consequence and that I am seeking their honest, critical appraisal of their involvement in the project. Similarly, I have asked school personnel to offer an honest appraisal of their project involvement and I have not

presented student data before seeking the views of school personnel. I have presented to colleagues outside of the project and sought their feedback on the data and findings. Taking all of these measures into account, there is still a possibility that my position has affected the data collected and the approach I have taken to analysis. However, as Haw (1996: 323) observes, ‘we all speak from a particular standpoint, out of particular experience, a particular history, a particular culture and that this is crucial to our subjectivity does not imply that we can only research the familiar.’

Ethics and Research with Young People

Discussions about research with children focus on two areas: informed consent and protection of research respondents. Informed consent is usually interpreted as meaning consent from the parents or those in loco parentis, with little consideration given to the right of the child to refuse participation. Researchers usually secure written informed consent from a range of educational stakeholders, including school personnel and parents/guardians. Thompson (1992) advises against setting a fixed age threshold at which children can consent, as he suggests that children at most ages are capable of making decisions about what they would like to do, and it is more important to focus on the interaction of the child, the context and the nature of the decision making task. Children from a surprisingly young age can understand basic elements of the research process and their role within it provided information is provided in an age appropriate manner. Therefore, children’s competence to consent depends partly on the context and partly on what they are consenting to undertake.

Research with children also needs to evaluate any potential risk or discomfort for children and ensure there are measures in place to mitigate potential harm. Shaw et al (2011) suggest that the onus is on the researcher to demonstrate s/he has taken appropriate measures to ensure that participants have been given the requisite information and supported to develop an adequate understanding of the research. In Ireland, research should comply with the requirements specified in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011). This provides information on protecting and promotion child welfare and best practice in reporting incidents where children are considered to be at risk of harm.

Children First recommends that researchers are subject to Garda-vetting and employment checks and that they have suitable expertise to undertake the research. Researchers should also be fully trained in best practice in respect of child protection. It also advises that a trusted adult or third party is present. The researchers should be able to demonstrate competence in working with children. Shaw et al (2011) and Williams (2011) also assert that children have a right to be involved in the research process. This right covers their understanding of the process, their ability to make decisions to be involved or to refuse involvement in the process and having the opportunity to become actively involved at different stages of the process including design, ethical issues and interpretation of results. Research on and including children should also consider appropriate methods of dissemination of findings and an effort to ensure positive change for children is an outcome of the research.

Protecting research participants from harm within and as a consequence of research is the other focus of ethical guidelines regarding children. Alderson (1995) recommends that should researchers feel they have to report an issue that has arisen within research to relevant authorities, that it is first discussed with the children. Children should be entitled to the same degree of confidentiality as adults. Morrow and Richards (1996) also caution against assuming that because a research project has ethical clearance, it is ethical. As ethical clearance is provided by institutions of the relevant professions, they may be more focused on protecting the project and the researcher than the children. Ethical issues should therefore be considered as an integral part of the whole research process up to and including dissemination and not only as a process to be undergone at the outset. It should consider power dynamics between the researcher and the researched in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and class differences. Morrow and Richards also highlight the danger of assuming either vulnerability or incompetence of children as participating research subjects, in any way that potentially disempowers them within the process. In this respect, there is a fine line between establishing appropriate boundaries regarding the protection of children from harm in the process and assuming they are unable to self-advocate or report truthfully and accurately on their own lived experience.

Factors to consider include: (a) accounts children give of themselves will be affected by personal variables, such as age, gender, ethnicity, shyness, willingness to talk in groups, perception of adults (b) where the data are collected, for example children who are part

of a research process undertaken within a school may not feel it is possible to opt out, since most school activities are compulsory (c) how the data are collected, whether by face-to-face interviews, participant observation, written accounts, focus group discussions or questionnaires (d) the age, gender, ethnicity and personal style of the researcher will affect the research, as is true of any interaction involving the researcher and the researched. Some element of participation by children in the development of research instruments is useful in addressing power imbalances and allowing time for a relationship to develop between the researcher and child respondents will also help to build confidence in children answering honestly. Brannen (1992) also recommends using a range of different methods in order to overcome potential biases and to provide perspective on how some questions can best be theorised and studied.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used to explore the development of higher education knowledge and aspirations in working-class students in Irish second level schools. It began by locating the project within qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) and exploring the benefits and drawbacks of this approach. It addresses ethical issues relevant to the study, including my own positionality and the ethics of research with children. It provided information on the sample, age cohort and information on access to the research sites and participants. It progressed to explain the rationale for using focus groups, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis as the main tools to conduct the research. The following four chapters present an analysis of the data, the findings of which are then discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

Chapter 4: The Capability of Autonomy and Post-Secondary Choice-Making in Working-class Students

This study applies the capability approach as an evaluative lens through which to explore the range of capabilities that emerged over a three-year period. The research question is:

How do social and academic support services for students, provided within the context of a school-university partnership, contribute to the development of student capabilities?

This chapter proposes that the capability of autonomy emerges as important in working-class students to develop the capability of aspiration towards post-secondary education. It presents the data using QLR, as described in Chapter 2, focusing on the development of the capability of autonomy through the TA21-CFES core practices of Leadership through Service, Pathways to College and Mentoring. It explores the evidence that participation in core practice activities, which aim to develop cultural and social capital constructs such as information, networks and trust, enhance the capability of autonomy in working-class students. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of how the evidence presented aligns with or challenges the literature presented in Chapter 3. The following section uses data from a QLR study in four schools to explore the impact of the three core practices of TA21-CFES on student development of the capability of autonomy.

The Capability of Autonomy and Leadership through Service

This section draws on data from students in four schools to explore the development of the capability of autonomy through engagement in the core practice of Leadership through Service. Throughout the interviews and focus groups, there was evidence that the Leadership through Service project, which allows students to lead a service-based project, was one important influencing factor in shifting their sense of autonomy. It is acknowledged that students aged 14-17 are exposed to a wide-range of developmental opportunities within and outside of school, including sport, drama, other extra-curricular activities, as well as part-time work and family responsibilities. Involvement in the TA21-CFES Leadership through Service project provided students with an additional opportunity to develop new skills and to overcome barriers. Teamwork, planning and implementation of a Leadership project are the ‘conversion factors’ through which they

are developing the capability of autonomy. This section analyses how the social and cultural capital constructs of information, trust and networks, which support the development of autonomy, also support the students' capability to aspire towards higher education.

There is evidence that involvement in the TA21-CFES project is influencing the student's sense of autonomy. As outlined in Chapter 2, Loots and Walker (2015) describe 'conversion factors' as the structural or social arrangements that influence the exercise of agency, these can be enabling or inhibiting. The analysis indicates that student involvement in planning, cooperating, leading and completing a service-focused project is acting as an enabling conversion factor in the development of their autonomy and providing them with confidence to achieve their valued functionings. Wilson-Strydom (2012) and Walker (2015) suggest that agency is essentially about having opportunities and choices and being able to act on them. It is not simply about the availability of the choice, but also crucially about having the autonomy to make one's own decisions. This is happening through involvement in the Leadership through Service projects, as it is a process through which students are building their confidence, sharing their cultural capital and deepening the trusted relationships within the school.

Confidence, Purpose, Pride

Students designed 'Leadership through Service' projects, which would positively impact upon their community; the projects provided students with the space and time to plan, lead and follow through on their initiative. Students in all four schools discussed how leading and developing the projects helped them feel empowered and more able to 'take control of what you're doing'. Sonya, a girl from Lucky Lane School, said that the leadership project helped the students in her school develop a sense of purpose and responsibility, reflecting that it has made them think more seriously:

Interview (INT) Year 1: We're more serious [because of the leadership project] . . . because we now know how much work had to go into it to make it a thing. Like, we had to get permission off teachers, we had to get furniture, and we had to get everything sorted out. We had to paint a room; we had to choose what colours to use.

Lucky Lane School completed a substantial project, where they re-designed a classroom, turning it into a twenty-first-century project room for more active teaching and learning methodologies. The students in this school scoped the entire project, secured financial support for its development and worked collaboratively to effectively complete the project room. Students were proud to have completed the project and developed greater confidence in working together as a team:

INT Year 1: It was almost a sense of pride really because you thought up a project and you had an idea and it was only a rough idea and then just to see it all carried out and actually say, we completed this, do you know what I mean? I think it's like almost like, I know we're in second year and it's just, it feels like it's something big to us.

The students indicate surprise at their own capacity to lead a large project; and belief in their capacity to make decisions and to lead autonomously was strengthened as a result: 'We believed in it, and we believed "right, we can do this and we're going to get it done".'

Students in Lucky Lane School also believed the project had been helpful in developing their sense of autonomy and confidence, as they presented the project to new external networks and to people who had been to higher education. This pride in their autonomy and recognition of enhanced confidence was consistently seen in the four schools. Casey (LL9)'s remarks in Lucky Lane School and Jack's in Eagle Park School are evidence of this:

Focus Group (FG) Year 1 - Casey (LL9): We had to research on this and we had to present it, so it really helped be confident that time, and I was not really confident and you know you had to meet other people, students, and it wasn't really good at the first meeting but the second time it was okay cause you were comfortable.

INT Year 1 - Jack (EP2): It wasn't the teachers doing it, it was us so it was showing us like that actually there is organising that goes into stuff.

Most students referred to the sense of accomplishment they had experienced by leading without the teachers. Completing the leadership project gave them a sense of pride—'we can stand proud of what we did'.

Students in **Morning Star School** organised an event to welcome incoming first year students and they were responsible for the preparation and management of the entire event, including communication with parents. Students mentioned the impact of this practice on the development of presentation skills, confidence and communication; highlighting the importance of leading, independently of a teacher's direction. This is evident in the following student remarks:

FG Year 1

Alex (MS7): We showed them around the school, and where they would be and kinda like put them in groups... to work, to see what they were like together. There was no teacher behind you to say what you had to mention, it was all just us so we had to make sure that we included everything.

Sarah (MS8): It made us want to probably do more things like that.

Zoe (MS10): Confidence, talking to people basically so. I'm not afraid to talk to people more. And like it shows others what you can do.

In **Eagle Park School**, students did a range of different leadership projects, and similar to Morning Star School there was a sense of growing autonomy and confidence through these activities,

FG Year 1

Thibaut (EP4): They gave us a great experience of leading a team and seeing all what you have to do to be a good leader and stuff.

Students in the four schools described how they are developing more confidence in their ability to lead and cooperate and more trusting relationships with their peers and their teachers. The 'enabling' conversion factors have been a realisation that they can work together as an effective team, a deepening of trusted relationships with teachers, who have supported them to build their team and newly extended social networks providing support for their projects. This is social and cultural capital aligned with greater trust,

expanded networks and a new information base. As Freire (1970) suggests, this is precipitating ‘praxis’ for some students, who are now engaged in an action-reflection-action cycle, through engagement in the project and participating in its related research project. The students are beginning to challenge perceptions of ‘what we can do’. Fox (2016) describes a ‘deficit discourse’ in widening participation interventions, which often focus on designing activities so that students can more effectively ‘transition’ to the habitus of the dominant culture. In contrast to this view, there is evidence that involvement in the Leadership core practice is facilitating the empowerment of working-class students, enabling them to explore and articulate what it is they value and have the capacity to influence in their own environment, through explaining the environment, structure and experience to incoming students or to potential philanthropic supporters for a school project. Rather than this widening participation intervention aiming to ‘fill in the gaps’ in cultural capital, it is raising awareness in the students of how their role and identity within the school can strengthen their capability as confident, autonomous agents. In this way, their social arrangements are expanding their capabilities, which is their freedom to promote or achieve functionings that are important to them (Sen 1992; 1999). This is critical to preparing students to identify and overcome deficit discourses, as Freire (1970) suggests that marginalised populations internalise the social inequalities of the oppressors and that limited information can serve as a tool in maintaining a culture of silence.

In Year 2, students continue to build a sense of autonomy through the Leadership core practice. It is evident that being in a school leadership role is building their own and incoming students’ cultural capital, strengthening the trusted networks in the school and enabling the sharing of information. Two students from Morning Star School describe the project here:

FG Year 2

Alex (MS7): We were yeah, we introduced sixth classes from different schools that are going to be coming into this school, we let them, it was an open day for them, and I was, my position was out on the astro and I just played a bit of football or rounders with them, just to introduce them and at the end I let them trade phone numbers or eh, social media so they could talk to each other and get in touch, so they have friends before they get into school.

Sarah (MS8): Oh yeah, we did like a kind of project thing like we had to bring the first years that are coming in next year and talk to them about all the school and, we just did it like 2 weeks ago.

Alex (MS7) is demonstrating the autonomy he has developed in the Leadership core practice to make a judgement that the incoming students will be helped if they build their networks in advance of arriving in second level, so he encourages the sharing of contacts amongst them. His growing autonomy is impacting on wider cultural capital and networks within the school. Although the students have built their own sense of autonomy, it is the impact on others of this activity that most resonates with them.

Recalling their own fears and lack of networks, students are pleased that they have the autonomy to share their cultural capital and information and to make new students feel they can 'fit in'. In Morning Star School, Alex (MS7) describes how he feels this will impact on their experience of 'fitting in' to secondary school:

FG Year 2: It felt like I was helping them so therefore I was taking out a load of stress so, like they're going into school and as well as that they need to try and make friends but they've already made friends now so that's a bit of stress already relieved and I was talking to them about study a bit, every few minutes I'd say study this and study that and how many subjects we usually do in first year and how much we do in third year, that there's a big leap from one and a half hours to two and a half hours, so.

Here, the student is sharing his cultural capital on the ways in which the move to secondary school involves several transitions. He underscores the importance of developing new trusted relationships, the concept of adapting to a new environment and then the greater demands in terms of volume of work. He is signposting for the incoming students the new habitual patterns they will be required to develop. However, it also appears that already by Year 2, this Leadership role has become more habitual to him, as there is no mention of fear about the responsibility of sharing his knowledge with them. This is evidence that developing autonomy through the Leadership core practice is the process through which stronger networks, greater cultural capital and a wider sharing of

information takes place in this school. The same student here reflects on the benefits of his Leadership responsibilities here:

FG Year 2 - Alex (MS7): Eh, it makes me more responsible I think and in control, and it makes me more mature....

Sarah (MS8) observes the ‘network effect’ of the Leadership project:

FG Year 2

Cliona: What’s good for you about it? Do you know?

Sarah (MS8): Well you’re not just walking around the school thinking aw these little randomers coming in, thinking they own the school like...

Students also see the value of developing leadership skills for other areas of their life:

FG Year 2 - Alex (MS7): I’m currently a youth leader, like I work with young people so I’m on the leadership team in a youth centre, and it kind of helps working with ages from 11 to 18, so it’s handy...

In **Eagle Park School, Year 2**, students also remarked on how Leadership roles have given them a platform to help younger students.

FG Year 2 - Thibaut (EP4): It kind of makes you feel proud that like you can show younger people how to do stuff and how to fill out a CAO form. It shows them then, they know how to do it when they go to sixth year and it will hopefully continue like that.

Sharing information and teaching younger students was linked to a sense of pride and confidence that this sort of interaction would have a longer-term benefit for those younger students. The following exchange is an example of students reflecting on what they know and how they can share it with others, to empower them in their educational ambitions:

FG Year 2

Kevin (EP5): It helps them

Cliona: It helps them? How do you think it helped them?

Kevin (EP5): They won't get as nervous...because we felt how they felt when we came into school we didn't know anything about it...I got lost the first day.

Nicola (EP6): We didn't have anything really like to know each other, but they got to know each other then.

In **Lucky Lane School, Year 2**, the student experience of TA21-CFES project was mixed. Students felt that 'having' to participate in the activities was limiting their autonomy and that involvement with the project should be optional in exam years. This view was repeated several times with students stating;

FG Year 2

Casey (LL9): Make it an optional thing, 'cause if there was I don't think I'd be in TA21, I don't like it that much....

Cliona: Do you think that you're able to figure out things on your own that you want to do...

Casey (LL9): Yeah! ...

Katie (LL5): You're very good at that type of stuff though, like figuring stuff out for yourself...

Casey (LL9): Like I'm not really into everyone talking about like, it just kind of bores me. We have one class of it a week and it just I'd rather have an actual class then just sit there and talk about our feelings...it kind of irritates me!''.

While this student expresses antipathy to the TA21-CFES project, there is nevertheless evidence from this interaction that she is clear about what she needs for her own development. In Year 2, she is demonstrating a strong sense of autonomy and a desire to be able to participate in decisions that affect her. This is a positive insight into the student's capability set. However, the students in Lucky Lane School clearly felt constrained by both the Junior Certificate examinations and the demands to continue engaging with the project, both of which they considered were inhibiting their agency freedom (Loots and Walker 2015).

Similarly, despite some frustration in Eagle Park School, Year 2, there was evidence of growing autonomy in students, especially because of the leadership project and the social networks they were developing with each other. They talked about how they planned a study weekend away and how they managed the process themselves. They explained how they had developed their confidence from this experience, and that in Year 2 it was an easier process to organise a Leadership activity together than in Year 1. One student describes the process;

INT Year 2 - Emily (LL1): We had to work in teams, and like help each other and like down there we were doing games that like a person telling each other stuff and working on like having to organise everything yourself and cook yourself and all that.

In **Lucky Lane School, Year 3**, the Leadership core practice continues to develop the capability of autonomy in students. Students who were previously reluctant to identify as ‘leaders’ begin to step into new roles:

INT Year 3

Cliona: Have you done any leadership activities this year?

Sonya (LL2): Yeah we did, we had to do some video project and I would say that probably changed me because I, they designated me as the leader so I thought “Oh okay. First time being leader but I might as well give this a bash” and I actually quite enjoyed it. And I just felt, I felt different because it was probably my first time being a leader. Out of my comfort zone again and I thought “Okay I’ll give this a bash” and when we did the video I realised how much, like, I don’t know how to explain it...

Here, the student demonstrates self-awareness and confidence that she can move into spaces of capability she would not normally have considered part of her ‘identity’, such as that of a ‘leader’. She is now incorporating this new self-concept into her perspective. She proceeds to explain the tensions this role caused for her and how she overcame those tensions:

INT Year 2

Sonya (LL2): Well, it's kind of hard because it's your mates as well and you kind of just want to chit chat but then you realise "Okay we have to do this". So, the way I got over it is we did all the stuff and then we had a chit chat and of course we did have problems and stuff like that but the mentors did actually say "Don't forget blah, blah, blah." And that made me realise "Okay we need to stay on topic".

Cliona: Yeah so you had support in your group that helped you. Do you feel like you're better able to manage situations like that now?

Sonya (LL2): Yeah like I have like never been in the leader groups and recently I have started offering myself as the leader.

In this school, students continue to develop the capability of autonomy through their Leadership projects, alongside a critical view of the environment in which they live. Exposure to wider networks through campus visits, mentors, the media, other schools and a locally based company, are all providing opportunities for the students to expand their frame of reference and critique what is happening in their own environment. This more critical engagement is evidenced through one part of their leadership project, which focused on developing a video highlighting the educational disadvantage their peers taking the Leaving Certificate Applied experience, in terms of progression and opportunities. They also collectively take over a radio podcast to discuss women in education and how they perceive gender inequalities from their community perspective. Here, one student explains the empowering effect of both schooling and the whole project on her and her peers:

INT Year 3 - Carly (LL4): Yeah, it's not only that like it's just they don't push you, because they might push you too far and you won't want to do it at all but they will be like you can do it. They tell you can do it and then you just get better. Well that's how my experience was, people might get told to do something and get people behind them giving them help and all but still can't do it. They have different ways of doing it but with me, like everybody's help around me, you get better.

Students also show growing awareness of how developing autonomy through leadership roles will help them in their adult lives, as they are required to become more independent learners:

INT Year 3 - Emily (LL1): But I do think it's good because when you go to college and get the college lifestyle, the teachers or the professors whatever they're called aren't always after you and when the teachers say in this school, it's really what you make it out of the year. It's really what you put in you get out because if you don't put your project work in on time, you're not going to get into the practice of doing it for after school, like when you leave school.

INT Year 3 - Sonya (LL2): You see the leadership project it opens up things that you get to do that you enjoy no matter what the leadership project is. Like I got to edit a video and I like editing videos so some girls got to do the fundraisers and like organise the bake sale and stuff and bake and make decorations for Christmas and all. So, it's like. The process of it introduces new things.

They speak of the importance of choice in developing their confidence, autonomy and sense of self:

FG Year 3

Cliona: So why is choice important to you?

Katie (LL5): If someone like tells me to do something and I don't want to do it and especially if they tell me to do it, then I'm not going to do it. Like I will put everything I have in to it not to do it.

Amanda (LL6): Like if it's our choice you are more inclined to have us do it. If they are like you can do this or you don't have to like I am more inclined to be like okay I will just do it and get it over with rather than like "do this" then I don't want to do it I'm not doing it.

Being trusted to make choices autonomously is an important driver in student motivation and in their drive to complete what they have started. Their observations demonstrate an understanding that they value collective decision-making, implied trust by their teachers

in allowing them to make choices and a sense of ownership of the project. This ownership also implies greater responsibility for the outcomes.

This student expresses the excitement and enthusiasm of her year group collectively deciding on what to do for their leadership project. They have approached their Leadership project systematically, with a step-by-step process, including a crowdfunding process to secure resources for a trip to Oxford. They explain here what is interesting about Leadership:

FG Year 3

Cliona: Okay and what's so interesting about the Leadership practice?

Katie (LL5): Because it's something that we have control over and we get to choose where we want to go and what we want to do and if they say no, we are kind of like well we want to do this, it's our leadership project. Like we picked a very ambitious one.

Cliona: So, you have steps to get there?

Amanda (LL6): Yeah and the progress of the steps is just really like, you feel good and like we have reached our goal of this section and now we are proud.

As with Years 1 and 2, students demonstrate pride, confidence and purpose in their approach to leadership projects. There is no longer hesitation about whether they can lead or organise and they are more conscious of their preference for making their own choices and contributing their views.

In **Hope Avenue School, Year 3**, there is continued evidence that the students feel more confident about their choices but that they also feel supported. They have organised a sports day and a workshop on consent and they have reached out to different colleges and other networks to involve them:

FG Year 3 - Eric (HA4): Eh we had a bit of help. We had someone from sky sports come in and give us an idea of what we could do in terms of the sports and what we could do. And we decided to do like a little sports day. Like playing basketball and football with the 2nd years. Creating teams representing colleges like Trinity and DCU.

Like Lucky Lane School, students here demonstrate a growing ability to make their own choices, while understanding the importance of their social networks in supporting them:

FG Year 3

Cliona: And do you think the school really wants you to go to college?

ALL: Yeah.

Cliona: Yeah? And what would happen if you said, “I’m not going to go to college”? So, you think it would be okay if you said, “I am going to leave school.” or “I am just going to get a job.” Do you think that would be okay as well?

Ben (HA6): Well yeah it would be my choice so.

Cliona: Do you think your family would be okay with that?

Eric (HA4): Yeah.

Holly (HA7): At the start, they wouldn’t but then they wouldn’t really care because it is me that chose it. If I am happy with it then it’s alright I guess.

Cliona: Yeah, you think it would be okay?

Eric (HA4): Yeah if that’s what you want to do then.

This is positive evidence that although students in this school have developed the capability of autonomy through their Leadership projects, they also believe the choice about their future is theirs and they can still choose to accept or reject the ‘College for Every Student’ message. This aligns with the suggestion of Watts and Bridges (2006) that widening participation interventions should provide the freedom to accept or reject what is expressed as the ‘better option’, so long as it is done from a position of free choice and with the necessary information.

In **Eagle Park School, Year 3**, students believe they have learned the skills of listening, cooperating and being confident under pressure because of project involvement.

FG Year 3

Cliona: And what skills do you think you have you learned from doing the leadership projects?

Kevin (EP5): Co-operating with other people in the group and listening to everyone's ideas.

Daragh (EP7): Confident under pressure

Ciaran: For me, communication skills like to catch peoples' attention you know so you can ask them their opinion and you know...

Students also express their view on the relevance of some of the subject matter they are personally interested in and in this school, they have taken on one of these themes as their leadership focus:

FG Year 3

Kevin (EP5): It's just like... I don't know I feel like the topics we should be doing it on... like I think we should be doing projects on stuff that are like relevant now but the stuff that like now we should be learning we aren't allowed to talk about in school.

Cliona: Like what?

Kevin (EP5): I don't know I think we should be doing more stuff on consent. Not just for girls but like boys as well because stuff like that is what needs to be talked about instead of like doing projects on cities around Spain and stuff like. We should be doing projects on things that people need to know.

Like Lucky Lane School, students in this school are critical of the system design and express a wish for their learning to focus more on issues of real value and relevance in their lives. This demonstrates growing autonomy and the importance to the students of 'choice and voice' in decision making. In a more positive observation, one student remarks that the student-teacher dynamic in the school, for their age-group at least, is now a collaborative, discursive one, rather than a more teacher directed approach:

FG Year 3 - Kevin (EP5): I'd say it would be more collaboration...Like if the teacher says something to us and like we don't really understand it and we don't agree with it... we say that we don't agree with it and like we will end up discussing it and then like the few teachers that just don't have it would just say right fair enough and just move on.

While this democratic interaction cannot be entirely attributed to the project, as it relates to the whole school climate, students are demonstrating autonomy and voice which they claim have been strengthened over the three years of the project. The evidence also indicates benefits to students beyond those who were part of this study. There was a strong appetite amongst the students interviewed in all four schools to share their knowledge and experience with other students. Students are bringing their cultural capital to the TA21-CFES project and to the school context, in what can be reframed as 'community cultural wealth (Delgado Bernal 1997; 2001; Auerbach 2001; Stanton-Salazar 2001; Yosso 2005). Yosso (2005) argues that there are multiple forms of capital, such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital, all of which are dynamic processes building on each other as part of community cultural wealth. Aspirational capital, for example is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality (Yosso 2005: 77). As Glassman and Patton (2014: 1361) observe 'Community does not determine development, it enables capabilities'. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000: 229) assert that students from non-dominant SES groups bring resilience as part of their 'community cultural wealth' (Yosso 2005) which they define as 'a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning.' Williams (1997) uses the term navigational capital to describe this process of development within institutional constraints. Students are willing to share their cultural and navigational capital with other students, as they realise the importance of social relations and networks in supporting the development of other capabilities, such as knowledge and autonomy. Yosso (2005) defines navigational capital as students' skills and abilities to navigate social institutions, including educational spaces. Yosso further explains that students' navigational capital empowers them to manoeuvre within unsupportive or hostile environments.

While students are drawing on the TA21-CFES project to develop their capabilities and they are increasingly critical of the organisation of school processes, the curriculum and aspects of their own community context, they do not demonstrate much awareness of wider issues that may affect their ability to convert their capabilities into functionings in the years to come. This reflection on the identity of their whole community is most evident in Lucky Lane School, where many students describe themselves as coming 'from

a disadvantaged community'. They are vocal about what this means, both the positives and negatives. It is interesting that in this small, city-based school, many of the teachers are also drawn from the local community. This clearly effects the institutional culture, as the students become more familiar with the individual educational trajectories of their teachers, who in many cases also sound like the students and live in their community. In this school, students are encouraged to consider different progression rates to higher education, to understand the school and community processes that inform these statistics and to locate their own individual experience within these normative structures. There is evidence that this supports the development of transformative resistant capital, which empowers students not just to develop a stronger sense of individual autonomy through the project but also to identify ways in which they can use their agency and voice to transform oppressive structures (Villenas and Deyhle 1999). By Year 3, for instance, the students in Lucky Lane School have chosen to crowd-fund online for a class trip to another university. Their involvement in the Leadership aspect of the project has challenged cultural deficit theories by facilitating students to understand their autonomy and agency in shaping the language of their own community and capabilities; they are beginning to identify their 'community cultural wealth' and work together to develop deeper and more powerful change. This is evidence that the project is interacting positively with institutional culture and changing the dynamic between students, teachers and the wider world. In contrast, Eagle Park School has also developed a strong college going culture but students there do not wish to associate either individually or institutionally with the concept of disadvantage, even though they are a DEIS school. Students speak about a school that is cohesive within its own community and is a network organisation, involving many local businesses and other organisations. They report positive relationships between the leadership, teachers and students and within this context, the TA21-CFES project has had very positive impact. However, the institutional climate had already put the school on an upward trajectory because of structural changes made by the principal relating to streaming, external partnerships, leadership posts within the school and encouraging high numbers of teachers to pursue continuous professional development opportunities.

This section has explored the development of student autonomy over a three-year period in the four schools. It has identified the processes through which students are developing a stronger sense of autonomy, specifically related to the Leadership through Service core

practice. The collective planning and implementation of a Leadership focused project strengthens students' confidence that they can contribute within a team environment and manage a complex project together through to completion. Themes emerging from the data analysis indicated students and school personnel believe that this element of the project had helped to develop broader networks for the students, improved their trusted relationships within the school and wider community and enhanced their confidence that they can navigate towards a higher education future. The following section investigates the impact of the Pathways to College core practice on the development of student autonomy.

The Capability of Autonomy and Pathways to College

This section explains the Pathways to College core practice and its impact on students in participating schools. Pathways provided students in second year of second level with the information needed to set goals, such as course requirements, subject choices and levels. As Chapters 1 and 2 in this study discusses, research highlights the impoverished availability of information and guidance at second level (McCoy et al. 2014). Smyth, McCoy et al. (2014: 114) provide evidence that 'educational aspirations at Junior Cycle are significantly associated with later performance, with those aspiring to degree-level courses achieving the highest grades'. Their longitudinal study provides evidence that second year is the most significant in terms of processes relating to long term student engagement. It 'sets the tone for teacher-student interaction and engagement with schoolwork' (McCoy 2014: 129). Smyth, McCoy et al. (2014) found that students can fall into a pattern of being given out to or failing to keep up with work, which has impact for the tone and nature of their school involvement for the rest of their time at second level. They identified the importance of developing high educational aspirations at Junior Cycle, as it correlates with higher attainment in the Leaving Certificate (2014: 131). Working-class students are less likely to have information from their family, community or school about available educational options. McCoy and Byrne (2011: 131), for instance, suggest that parents from the lower non-manual group view the 'child as expert' in post-school decision-making and, although highly supportive of their decisions, did not push students in a direction. Students in the McCoy and Byrne (2011) study were disappointed with the level of guidance they received in school and expressed a wish to have more information at an earlier age. Their evidence suggests that having such

information would support the development of higher educational aspirations and therefore focus students on higher attainment.

The Pathways to College core practice aims to address these structural challenges through supporting the guidance counsellor to develop a ‘whole school approach’ to guidance and to ensure that Junior Cycle students are getting the guidance they need when they need it. It is proposed that through this core practice, students will be better able to navigate obstacles and develop educational resilience in pursuit of their longer-term goals (Smyth and Banks 2012; McCoy et al. 2014).

Students in Lucky Lane School make a connection between the information they have been exposed to through TA21-CFES Pathways activities and they talked of a growing awareness that they are responsible for their own futures. This reflects a growing sense of agency and autonomy through internalising the knowledge they are gaining about college.

In **Morning Star School**, students cite the importance of repeated goal setting, as each achievement supports their trust that they can reach their next goal. This is clear in one student’s comments,

INT Year 2 - Dylan (MS1): Yeah... it’s good when you achieve a goal. And you keep on, when you achieve a goal, set another goal.

They relate this effort to their future happiness, and remark it is worth working towards ‘so you are not falling behind in your own life’. They are aware of the advantage in knowing what is required for their future goals in second year rather than fifth year and they remark on the cultural capital they acquire from their families and friends in terms of motivating them to work harder and setting themselves high expectations. The students clearly see the link between their own autonomous efforts and what they will achieve in the future, highlighting the importance of establishing habitual patterns involving organisation, hard work and focus, along with clear and varied sources of information in charting their course. These sources of information are provided in TA21-CFES through the Pathways to College activities, including college visits and building relationships

with college going students that are centred around goal setting; this is evident in this student's' remark:

INT Year 2

Cliona: When you think about your future, do you think you can fulfil your goals?

Dylan (MS1): If I. . . like if you work hard and the more you try. . . .

Cliona: Okay, so a lot of it is about setting goals and then working towards them?

Dylan (MS1): How well you do in school as well because like if you take your mind off it then you don't want to do it.

Students in **Hope Avenue School** refer to the information which they have received about college and careers and how it has helped define for them the boundaries of where they can go, and they demonstrate a greater understanding of their own potential. Information about the potential of education is driving a sense of autonomy in students, making them more focused:

INT Year 3

Cliona: If you didn't go to college what kind of life do you think you'd have in 10 years' time?

Georgia (HA3): A rough hard life. One like, if you'd have to just pay the things that and you wouldn't be able to get like anything, you actually want, you'd have to just bills and stuff like that.

Exposure to college information through college visits and pathways activities has given students a sense that higher education provides greater autonomy, they talk about choices, options and how the college itself allows students more freedom to be and do what suits them:

INT Year 3 - Georgia (HA3): Except it could change you for the better cause like there's some things that you don't like. Like you don't have as much classes because you just focus on the same course. You've no uniform, you go- and after college you got your free time, you've more like say freedom

In Year 2, students in Eagle Park School described how completing a mock college application broadened their sense of what is possible, and their understanding of the range of available options. It also developed their confidence to make individual decisions. When asked what they wanted to do after school, a range of answers from different individuals readily emerged including: veterinary nursing, travelling, taking a year out before college. This is positive evidence of the development of the capability of autonomy, as the students are reflecting on their choices with more context and information. Watts (2012) suggests, this freedom to choose, based on enhanced information, can also mean the freedom to reject higher education as ‘not for us’. Watts (2012) nevertheless acknowledges that students from working-class communities may be bounded by the limitations imparted by their social, academic and cultural capital, which means that even students who qualify for entry into higher education may not have the opportunity to make informed and reflective choices. They adapt their preferences, based on their environment, so that they do not consider certain higher education institutions as within their reach (Watts 2012). Some of the complexities of identifying and addressing adapted preferences are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Institutional culture is critical to influencing preference formation, as Sen observes, because ‘opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function’ (1999: 142). In this sense, Pathways to College endeavours to influence institutional culture, through creating a framework to deliver and discuss information relating to post-secondary choices early in the second level cycle and through strengthening student-teacher trust. Students may still make a choice not to progress to post-secondary education but they should do so not because of adapted preferences but rather because they are autonomous agents who believe that their informed choice at that time is the one most likely to provide for them ‘a life of value’.

In **Morning Star School, Year 3**, there is positive evidence that student relations with teachers are helping them to develop the capability of autonomy and pursue their goals:

INT Year 3

Cliona: Yeah so when you are saying (Teacher’s name) are your teachers supportive then? Do you find all of them supportive?

Conor (MS2): Well like with certain things they can, they will help you with whatever they can like. Especially when it comes to like, I know a lad who wants to study chemistry and the chemistry teacher was like, had loads of friends that would be willing to help him like. There's a chemistry lab not so far from here and he got to work there for a couple of weeks and he loved it.

This student's trusting relationship with his teacher has opened him to social networks that will support the development of knowledge and hope in working towards his educational goals. While students have developed their capability of autonomy and they show a greatly increased willingness and confidence to work independently, there is also abundant evidence in all schools that they realise the fundamental importance of drawing on positive networks around them to realise their longer-term goals.

In **Lucky Lane School Year 3**, students demonstrate how the capability of autonomy is becoming a functioning, as they express frustration about the school messaging that they should all aim for post-secondary education. They challenge this idea by seeking out alternatives within their community:

FG Year 3

Katie (LL5): I feel like I have to go to college it's not because I want to, I just have to. Like everyone, you just hear aw if you don't have an education you can't get a good job. It's just irritating. It's the 21st century like you need to have education, you need to be smart like and know technology.

Szantina (LL8): You need a certain qualification to get a job.

Katie (LL5): And it's annoying because like there's jobs that people want to do that you don't necessarily need a college degree for and like we've been pressed on it since second year now that college is important and yeah it is in certain circumstances like, I could want to go into a family business, like I don't I want to go to college but like if I had a family business that I wanted to go into then I don't necessarily need a college degree for that.

While students in this school have enjoyed, and learned from the Leadership project, some students are expressing their emerging autonomy through resistance to the overall CFES project messaging:

FG Year 3

Cliona: Do you like that now? Working in a team?

Casey (LL9): Good and bad.

Katie (LL5): Em, it's starting to push me away from college.

Cliona: Really?

Katie (LL5): Yeah like I'm starting to kind of rebel like I don't wanna go to college anymore.

Cliona: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Katie (LL5): It's too much like the programme has gone old like we are doing the same thing every week like we have one class of it and it's literally the exact same thing. It's like there's nothing new. The mentoring is all the same. The questions that they have are the same in first, second and third year. It's like we are repeating it like every year thinking it's gonna get better but it's just not.

In this school, some aspects of the project have been integrated into timetabling and students feel the content is limited, so they are no longer learning. While beginning in second year was experienced as a real benefit to them, the continued focus on the same messages and materials is now alienating for some and there is evidence that they are keen to find and defend valid alternatives to post-secondary education.

The Capability of Autonomy and Mentoring

Hamilton and Hamilton (1992) define a mentor as one person who helps another person to make a transition, often in knowledge, in work or in their thinking (Hamilton and Hamilton 1992). Therefore, a mentor is a more experienced person who can act as a role model to the mentee. Mentor characteristics identified in the literature include a learning partnership between a more and less experienced person (Kram 1985; Garvey and Alred 2003; Karcher 2005) and a relationship that involves emotional and/or instrumental support that becomes more impactful over time (Grossman and Rhodes 2002). Mentoring relationships aimed at educational uplift provide career, social and emotional support in a safe setting, supportive of self-exploration and with the objective of more positive academic outcomes for the young person (O'Sullivan et al. 2017).

Research indicates that the types of relationships students experience prior to and during college influence their educational outcomes, with middle-class graduates being more likely to have had a significant person who helped them navigate the system than working-class students (Bruce and Bridgeland 2014) and middle-class students demonstrating a broader network of supportive relationships that encourage college and career development (Erickson, McDonald and Elder 2009; Ianni 1989). McCoy et al. (2014) identify socio-economic disadvantage, limited networks, issues with belonging and poor self-efficacy as significant barriers to education progression in students from working-class groups.

O'Sullivan et al. (2017) propose that mentoring is a valuable way to equip students with the support needed to overcome these barriers. The opportunity to develop a trusted relationship with a relatable 'other' can positively impact on negative perceptions of higher education and serve to raise aspirations, while also supporting students in dealing with barriers specifically related to working-class (Levine and Nidiffer 1996; Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003).

Students have built social capital through their mentoring relationships, which has provided them with trustworthy information and broader networks of relatable role models. Most of the mentors were recruited from working-class students and alumni who had progressed to Trinity College Dublin via the access programmes, so they were considered by the second level students to be 'relatable'. Some mentors were drawn from the secondary school itself, and they were students in their final two years of school with college aspirations.

There is positive evidence that students develop a stronger sense of autonomy and self-directedness through the Mentoring core practice. Mentors worked through a structured set of resources over the course of about six meetings a year. Expanding their networks has given students greater clarity about what is required in higher education but it has also reassured them that it is possible for them to reach this goal. Carly (LL4) (LL4)(LL4)in Lucky Lane School talked about the importance of having someone reassuring in her life, who knew how to navigate the education system. She said of the mentors:

INT Year 1: They're just [was] more like reassuring. . . [They] make sure that you can do that course. Just like, you know that you can get there if you wanted.

Conor (MS2) in Morning Star School talked about the importance of mentoring, and how it provided him with the sense that he can achieve:

INT Year 1

Cliona: What effect has mentoring had on you?

Conor (MS2): Like it has opened our eyes to say, 'well they've achieved it'.

Cliona: And what does that make you feel?

Conor (MS2): That if they can do it then we can do it.

This exchange indicates the importance of the mentoring relationship in transferring information that supports the development of autonomy in the students. This autonomy was particularly related to the sense that they can achieve their goals and there is evidence that they are converting this enhanced autonomy into functionings, such as completing school work to a high standard, focusing on their longer-term goals and improving their academic attainment.

These students also show growth in their autonomy through *becoming* mentors for younger students in Year 2 and sharing their own knowledge base about education transitions with incoming first years. One student describes the importance of developing new trusted relationships, the concept of adapting to a new environment and then the greater demands in terms of volume of work. He is signposting for the incoming students the new habitual patterns they will be required to develop. The same student here reflects on the benefits of the networks he is developing:

INT Year 2 - Dylan (MS1): Eh, it makes me more responsible I think and in control, and it makes me more mature

In Lucky Lane School mentoring has had a pivotal effect on what students believe they can achieve. Students talked about the benefits of having someone reassuring, someone from their community who had succeeded and who believes in them: 'They're (mentor)

just more like reassuring. . . (they) make sure that you can do that course. Just like, you know that you can get there if you wanted.’

In **Lucky Lane School, Year 2** students identified the impact of having a mentor for two years on their sense of autonomy. There was evidence that students felt stronger and empowered by the stories of other people’s successes and their ‘navigational capital’ to overcome challenges. One student explains the importance of hearing her mentor’s story;

INT Year 2 - Sonya (LL2): Talking to the mentor. She was telling us about how before ...she wasn’t the best at talking to people and she never thought that it’d be her going talking to people she’d be more like sitting back and listening and like, I’m a confident person but at the same time if I stood up in front of loads of people I’d kinda be like, what’s going on. So, she just told her improvement of all that and that just helped like ‘cause she was just saying, you don’t have to be confident at the start, you can develop it and I was confident, but now it’s just like, I can talk to people more. Like this time last year, not last year but like two years ago, I’d sit in a room with you and talk but like I’d be kinda (less confident).

Mentoring was important for hearing the message ‘*if I can then you can*’ this positively impacts upon the students sense of autonomy and self-belief.

In **Morning Star School, Year 3**, as with all schools there has been less mentoring. However, it continues to have a positive impact on the developing capabilities of autonomy and hope.

INT Year 3

Cliona: So, last year students said about their mentors – “they’re just more like reassuring. They make sure you can do the course that you like. You know that you can get there if you wanted because they went there”. Can you tell me why that student might have said that? And tell me does that comment relate to you?

Conor (MS2): Like they, when I told them about a certain thing they would respond in the way I would probably say it if I was in their position. And I felt like I, like there is certain people that just think they are just blabbering on and

stuff but they really like got to my level and explained it and really said “This is possible, everything is possible”.

Cliona: And why did you believe them?

Conor (MS2): Well at first I didn’t. Again, the second time I arrived they showed me like examples and stuff like that and I thought “this is great actually, yeah”.

Students trust this information because of the way in which it was delivered, in a less formal yet positively reinforcing manner:

INT Year 3

Cliona: And like you said that they came to your level. So, was there something about how they communicated with you that made it?

Conor (MS2): Yeah, they didn’t like stand at the front of the class and just an announcer. They came like in a group, we were in groups and they would come to the groups and talk normally to us.

For this student, the sense of collaboration and gaining knowledge from someone who treats students as equals influences her sense of autonomy. Over time, she develops a belief in the information, opinions and stories shared by the mentors. However, in some of the schools, by Year 3 there is high attrition of mentors and they engage either sporadically or not at all with the students. This means there are a variety of views on who is a ‘trustworthy’ mentor. The mentors who turn up consistently and engage with students at their level have a considerable impact over the three-year period. Seeing them both within the school and on college campuses does help students to believe that they are on a similar path and they will identify with others when they do reach college. Students in this school are also aware that their social networks are important and affect their capability of autonomy:

INT Year 3

Cliona: So, one of the questions I had is “Do you think it’s your own responsibility where you want to go in life or do you think there are other things that can impact on that?” Because when someone says, ‘it’s down to hard work’ it sounds as if we think that if they don’t get there then it’s to do with them not working hard enough?

Dylan (MS1): Well no it's just about how much you want to push yourself to get there and, it's not just yourself. Like it's mostly yourself but also other people can help you along and stuff like that.

Cliona: Yeah and so for you, who is helping you along?

Dylan (MS1): I have a mate who, well colleague, and he is helping make, he is doing films for Bank of Ireland and I am allowed to go along with him. So that's definitely opening to loads of other people that work with him and...

This student attributes his progress to his own effort and to the positive impact of the networks around him. However, he does not expand on potential obstacles other than himself as an individual or his own networks which may prevent the realisation of his goals.

Principal and Teacher Perspective – Hope Avenue School

To validate the student data, this study also conducted interviews with the Principals and a focus group with teachers in each school at the end of the three years of the project. This interview sought to explore their positive and negative experiences of the project. It is acknowledged that they may have offered more positive than negatives because the researcher is also associated with the project. However, their feedback does correspond with the data provided by students.

The Principal and teachers in Hope Avenue School view the project as having had a very positive impact on the school. They say the biggest change has been in the sense of autonomy of the year group involved in the project since second year. They now have a problem of success, in that many students are seeking out leadership roles on the Student Council and as Prefects, and there are not enough such roles in the school to meet demand:

INT Year 3 - Principal: I was just saying to somebody. We have a big problem for next year but it's a very positive problem because we have so many people who want to be like Prefects and senior mentors and we never had that problem before so that's great.

The project is run by a team of six teachers and two senior students but the Principal remarks ‘the team is quite big and it is really growing. I mean as such, obviously, the whole school has the team but you do need core people to drive it you know.’ Teachers note the importance of management support to implement and reinforce the project year-on-year, so that it becomes part of the school fabric. Challenges to the project implementation include the additional time needed to plan it into school hours. This school has used ‘Croke Park Hours’ for early team meetings and they are looking at how they can incorporate more of the project into class time. Pathways to College is removing a barrier in the students’ sense of possibility, according to one teacher:

INT Year 3: And I suppose the pathways to college is, we were just saying, then is taking a barrier away from where, if I take ownership of myself, where I can go to. And encouragement to build relationships. I think a big step for me was the student member of the CFES team and that we are part of it. There is a voice there for students. We seem to create a better voice for students through the whole lot.

The Principal also notes a significant impact on aspiration, with many more students insisting on taking the higher-level paper:

INT Year 3: Some of the teachers would be saying to me ‘I don’t know if they will pass the higher-level paper but they are insisting on doing it’ Which you know to me is, my response ‘So what, let them do the higher level, absolutely’to me that is great complaint and that shows me that TA21-CFES is working. When we have Traveller, boys wanting to do higher level, you know, and won’t drop down. And we have other boys from very poor backgrounds on their days off coming in and finishing engineering projects. Which I had yesterday, you know?

Teachers remark that it essentially removes apathy and gives students a greater sense of autonomy, hope and control, over their future. Mentors have had a huge impact, students have benefitted from informal exchanges about college with people who are not teachers and who have taken the time to come in to talk to them:

INT Year 3: Because that has been, you know, for a long time is a huge issue really but I think there is a lot more belief now among everybody that ‘You can if you want to because look at X, Y and Z’ the mentors have had a huge influence, those college mentors. They are so down to earth and they tell their own story and that means so much to the students and they are one of them, you know.

Enabling and Inhibiting Conversion Factors in developing the Capability of Autonomy

In Eagle Park School, the main barrier to autonomy in Year 2 was the sense that the TA21-CFES project was not as much a central component of school life as in Year 1: ‘They used to call us out all the time, every week for a different activity and now they don’t.’ Students understood but did not accept that perhaps the reason ‘they don’t talk to us as much about TA21-CFES’ was because of the Junior Cycle exam at the end of the year: ‘I know it’s exam year but we should be more involved, even if it’s an exam year.’ Although the positive experiences through the Leadership through Service core practice influenced autonomy in Year 1, the lack of perceived opportunities in Year 2 had a negative impact. By Year 3, some students have become resentful of the project, while others are not experiencing the same benefits as some Mentors have not been as reliable as others.

In **Hope Avenue School in Year 2**, students have not been as involved in the project, they remark that teachers have not permitted their involvement because of a much greater focus on the Junior Certificate examination. They have had only a small number of mentoring sessions and no Leadership project. They have, however, completed some Pathways to College work. Because of this, there is less evidence of a developing sense of autonomy through the project than was evident in Year 1. However, it is still their view that the project is building their confidence and providing useful information through mentoring networks. There was a sense that the TA21-CFES culture, which was becoming part of the whole school, was positive and that there were benefits for personal growth despite diminished project involvement.

INT(s) Year 2

Cliona: So last year when we came people, you said that being part of CFES had built your confidence, is that the case this year?

Aga (HA1): Yeah it is, few years get the opportunity to do this but they're like involving more years like the fourth years get to have the jumpers now as well so they're like happy with that.

Ashley (HA2): Well, the mock applications are really good and like the people you get to talk to that are already in college they share their experience with you so it's really good to have someone to talk to you about it.

In **Lucky Lane School, Year 2** there were mixed reports about the benefits of the TA21-CFES project and its impact upon students growing sense of autonomy. Students felt that 'having' to participate in the activities was removing their sense of self-direction and autonomy, indicating that TA21-CFES should be 'optional' especially in exam years.

FG Year 2

Katie (LL5): You hear like TA21, TA21 and you're like I'm stressed enough as it is I don't need this...I wish it was more kind of fun in the sense that it was a break away from like the school situation. Cause we did obviously, our leadership project but that was based around school...

Casey (LL9): And then we were pulled out of non-exam classes and them classes that are non-exam are really enjoyable, they're really relaxing".

Another student remarks on how the TA21-CFES project became secondary to the exams:

FG Year 2 - Szantina (LL8): ...we didn't have as many as what we did last year like, last year was great, we learned so much about colleges and how to get into them and everything, whereas this year it's kind of like "no your Junior Cert is more important so".

Students were clearly frustrated by the focus on exam year and having had such a good experience with TA21-CFES in year one, there was evidence that the autonomy they had gained was now being tested by the lack of independence to choose what they could do within the exam year. In **Morning Star School, Year 2**, students did not engage in as much Pathways and Mentoring work, so there is little evidence of its impact on the development of their sense of autonomy.

There are positive and negative processes evident in Year 2, through which autonomy is developing. For example, increased motivation is a positive process; students refer to their delight in meeting college students and visiting campuses, and the empowerment they feel when they learn that their future is in their own hands. Campus visits and wider college networks are enabling social conversion factors through which students are deciding to work harder and build their motivation. Therefore, increased motivation and self-belief are the processes through which the Pathways to College activities impact upon students developing sense of autonomy. Conversely, information and new networks may also be considered inhibiting conversion factors, as there is some evidence that they have increased students fear about their future. One student describes how the college investigations, and knowledge about entry requirements, has increased their fear, which they later state has impacted on their motivation and their sense of responsibility about their own future.

FG Year 2

Cliona: Yeah and calculating your points

Severall: Yeah

Cliona: How does that make you feel?

Vladyslav (MS5): Nervous

Cliona: Really, why?

Vladyslav (MS5): 'Cause if you don't get the things, like the grades, you won't be able to get to the college that you want.

In some cases, there are also inhibiting conversion factors within the school system which are actively discouraging autonomy and providing students with a sense of powerlessness about their future. One student talks about how being streamed into a lower subject level at a younger age will now make it very difficult for her to follow her ideal career of

becoming a teacher. The apathy she feels towards her future impacts upon the sense of autonomy she has and how much she feels in control of her own destiny. She said ‘Like, I really wanted to be a primary school teacher when I was like younger and I still would like to do it but you’ve to do higher Irish and I can’t do it, so.’ Another student highlights how streaming impacts upon her sense of control over her future:

INT Year 2 – Aga (HA1): Like, you get put into 5 different classes like everyone in first year, you don’t get to say what class you want, and I got put into the second last one which is like Ordinary level and like I got moved up to higher for a few of the subjects but say for like Irish I have to do Ordinary level, Maths I have to do Ordinary Level, I’d rather do higher but I can’t ‘cause my class and the subjects are scheduled, like if I have Irish like the higher level class has like English so I can’t swap, so yeah that’s a bad thing.

In both Years 1 and 2 there is clear evidence that students are becoming more self-directed and autonomous in terms of their schooling because of the TA21-CFES project. However, in Year 2 students are reflecting more deeply on the external factors that affect the development of their capability set. Students note that school structure, when it is open and allows choice, encourages their autonomy, providing them with access to information and relationships that harness this capability. When the structure is limiting, there is evidence in Hope Avenue School that it impedes this growth, limits their emerging autonomy and inhibits their sense of possibility.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided evidence of ways in which the TA21-CFES project is encouraging the development of the capability of autonomy in working-class students, so that they can make more informed choices about what they wish to do in the future and how their choices relate to what they consider to be a 'a life of value'. It presented a rationale for this exploration, drawing on the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 and evidence provided using a longitudinal qualitative exploration of the impact of three core practices: Leadership through Service, Pathways to College and Mentoring on students’ capability set.

The evidence presented demonstrates that involvement in the TA21 project is influencing students' sense of autonomy. Students' involvement in planning, cooperating, leading and completing a service-focused project are acting as enabling conversion factors in the development of their autonomy and providing them with confidence to achieve valued functionings. There is evidence that some students are also beginning to challenge perceptions of 'what we can do'; the Leadership core practice is facilitating the empowerment of working-class students, enabling them to explore and articulate what it is they value and have the capacity to influence in their own environment. In Year 2, evidence was presented that students felt structural limitations to the continued development of their autonomy, through the impact of the Junior Certificate examination, combined with a sense that they were 'having' to participate in the TA21-CFES project.

Nevertheless, evidence also indicated that there was a strong appetite amongst the students interviewed in all four schools to share their cultural capital with other students. They were also very aware of the benefits of broader social networks on their own confidence and autonomy, in relation to trusted relationships with college-going students, new conversations with family members, deepened trust with teachers and connections beyond the school to some local businesses. Although students are not specifically encouraged to consider structural reasons behind more limited progression within their communities, this is an important future consideration for development of transformative resistant capital and greater individual autonomy.

The evidence presented indicated that the Pathways to College core practice was addressing some structural challenges through supporting the guidance counsellor to develop a 'whole school approach' to guidance and to ensure that Junior Cycle students are getting the guidance they need at an earlier stage. Students were making explicit connections between the information they have been exposed to through TA21-CFES pathways activities and responsibility for their own futures. This reflected a growing sense of agency and autonomy through internalising the knowledge they are gaining about college. Pathways to College was also influencing institutional culture, through creating a framework to deliver and discuss information relating to post-secondary choices early in the second level cycle and through strengthening student-teacher trust. Evidence presented indicated that mentoring relationships with relatable 'others' were supporting students to develop autonomy through greater confidence that they can

achieve their goals and through its impact on their habitual work patterns and longer term goal setting. The Leadership through Service core practice yielded greater evidence of change to student autonomy than did Mentoring or Pathways to College. However, evidence points towards the conclusion that students have developed a stronger sense of their own autonomy through the opportunity to engage in teamwork with a project goal. This, combined with new information on future options and wider networks of college-going young people are all working together to have a positive impact on their aspirations towards higher education.

Chapter 5: The Capability of Practical Reason and College Knowledge

This chapter builds on the exploration and evidence presented in Chapter 4 regarding the capabilities required by working-class students to aspire towards higher education, by proposing that students need to develop the capability of practical reason and college knowledge. It highlights some differences across the four schools and student experiences. It also discusses enabling and inhibiting conversion factors within their environment that may affect their ability to convert developing capabilities into functionings. Finally, it cites new information derived from mentors and teachers, campus visits and broader, more positive discussions across their home and school community as the principal processes through which working-class students in partner schools are developing the capability of practical reason and college knowledge.

The Capability of Knowledge and Practical Reason and Pathways to College

Students reported that the college knowledge gleaned from the project was providing them with a ‘road map’ to college. One student stated that TA21-CFES was ‘a guide to know what to do for college’; a point that was reiterated by students across several schools. Students developed both factual and experiential knowledge. Factual knowledge related to information about entry requirements, subject choices and points requirements. There is evidence that this knowledge reduced students’ fears and opened a world of new possibilities:

FG Year 1

Casey (LL9): It kind of made us less scared than we used to be about going to college. . . ‘cause now you know it’s only going to be a few forms.

Katie (LL5): I didn’t really know what college was. I thought you just picked a random college and got a job. . . Like I didn’t know you had to plan and the points for college.

Factual and Experiential Knowledge

Students are gaining experiential knowledge through their family networks and mentors. The combination of the factual and experiential knowledge provided by the project is

developing their understanding of higher education, even in those who resisted the idea of college:

INT Year 1 – Katie (LL5): [Last year] we had a negative thing about college like it was so bad and all but that just wasn't true, but after seeing what it's like, it's much better. I never really wanted to go to college but it's making me, because we went to colleges and all; it's making me want to go to it; just it's making me want to go to it now.

As Robeyns (2003) observes, knowledge of others with whom students can identify and knowledge for critical thinking and inquiry is fundamental to educational uplift. Knowledge is discussed here as system knowledge rather than academic skills or abilities. New knowledge has also helped students become clearer about their future, even if that meant they had decided that higher education was not for them. When asked if TA21-CFES changed their plans, one student replied 'No... I still want to become a mechanic'.

Other students reported being more informed about where they could go and what they could study. Some realised that they were restricted to certain places, 'I decided there was only one college I could go to if I wanted to be a vet and that was UCD', while others were encouraged by the range of choice available to them:

FG Year 1 - Nicola (EP6): I wanted to be a music teacher but there's other things I could've done. I could've done music technology or music for commercials and all that, like there's a lot, you find out there is more of a range of courses that you can take on, instead of just teaching.

Changing Habitual Patterns

St John (2006; 2011) cites the development of new habitual patterns as essential to breaking the access barrier. There is evidence that students in the TA21-CFES project are developing knowledge about the level of work required to progress onto higher education. Completing college investigations at age 14 has impacted upon this knowledge and has pushed them to work harder. Students talk about how developing this

knowledge earlier in their schooling has had a behavioural impact: ‘I think we’re a lot calmer in school now, we’re not as like “Ugh, I hate school” anymore’. The project has helped them to build cultural capital, through discussing college with their parents and hearing their views on it. This has encouraged some students, as they have higher trust that their parents support the students’ college ambitions:

My ma and da were always kinda like backing me up on anything I’d ever dis-I’d done. But like when I brought up the college their faces lit up and like “Yes, you’re going to college! If you want to go to college, you can go”

For other students, college knowledge is strengthening their voice. They are more confident, curious and less fearful of asking questions: ‘you learn how to ask the right questions’. Appadurai (2004) links the capacity to aspire to student voice. Where schooling fosters voice, it simultaneously nurtures aspiration. Exposure to different kinds of cultural capital, broader social relations and networks, new college knowledge based on campus visits and relatable mentors, and a new-found confidence in their ability to ‘ask the right questions’ are all enabling conversion factors through which students are developing the capability of college knowledge and practical reason. This section has provided an overview of the emergent themes in this chapter. The sub-sections below explore in detail the impact of the project on students’ developing capability of college knowledge and practical reason.

The Capability of Knowledge and Practical Reason and Pathways to College

In Year 1, students in all schools have identified college costs as an inhibiting social conversion factor in their future educational progression.

Costs of College

St John (2006; 2011) details the extent to which fears about college costs can act as an inhibiting conversion factor in student post-secondary planning. It is part of what Watts (2007) refers to as the ‘adapted preference’ problem. In **Eagle Park School, Year 1**, participation in the project has built student knowledge to identify barriers to higher education progression. They have some awareness about college costs but in some cases

this has caused concern rather than comfort. They still know very little regarding the specific costs regarding going to college but they have an idea that it costs ‘a lot 4 or 5 grand.’ As far as this group is concerned, finance is the only barrier they identify as a factor that may prevent them from progressing to higher education:

FG Year 1

Cliona: Are there any other barriers to going to college do you think for people?

Thibaut (EP4): Background. Like the family might not have enough money to pay for them going to college.

In **Morning Star School, Year 1**, students have greater knowledge about what is required to get to college and what it might be like to attend college but they remain confused and, in some cases, concerned about the costs of college and how these might be met. Concerns about college costs are perceived as a barrier by some students and they do not yet have enough information to address those concerns.

FG Year 1

Cliona: Did you learn anything about finances or anything for going to college?

Dylan (MS6) No, we haven’t really gone into anything like that.

Cliona: How do you guys think college is paid for?

David (MS6): Bursary.

Conor (MS2): Eh you pay a certain amount every year.

Lubimir (MS3): Grants.

Kelsey (MS1): Studentships.

Goal-Setting and Subject Choice

In **Eagle Park School, Year 1** the project has built their cultural capital in respect of future choices:

INT Year 1

Brenda (EP1): I think it just gets you thinking, doesn’t it? Because in second year, I think if we didn’t have TA21-CFES the last thing you would think about is college. But now it’s, as I said, there is goals and like in mentoring we talked

about goals and like, I remember it was like weekly goals, monthly goals, and then yearly. So, it just motivated us to do that goal, to reach it and yeah.

Jack (EP2): I think it really opens your mind about stuff you can do. I think, like it makes it realistic what you can do rather than like “Oh I think I’d like to do this” but now you know how to get there.

In **Morning Star School, Year 1** Students describe the type of people who go to college as ‘smart people’ but this is qualified by the acknowledgement that ‘if you want to and you have the motivation and you have the means like money wise to get in then I’d say anyone can’. They are also aware that there are a variety of ways of getting to college, noting that ‘If you don’t get enough points you can do certain things to get through’ and these are ‘Certain things to go around, like different courses and things.’ Knowledge developed through the project is therefore building their cultural capital. Students remark that they feel more motivated because of the project and that they have ‘something to be proud of and it makes you want to think more about college’. It has also helped them with goal setting – both short and long term. It has focused them on the detail of their future objectives, one student remarks: ‘It just helps you think of what you maybe would prefer to do than what you were just thought of before like. You just assume then you want to be like a doctor say but then you become more realistic when you think about what you need.’

This student is demonstrating how they have integrated the project knowledge with their own perspective through a developing capability of practical reason. They are also now aware that they will need to consider their subject choices at an early stage to work towards their future goals:

INT(s) Year 1

Jack (EP2): So that if you want to get like your degree you have to have those subjects if you want to go into the course like in college.

Brenda (EP2): More research and also, em focusing on studying like, like making sure that I am... focused on marks basically to make sure I get the good requirements to do that course.

Students completed an exercise where they calculated the points they were currently achieving against what they needed to get to the course they were interested in. There is evidence that for some students, this exercise has helped them focus on how to do better, while for others it has reassured them that the course they are aiming for is realistic:

INT(s) Year 1

Jack (EP2): Well...I was looking at game, art, and design and the points aren't really high so I was pretty happy when I saw it because yeah.

Brenda (EP1): Like I thought I could do a bit better. It's not that I'm doing bad but just like...that I can get better grades and stuff, and then improve on what I'm already doing.

They are also now aware that the decisions they make regarding not just subjects but also higher, ordinary and foundation level subjects will impact on their academic attainment:

INT Year 1 - Jack (EP2): I'd say picking like higher and ordinary, if you don't pick enough higher-level subjects then you won't get enough points to get to college. I just found that out like, so I was trying to think of ways to make sure I get enough points.

There is evidence too that the knowledge and cultural capital they have acquired has fundamentally reframed their perspective on what the benefits of going to college might be:

INT Year 1

Jack (EP2): Because I would have thought going to college was useless. You wouldn't need it at all to get into anything. We had to do a lot of searching about it and stuff.

Brenda (EP1): Like you just thought "what's the point going there". I didn't know how it works basically then. Like the project taught me how to get that information.

Life Skills and Educational Resilience

Wilson-Strydom (2012) defines educational resilience as the ability to negotiate risk, to persevere academically and to be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive constraints; and aspiring and hopes for a successful university career. The project is building knowledge but students note that they are also acquiring life skills through their extended networks,

INT(s) Year 1

Cliona: Do you think it's doing anything else for you? Other than giving you knowledge for college, is there any other thing it's preparing you for?

Brenda (EP1): For life, basically. For getting jobs, and stuff.

Jack (EP2): How to work, in like teamwork. Like we go to like Trinity College or something, and then we have to go in like groups and work together. It might be like people from different schools, and that would kind of help you like, to make new friends and help you like understand how you would work in a team.

In Lucky Lane School, Year 1 the knowledge students acquire through the project motivates them to work harder. The students are changing their habitual patterns because of this knowledge. They are more aware of what is required of them in terms of progressing in school, and while they understood the difficulty in getting specific colleges/course they speak of the value in persisting for the longer-term benefits. In Year 1 there is also evidence that the college knowledge they are accumulating through the new networks is forming new cultural capital, they are talking to their families about college resulting in shared ambitions for their future. Students in Year 1 described how positive TA21-CFES is for those who have limited college-going cultural capital within their family networks. Overall, Year 1 provides knowledge that is translating into new cultural capital, in some respects this challenged the view within some families that college may not be useful or possible. The students also talk about the emergence of family pride regarding the young people's discussions and plans for their future.

College Costs

In Year 2, the concern and uncertainty about college costs continues to be an ‘access barrier’ (St John 2006) for students. In **Lucky Lane School, Year 2** students talk specifically about the knowledge they are acquiring about college costs and how this is affecting their plans. This is exemplified in several students’ responses:

INT Year 1

Emily (LL1): one (money) of my biggest worries about it ’cause like I feel bad enough having to pay for Junior Cert stuff never mind college books and college, getting into college in general.

Students talk about college grants, and knowing about different levels of grant entitlement. There is evidence that information about finances is helping them plan for their futures, with some referring to getting part time work, and others talking about grant supports and scholarships.

In **Eagle Park School, Year 2** familial networks were central to students’ understanding of costs and those with a family member in college had some awareness of student grants, alternative access routes and college supports. Students repeated concern that going to college costs “a lot” indicating that knowledge about the costs of college is creating some fear and may be an inhibiting conversion factor for some students.

FG Year 2

Cliona: Yeah, ok. So, do you have any idea how much college costs?

Kevin (EP5): No, well I think like around a thousand euro or something.

Cliona: Yeah, you think it does cost though.

Kevin (EP5): Yeah, I think it does cost a lot to get into college.

Despite limited information about the cost of going to college, the project has built students’ understanding that going to college can be a way to progress into a career that may be fulfilling and provide more family income:

FG Year 2

Cliona: What kind of jobs do you think people who go to college do?

Kevin (EP5): They get really good jobs like em, and engineer a doctor a nurse, the kind of much more better jobs.

Cliona: Yeah, and why do you think those are better jobs?

Kevin (EP5): ‘cause, they’ve got, well, they get paid more (laughs)

Cliona: Yeah, that’s fair. And how about you?

Nicola (EP6): They kind of do like important jobs ‘cause if we didn’t have enough doctors it’d be very hard to aid people when they’re sick or when they’ve broke their arm or something.

Cliona: Yeah and I guess in line with that so how much money do you think that college graduates would earn, compared to people that don’t go to college? Do you think they earn more or less?

Thibaut (EP4): Way more...

Kevin (EP5): They’d earn more than people that didn’t go to college.

Early Information

Smyth et al. (2011), McCoy et al. (2014) and Keane (2013) discuss the impact of limited educational guidance on working-class students, where information on post-secondary routes is more limited. In Ireland, much of the time allocated for educational guidance is absorbed by individual counselling and there is virtually no guidance provided to students at the Junior Certificate level. This means students are more likely to choose the subjects and levels that will limit them in their pathways when it comes to preparing for the Leaving Certificate. There is evidence that even when students do not like the project, they recognise how it is changing their views and providing them with access to knowledge and networks that are not available to their peers. One student stated:

FG Year 2 - Nicola (EP6): I don’t really think about it like when the mentor comes in and all I think about it then but otherwise I just focus on other things, do you get me. But like I do think it’s important that its came into the school, ‘cause like my friend who’s in a different school hasn’t got a clue about anything

she wants to become or anything like that, so I think that we've got an advantage over other schools.

Other students talk about their factual knowledge on what is required to progress to higher education, different subject choices and the range of routes of entry. Having this information so early in their second level cycle is perceived as providing them with more options:

INT Year 2 - Olivia (EP3): Other years don't start learning about it until like fifth or sixth year, but we're only in third year and we already know so much about it, so we're like prepared for it that we already know what's gonna happen and all... Because when I came into first year I didn't think that like school was important or anything. I thought aw we just have to come. Now I know like you have to go to school you have to do something and get where you want to in life.

However, there is also evidence of conflict between their existing social and cultural capital and the project messages. Students talk about their backgrounds and families preventing them from progressing, they also explain the sometimes-negative impact of peer behaviour; 'friends that don't want to go to college and all might be saying ah you don't need to study just...' This demonstrates that students are developing the capability of practical reason, integrating their early, new knowledge and awareness into their perspectives for the future, and discussing these options with friends, teachers and families.

The early information that students acquire through TA21-CFES is translating into increased aspiration to go to college. Students observe that the project makes college more accessible, 'it's real approachable now.' Students comment that two years of information makes the difference to their self-belief;

INT Year 2 - Olivia (EP3): In second year, especially and the start of this year kind of made us realise that like it is possible to get there and that no matter where you come from or what you do in school there's always a way to kind of better yourself in the sense of going to college.

In Year 2, the students in **Lucky Lane School** are already demonstrating practical reason by using the project knowledge to make more informed choices.

INT Year 2 - Sonya (LL2): It's too like I dunno, like when I walk into Trinity I don't think this is my college I think it's a lovely college, but I don't wanna go here... It just bores me, there's nothing fun about it.... and it looks too, what's the word I can't think... I can't think of the word... It's not modern, it's just like... It's old and...I want to go to like DIT or NCAD or something.

Other students liked the feel of the college and were surprised by the type of people they met in the college, 'Personally I would have thought Trinity College would have been like a real like snobby place but going into it you see that it's like there's just like normal people in it.'

Educational Resilience

In **Eagle Park School, Year 2** participation in the project continues to build student knowledge regarding pathways to college, career exploration, college environment, academic and personal requirements for success. Students voiced a positive regard for their school for supporting them to acquire college knowledge, saying that this inspired them to persevere even with difficult subjects required for matriculation. Persistent barriers to knowledge should be understood against the backdrop that students felt there was significantly less TA21-CFES project engagement with their cohort in Year 2: 'It was kinda less work than last year. I know it's exam year, but like we, they said that, there'd be a little bit of TA21-CFES but, not a whole lot...'

INT Year 2 - It kinda gave like an extra, like it kinda helped me think that like there's not always one way there's many other paths getting to college, and I think CFES is just the biggest path there is to get to college, and that's what kind of put my mind and said, you know look, even if I don't get in I might get in with CFES.

The TA21-CFES project is increasing the capability of practical reason and college knowledge in students through the development of cultural capital via college subject and career exploration, campus visits and opportunities to attend college-style academic

sessions on campus. Even when students discussed feeling uncomfortable in the college environment, some were willing to 'give it a fair chance' while others had identified ways they could navigate it.

FG Year 2

Cliona: Was it? What was scary about it?

Nicola (EP6): Just that it's so big and that in a couple of years we'll be there as well. And the lessons that we did were so long. We did like an hour and a half of psychology and he was like that's just a half they are usually up to three hours.

Ciaran: And the big long rooms, with just like 200 seats in a big room and then just a professor or something at the end of the stage like.

In **Lucky Lane School, Year 2**, students have developed greater confidence in their ability to make it to college:

INT(s) Year 2

Emily (LL1): Eh yeah, it makes me more prepared for college and what happens in college.

Cliona: Ok, and having that knowledge, how does that help with your confidence? If you think about before you had that knowledge?

Emily (LL1): Just that it's not, college is not as hard to get to as people make it seem, and it's more accessible.

Cliona: But do you think that you'll be able to fulfil them (your ambitions)?

Sonya (LL2): Eh, yeah.

Cliona: and why do you believe that?

Sonya (LL2): Because, eh, I think I do good in my subjects and the subjects that I need that I know I want for college, I understand them and find them kind of fun and interesting.

Here, the student connects their enjoyment of subject areas with their career ambitions, a long-term view that indicates the project knowledge has built their capability of practical reason. In addition to this, students have a nuanced understanding of the range of college routes available:

INT Year 2

Cliona: That's ok. So, when you did the CAO thing did that affect you in any way?

Kiara (LL3): It actually helped me know like Level 5s like the difference of them and like the other ones like the Level 8 and universities and like.

Cliona: Do you think CFES is preparing you for your future?

Kiara (LL3): CFES I think does because it gives you like just your own college and stuff, like different colleges and universities and like shows you what's out there on offer like.

Students continue to build their networks through the project, which is helping to build their knowledge and confidence:

INT Year 2

Cliona: And what do you think your school is doing, to prepare you?

Sonya (LL2): They're getting us ready, they're having us have our books for every class which is just normal every day. They're telling us what we'll need, different breaks that we'll have, they're bringing us to colleges to show us how students work in colleges. They're bringing in mentors which I'm very thankful for, because it is going to help me in the long run.

Goal-Setting

TA21-CFES also supports the development of practical reason and college knowledge in students by encouraging them to set academic goals and to understand what is required to achieve these goals. Students demonstrate their ability to manage choices and challenges and how to best direct their efforts to meet goals and exhibit a sense of satisfaction that they tried their best in pursuit of their goals:

INT Year 2

Emily (LL1): But I think having TA21-CFES kind of makes you driven towards kind of, you have a goal and you know like, when you look into all your college points and everything it kind of makes you think well you know I might want to

keep up my Irish because, it kind of makes you put more effort into things so for example like Spanish, I dropped to ordinary Spanish but I've higher level Maths and Irish so I think I'll be covered type thing but if I hadn't been involved in CFES I wouldn't have probably considered that when I was thinking about oh maybe I'll put a bit of effort into my maths because the extra 25 points type of thing.

Cliona: Yeah, that's good ok. Em, so you said last year that CFES had made you work hard, do you think that's still true?

Emily (LL1): Yeah, definitely because when you have the goal of college and you know that ok I need this many points or even if you don't need that many points, you'd like to think that you tried your best to achieve them points and as I said now if I didn't know that I needed higher Maths or higher Irish I wouldn't have tried as hard and now like I kept them up and I'm really happy I did...

In **Hope Avenue School, Year 3**, students reflect on their extended family and how this impacts on individual choice. Despite having college ambitions, some students comment on their lack of knowledge and the impact this might have. One student who moves from the Inner City to this school remarks on the impact of being in a school where she has access to early information and a growing sense of choice:

INT Year 3 - Ashley (HA2): I come from like, because I'm not from this area originally, I'm from the inner city. So, my nanny wouldn't of went to college. Like none of my uncles or aunties would've went to college. My da went a college but it was like an IT⁷ not a university and my mam was like from a trade from very young.... So, I was never around people who actually went to college.

Cliona: Yeah.

Ashley (HA2): Like they would support and say like 'you should go to college' but I was never with people who went and were like 'We done this and we done that'. So, like when I kind of like came here I was kind of like 'Oh I do want to

⁷ An IT is an Institute of Technology, a type of higher education created from the late 1960s onwards and, with the exception of Dublin Institute of Technology, were formerly known as Regional Technical Colleges. There are 14 IoTs nationwide. The institutions traditional courses focused particularly in business, engineering and science. In recent years there has been a rapid expansion in apprenticeships and nursing courses.

go to college'. But I was kind of like 'How do you even get into it, like how do you even go about trying to?' Like, I had no information and then couldn't really give it to me either. Like, my dad would help me and look it up and stuff like but I was only in first year at the time. And second year came along and like third year and that was what really got me interested in really wanting to go to college. But I started taking school a lot more serious and I started putting more focus on subjects that I found really interesting. Like, I can even tell you off the top of my head what I subjects I need for biotechnology and stuff like that.

While supportive, this student's family do not have access to the knowledge she needs to make informed choices about her future, she draws instead on her own resources to find the necessary information and takes advantage of all opportunities through the project to refine her goals for the future. She is demonstrating the capability of practical reason and college knowledge by pursuing information and experiences that will support her in the future. She draws on her family networks for validation of her trajectory and her peers to join her in the journey to college.

In **Year 3, Lucky Lane School** students get most benefit out of the Pathways to College exercise where they use their Junior Certificate points to calculate what points they might get in their Leaving Certificate. For some students, this is a reassuring exercise and it has impact because it is directly relevant for them:

INT(s) Year 3

Jack (EP2): Like I have to work on this to get good points because like I didn't like my results and I was upset by them but then when I did the points system I was like I'm really proud because I got more points than I expected and more than I needed for the course I was looking at so it kind of made me like okay I'm doing okay I don't need to panic or anything and like that's a good thing.

Brenda (EP1): It's like self-reflection, it's pretty good. Other than just filling in something that I don't know has been given to us. That's why we probably like that. Like to see your progress I guess throughout even though you don't really think about it much but like when, for example for CAO you think about it too much but you don't really get your progress kind of I don't know.

Similarly, in **Morning Star School, Year 3**, the new knowledge students have developed through the project has provided both impetus and inspiration and it helps students to distinguish between what they enjoy doing and what they would potentially like to do as a career:

INT Year 3: It also rules out like em, things that if you actually want to do it as a hobby or as a job. So, for like you know computer science I used to think that I would like that course and want to be a software engineer or something but now I just feel like. I think I would just do it as a hobby because I feel like I would rather be researching in like fields of science instead of doing that although I loved it like enjoyed it.

While not related to the project, some students express the teaching and learning approach they experience as potentially alienating. They articulate some of the tension behind the ‘teacher-directed’ teaching model that is more prevalent in DEIS schools (Growing up in Ireland 2011). These students are aware of the impact of a didactic, uniform approach to teaching, rather than a more personalised one and they speak about the impact of this on their attainment and engagement. This demonstrates a growing critical awareness of the structures and processes behind their everyday experiences of school and an ability to incorporate new knowledge into an analysis of how their own outcomes might be different in an alternative learning environment:

INT Year 3 - Kelsey (MS4): I hate that like teachers do that a lot like they compare you to other students and they’re kind of like. Like for instance (this hasn’t actually happened) it could be like a teacher would go like Stacey could do her work so why couldn’t you but like I’m in a completely different situation like my mind could be anywhere else. They just expect you to do work the way everyone else does it and I work completely different to say what Stacey would work as like I’m very talkative person. I’m not saying Stacey’s not this is just a for instance. That’s why I’m good at art and music because I actually like do something. Whereas like if anybody else, they could like write it out loads of times and learn it and I feel like instead of levels in school, they should cater to the different ways of learning rather than higher or ordinary.

In **Eagle Park School, Year 3**, the students have not further developed their knowledge from the project, but they still demonstrate growing confidence and strong college knowledge acquired in the earlier project years:

INT Year 3

Cliona: Did you gain new knowledge about educational options this year?

Olivia (EP3): Em, I think that we had a lot of the knowledge already. So, I don't think I've learned much things that are new other than the specifics about grants and things like that but I definitely have discovered a lot about myself this year and about my career choices and I think a little bit more about college life as well because I actually... I think I'm also getting really excited for college because I kind of feel like I've matured a lot in TY and in a way, I just want to be done with school and just doing something that I love.

The Capability of Practical Reason and College Knowledge and Mentoring

The developing capability of practical reason and college knowledge has taken place through a range of social conversion factors. Throughout the project, students mainly developed the capability of practical reason and college knowledge through engagement in the Pathways to College core practice. However, their involvement with mentors and the experiential information they gain from them has also been beneficial. Students refer to the importance of having mentors who come from similar communities, saying that this provided a strong foundation from which to assimilate new and trusted information. It has allowed students to develop an understanding of alternative entry routes to college. Zoe (MS10) talked about how her mentor showed her the different paths to higher education:

FG Year 3 – Zoe (MS10): I heard [from my mentor] that if you get lower than you're aiming. . . you can take an access course. . . and then you go through that course and then you do some examinations in that and then if you do well you can go on to your [degree] course if you want to. . .It's more years to do your course, like four years for your course, but it might take six because you needed two years to get into your course.

Similarly, Szantina (LL8) remarked:

FG Year 3 – Szantina (LL8): Because they know, what it's like to feel, what you're going through yourself. They mostly didn't want to go to college either. It's something that they just didn't, thought it was useless. Then they are telling us now that that you really did need to go to it. Because they're- they have jobs that they wouldn't have got only that they went to college so that helps us to see that you need to go to it to get what you want to achieve, your goals. And they talk to us about organization and stuff like so it's really important. And my mentor, she's still in college, so it's like she tells us about college and life there and stuff so it's really important and interesting.

Students talk about the importance of knowing their mentors, of seeing them in their schools and communities; this has allowed them to ask questions and develop knowledge about what they need to do to be successful. It is the combination of trust and availability of information which is impacting upon the capability of knowledge and practical reason in the students. A strong theme that emerges is: 'If they can do it, then so can I!' Mentors have provided broader networks within which students are navigating their college objectives. Students have also extended these college discussions into their families:

FG Year 3 - Casey (LL9): We did mentoring with past students in our school and college students gone; And we just, they told, we learned more about to think college in the future.

Sophie (LL10): I told my mam that we were doing this, programme called the CFES and that it's called "College for Every Student" and it's like if you have you have a bad background, bad grades, and you're not really a good student, you can still work your way up and get into college

Students know that to get to college they will need more than hard work, they remark they will also need advice from their mentors, parents, friends and teachers.

In **Lucky Lane School, Year 3**, students feel confident they have developed sound knowledge of the system through interaction with their mentors and teachers. This

demonstrates the combined impact of activities in both Pathways to College and Mentoring core practices. Emily describes it here:

INT Year 3 – Emily (LL1): Because we were doing loads of like, with my mentor and some of the teachers, we were doing like surveys on things that we might be interested in and we got lots of different choices like you would hear jobs that you wouldn't even think of, like you think of like a doctor or a teacher or a vet or something but there's actually like so much more out there and CFES made us go into detail on what we wanted to do. Then we did this thing where we picked what our ideal job was and got the points and then for the Junior Cert we got so, say an A is like 90 points or whatever, I don't know what way it works, but we added up all of our points and seen if we got the job and what other things we could have done. So that was good. So, you learned a lot more about the other jobs that are out there in the world and that there's something for everybody. That it's not just all the basic jobs.

Principal and Teacher Perspectives – Lucky Lane and Morning Star Schools

The value of accessing early information, highlighted by Smyth (2011; 2014) is evident when school leadership are interviewed. In **Lucky Lane School**, the Principal observes the biggest impact of the project is that students realise they have more choice about their future. Developing the capability of knowledge and practical reason, through structured information sessions and campus visits provides them with a strong sense of the value of education for all aspects of their life:

INT Year 3 – Principal: And certainly, since I've come here now and I'm in my seventh year as Principal it has probably been the single most important initiative that has come into the school. It is now giving them that information and knowledge that allows them to make their own choices and even if they never go to university, it's the fact that education is so important, and they realise that

education is for them, they can access education, whether it is at third level, whether it is a trade, whether it is a PLC⁸.

In **Morning Star School**, the Principal talks about many of the students as having had a ‘rocky start’ with education and coming from families that did not have the capabilities to support their children. The experiential knowledge students are gaining through stories of success about other former students of the school, and their difficulties while in the second level system, are having a motivating effect on students and what teachers believe they are capable of:

INT Year 3 – Principal: It is because many of the parents that we meet, while they would respect the school, they would respect what we are doing, they would respect education, they may not just have themselves, within themselves that get up and go or the drive or perhaps the knowledge to access or maybe there is a fear of education or fear of third level. The year group that (Teacher) took over back in 2013, we only got 47 students and she immediately recognised that it was a small cohort. It was an ideal number to say, “Fine let’s do something different”. And this is the end result of it. So, as you can see today, I mean we have a wonderful set of projects. We’ve had that man coming in. A former student who is now going to do a PhD in Harvard. And there’s a little essay written out there on the wall of a girl who had grave difficulties in school. Attended maybe 40% of the time but would have been exposed to TAP. She’s now doing medicine in Trinity. Now that is just phenomenal. I mean there is another boy in Trinity who was expelled out of a school not far from here. Badly treated. And he is in Trinity. So, the point I am making is that, you know, we all get a sort of a, some of these lads and lassies have a rocky start.

Knowledge of ‘relatable role models’ (O’Sullivan et al. 2017; Hannon et al. 2017) is helping students to understand that where the second level system may not support or develop all students, this does not mean those students do not have educational potential. In Eagle Park School, meanwhile, John comments on how much they have integrated the

⁸ A PLC is a post-leaving certificate course in a college of further education. It is often a preparation for employment but it can also be used to progress to higher education.

project into their school planning and the impact of this:

INT Year 3 – John (teacher): Em yeah, I suppose I would have been involved in the pilot project so I would have been one of those people that was drafted in, so I can see a huge change that is now part of our planning in school and is part of what every year group is meant to do. So, I think it is part of the culture of the school now and I think being a DEIS school and everything, I don't know if you guys agree but like what CFES just feeds into kind of everything now. Like there is an expectation for them now and they're talking about going to college and even if it's something very, very small but they're still having those conversations. Better subject choices. Not all of the time obviously, but I think their mind set is changed a little bit.

This is significant as it addresses some of the structural challenges within the school that impact on students and helps teachers to re-orientate aspects of school planning to support all students to reach their potential. It is becoming part of the school 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1996; Reay 2009). Sinead agrees that it has moved from an 'add-on' to something which is part of the school culture:

INT Year 3 – Sinead (teacher): I think it is part of the culture like it's not an extra thing. It is I think and even more now in the third year here, kids know what it is and will refer to it and mention it so it's kind of weaved in.

Other teachers can see that it affects the quality of materials students use to present and explain themselves, this is particularly evident when they are preparing their curriculum vitae for transition year:

INT Year 3 – Emmet (teacher): They're putting it in like, I am in charge of the exams in June and I made them do, like before it would be fill in a form if you're interested but I was like no, I was like they should do a CV and an application form and a cover letter because some of the stuff that we got back, I was like I need to look at my own CV because this is.... And they're mentioning things like CFES in their cover letters so it has just become part of what they talk about and.....

The final difference teachers allude to is the importance of the project intervening with students so early in the second level cycle. They see this has had an impact on motivation, attainment and subject choice:

INT(s) Year 3

John: I think one possible thing about the CFES em, is that they get involved with it so early em, certainly like I would be involved in organising the careers thing which we do with second years and when people are coming in from outside, they're kind of like they're surprised that we are doing it with second years instead of sixth years which is typically done but I think in sixth year, mistakes have been made (laugh) you know. It is a bit late to decide what you want to be in sixth year when you have already given up halfway through second year but yeah by kind of giving them the models and getting them involved and thinking about it as early as first year and second year, you're kind of giving them something to aim for like.

Sinead: It helps them for the subject choices then like for the Leaving Cert. Like to bring their focus to what do I want to do when I get to fifth year rather than thinking about it last minute.

Inhibiting Social and Geographical Conversion Factors

In **Lucky Lane School Year 2**, there is greater evidence that new knowledge has alerted students to some potential barriers to their hopes for the future:

INT Year 2

Sonya (LL2): Well, I chose like Engineering and all, but most of the subjects you have to do for Engineering is Higher Level, and I don't do higher level Maths anymore, so, I'm not going to be [sure?] about that anymore.

Cliona: And, was there a place after you did you assignment where you could ask that question?

Sonya (LL2): Well no because we did it in the computer room, but I asked my teacher, and he said you can do some stuff in Engineering at ordinary but most of the stuff is higher level.

Some students observe that their schooling is itself a barrier to preparing them for the future:

INT Year 2

Cliona: Ok, so it's a lot of work, but you don't think it's preparing you that much for your future?

Carly (LL4): Well, not like it depends on what kind of job you're going into, like if you're going into a job where you've got to learn a lot of stuff, like a scientist or a doctor, like that'd be good for a lot of that, but like, if you're going to like for example, childcare or something, I don't think you need to learn whole lot of science and all that like.

Cliona: Yeah, so you think school prepares some people better than others? Depending on what they wanna do?

Carly (LL4): Yeah, I think schools know they [?] based on the STEM as well.

Cliona: Yeah ok, and you don't like that

Carly (LL4): It's not that I don't like it I just don't think it's relevant in everyone's life.

For other students, the range of choices and sometime the location of colleges are perceived as barriers, as they appear keen to attend college locally. This shows how developing this early knowledge is helping students to consider the whole range of dimensions involved in making a college choice: course, finance, location, environment, 'fit'.

Educational Resilience

In **Hope Avenue School, Year 2** there is clear evidence that students have a greater understanding of higher education and the requirements necessary to progress their goals. Some of them have concerns regarding the cost of college and these worries have not been addressed by the CFES project. There is a difference between Year 1 and Year 2 in

terms of the network effect. There is greater evidence that peers have been a potential distraction in Year 2 of the project. Students are building a deeper awareness of the life choices of their wider family network and the educational role models they have met through the project. There is evidence in Year 2 that students are more conscious of the potential barriers to their educational progression but they are still hopeful that with hard work and the right advice, they will get to where they want to go. They have begun to reconfigure who they think goes to college, remarking that ‘CFES has taught them ‘You don’t have to smart, you have to work hard.’ This means that ‘CFES can fill the knowledge gaps that ‘smart’ people have, so that they too will be able to figure out how to get to college. By Year 3, the students are more reflective about their schooling, more aware of the range of choices and more realistic about where they may progress to in the future. Knowing the range of possible routes to course choices, as well as having met people from their own community who have made it there, is reassuring for them and making their plans more concrete.

There is evidence of deeper reflection on what education is versus schooling and the value of schooling itself. Students distinguish between learning and the formal learning environment:

INT Year 2 - Aga (HA1): I like education, I don’t like school? Because in school we, we get judged like everyone gets judged on the same thing, do you get me? I have a friend called A, and she’s really good at maths and business where I’d be better at English, and science, and art, but we’d get judged in the same way.... That’s what I don’t like, but I like learning new things.

Students are excited about the idea of creating new knowledge, not just learning what is already there:

INT Year 2 - Aga (HA1): To think people years on could actually go like “they’re learning about something that you found out in the world that hasn’t been found out yet”

The encouragement they receive from the new networks in CFES is important in their developing knowledge, one student reflects on the difference encouragement makes to their aspirations:

INT Year 2 - Georgia (HA3): They encourage you a lot, uh, give like... they say to obviously study a lot more when you're younger then it gets easier and easier instead of just not studying and then just having loads to do when you're older. All my cousins dropped out so I had no encouragement.

New knowledge is also encouraging students to find a balance between what they perceive as 'a good life' within their own family network and project messages:

INT Year 2:...my oldest brother, he works in the airport and I think that's a bit good for him, cause he's getting money to pay rent and to try get a new house and all. And then my other brother, he has a like good enough job for himself.

This is evidence that students are developing hope and habitus through a thickening aspirational map (Appadurai 2004; Bourdieu 1996). In **Hope Avenue School, Year 2**, many students remarked that they did not have as much involvement in practices to build their knowledge, such as Mentoring and Pathways to College, because of the focus on the Junior Certificate. Students have visited a range of different colleges and they are making their choices based on this new knowledge. There is evidence of a link between this knowledge and the motivation to work hard for the Junior Certificate:

INT Year 2

Cliona: Em, so you said last year that CFES had made you work hard, is that still true?

Ashley (HA2): Yeah, it really is because, it kind of motivated me to study, like on days I'd be like no I'll just study tomorrow and I'll keep saying that but then I'll be like no, it'll actually improve my Junior Cert and if I do like Higher Level subjects and I do good in Junior Cert, then I'll be like really good at them in Leaving Cert.

The knowledge has built their cultural capital:

INT(s) Year 2

Cliona: And has CFES helped you do that? How has it helped you to do that?

Ashley (HA2): It's just like, it's shown me like what college is best for me because I want to be a physiotherapist and it's shown me what college would let me do that.

Georgia (HA3): I think if it wasn't for CFES I wouldn't really know much about college in the first place, coz like usually when you think of college it's kind of like College X and like College Y you wouldn't really know like, you wouldn't really get told much about College M and stuff like that, but if they kind of give us like a broad options and stuff like that, so they gave us a lot of information about how to get into like, with CAO points and stuff like that.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the development of the capability of practical reason and college knowledge on student aspirations towards higher education. It defined this capability as one related to making reasoned, informed choices based on trusted factual and experiential knowledge, shared through varied networks. It proposes that having this capability expands opportunities, agency and freedom in relation to post-secondary choice making. The Pathways to College core practice has had the greatest impact on the emerging capability of practical reason and college knowledge. There is evidence that students now see new higher education possibilities. This is encouraging new habitual work patterns and college-focused conversations within their family, school and community. They also demonstrate increased motivation through internalising the habit of goal-setting in their approach to school work. However, the chapter also highlights some inhibiting social factors, such as concern about college costs, an increasing pull against higher education progression by some of their peers, limited subject choice and level, the Junior Cert examinations and more restricted project activity in Year 2.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that students consider the early information they have developed from the project is providing them with a 'road map' for their future. They are

more aware of the importance of repeated and longer term goal-setting, hard work and extending and building their networks to help them with educational resilience for the years ahead. They also report being calmer in school and having better, more trusting relationships with their teachers, particularly in second year of second level. Exposure to different kinds of cultural capital, broader social relations and networks, new college knowledge based on campus visits and relatable mentors and a new-found confidence in their ability to 'ask the right questions' are all enabling conversion factors through which students are developing the capability of college knowledge and practical reason.

Chapter 6: The Capability of Identity, Student Choice and Adapted Preferences

Building on Chapters 4 and 5, which argue that the capabilities of autonomy and practical reason/knowledge are essential for working-class students to develop aspirations towards higher education, this chapter proposes that the capability of identity plays a critical role in the post-secondary trajectory of working-class students. It begins by exploring the emergence of new identities in the students participating in the TA21-CFES project, including some challenges they are experiencing between this, their family and community. This raises questions regarding the justifications for such educational interventions and the chapter proceeds to explore some of these tensions. The following section explores the interplay of emerging identities within the context of school and community relationships.

The Capability of Identity, Institutional and Community Relationships

In this section, it is proposed that the capability of identity is central to a working-class student's ability to imagine and work towards a future in higher education. However, there are echoes in the student experience of the conflict, confusion and issues with identities in flux highlighted by Bridges (2006), Burke et al. (2016), Reay et al. (2009), Share and Carroll (2013) above. Student identities are in a state of flux as the TA21-CFES project requires that they actively explore education and work possibilities in their future that do not exist in their immediate context. Students remark on both transformation and tension in how they understand themselves because of engagement with the project; they understand their identities to be in flux, shifting between an older identity rooted in their relationship to the internalised expectations of their school community (and sometimes family and peer), and a newer identity that has emerged through participation in the TA21-CFES project, in which many now talk about their future as college students. This identity in flux is, however, raising questions and challenges for some students. In addition to the theme of identity in transition, a second theme emerged in Year 2 when students reported that the positive 'TA21-CFES' identity they had developed in Year 1 was somewhat deflated because of less project engagement in Year 2, because of the demands of the Junior Certificate state examinations.

College Identity and Fitting In

Students in Lucky Lane School have internalised the discourse of disadvantage (Burke et al. 2016), they are aware of the impact of dimensions of disadvantage, and to some extent are ‘concertized’, as Freire (1970) would say. They are using the project to build their capabilities, their awareness of future options and their identity as college-going but from a ‘disadvantaged’ community. Students in Lucky Lane School had a language to describe their community. They described themselves as coming from ‘a disadvantaged community’ and perceived this identity as being shared with many of their friends and family. The TA21-CFES project introduced them to new ideas about what they can be, and do, and in some cases this information did not fit with their existing views. Students are experiencing new ideas about their abilities, and possibilities for their futures and work, through the Leadership through Service, Mentoring, and Pathways to College core practices, as well as through their identity within the project. Particularly in Year 1, students take pride in their TA21-CFES identity and express a feeling of being privileged with opportunities to visit colleges, take on leadership roles, get college information and have mentors. In Lucky Lane School, Year 1, students were proud of this identity but they were aware that other school groups were envious of this perceived status. The project made them reflect on what they would like for their own future, and compare it with their view of their own adult role models.

Shifting Institutional Culture, Shifting Identities

They were also conflicted about whether they would ‘fit in’ in selective higher education environment. Most students believed that going to college would lead to a more independent, self-directed life. However, there was conflict between their identity and the possibilities they were being introduced to; some students believe that college is usually for ‘people with money’ and ‘smart people’. But the possibility of progressing to higher education has also impacted on their habitual patterns, making them more likely to complete homework. There is evidence that a shifting institutional culture in influencing their identity and shaping preference formation. The change here reflects Sen’s (1992: 142) observation that ‘opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function’. The institutional culture in Lucky Lane School is shifting, both students and teachers believe there are new possibilities open to the

students in the school and this is supporting the development of greater student autonomy and an emergent identity as ‘college going’ students.

Bound up with this positive institutional shift, however, is a sense from some students that being a TA21-CFES participant sets them apart, especially from their non-TA21-CFES peers, their communities as well as friends and family. The process of reconciling newly emerging identities with older ideas about who they are and what they can do is, for students, neither easy nor linear. There is, however, also positive evidence that the project is supporting students to have conversations with family about plans and that these discussions support student determination and build a sense of hope. One student from Morning Star School, in Year 2, said:

My mam and dad keep on asking me, telling me, asking me what university or college I wanna do, what courses I wanna do, and every year it’s the same course, medicine. Anything to do with medicine or being a medic or something like that. And they think, they say that I’m very determined for that, and as well I like Muay Thai and I do Kung Fu and I’m really passionate about that as well, so hopefully.

New Identities and Positive Choices

There is some evidence that the tension students experience as part of negotiating between new and older identities can lead to greater clarity about their personal goals. For some students, the development of an identity as a learner who is college-bound clashes with what they see emerging as common behaviours in their peer networks. Some students use this clash to clarify what they do not want in life and to strengthen their sense of autonomy. One student from Morning Star School, Year 2, said that:

Dylan (MS1): Yeah, I’ve seen it happen like very often, even people in my year now would go off and like have drinks, like not necessarily get drunk but I think at the same time you’re drinking below the age as well like.

For many students, this sense of autonomy in more positive choice-making seems to strengthen through the years of project participation, alongside their confidence to negotiate and declare their identity on their own terms. By Year 3, students demonstrate

greater confidence in their ability to navigate their fluctuating sense of self and a chorus of student voices proclaiming, 'I am not disadvantaged' begins to emerge. In re-framing, what they understand as 'disadvantaged' they draw on their navigational capital, resilience and role models from their area who have charted a course they feel is part of their future.

Deflated Identities

In Year 2, there was a strong theme of deflated identities, because of fewer project activities due to the pressure of the Junior Certificate examination. Following Year 1 students proudly labelled themselves as TA21-CFES leaders, mentors and scholars, because of intensive project engagement. However, the impact of fewer project activities in Year 2 influenced students' self-identification, even while they recognised the expansion of TA21-CFES to other year groups in some of the project schools as a positive gain for the school community. This theme of fewer activities in Year 2 was noted in all schools, and Morning Star and Hope Avenue schools linked this to a puncturing of the positive identity the project had helped them build in Year 1.

Despite the reduction in activities in Year 2, especially in the Leadership through Service core practice, students from all schools talked about how participation in core activities influenced their sense of identity. In all schools, the sense of identity that emerged was one in flux between students' sense that they, alongside many of their friends and family, are from 'a disadvantaged community' and newer ideas about what they can be and do.

The Capability of Identity and Leadership through Service

Students in all schools reported participating in more Leadership through Service activities in Year 1 than Year 2. However, not all students in Year 1 participated in the Leadership practice, as schools found it the most challenging to implement without structured guidance from the core university-based programme team. The sections below analyse the impact of this core practice on the development of the capability of identity.

Group Identity

In Year 1, students talked about developing a sense of identity as leaders and self-directed individuals with goals for their future. Their involvement in school leadership projects enhanced their knowledge, confidence that they could work together as part of team and their sense of group identity. Students also understood their experiences to be shaping them in ways that would leave a lasting impression. One student from Eagle Park School said:

INT Year 1: I think just from being in school like with TA21-CFES you learn a lot more outside of the classroom than you do in and I find the terms like ‘developing as a person’ it’s like, who you are and stuff I find that doing things like Leadership through really does shape who you are and like you will remember something like that.

Deflated Identities

As outlined above, in **Morning Star and Hope Avenue** schools, Year 2, there is evidence that the reduction in project activity has impacted on the students’ identity as leaders within their school, something which they had begun to establish in the first year of the project. However, because the project identified only a sub-group within their year as ‘leaders’, they also see this as a selective identity that was open to some but not others. This appears to have had a negative impact in the school, where some but not all students were perceived as ‘leaders’ and those who were not had limited information about it and a limited sense of development from it. Students in **Morning Star School** discussed this in the following terms:

FG Year 2

Cliona: Has leadership through service improved your leadership skills?

David (MS6): Whoever was a leader?

Vladyslav (MS5): I’m only a leader now, since... the other class they know

Cliona: And what are you doing this year for your leadership

Zoe (MS10): We haven't done anything yet.

Cliona: So, you know that you're a leader

Zoe (MS10): I think that like [unclear?] we'll do more stuff next year, when we don't have exams.

Cliona: Ok, and have you met at all since you've known you're a leader?

Vladyslav (MS5): No

Cliona: And what about last year?

Sarah (MS8): Oh, like we were a really good team, together. But like it worked. And it wasn't like you know like if someone was a leader it's not like we have to listen to them or anything. Like we all just work together.

This comment reveals the network effect of their engagement in Leadership through Service, which developed trust in their ability to work together as a team and enhanced their sense of group identity. However, this direct engagement in leadership work by all was not sustained in Year 2.

Identity as Leaders and Role Models

Students in **Morning Star School** who were involved in the Leadership through Service project, which focused on orientation of incoming first years, have enjoyed their identity as school leaders and welcomed the opportunity to share their cultural capital with new students. They can see the value of leadership roles in strengthening his sense of autonomy and confidence. Students can also see that developing their identity as leaders will be transferable to other areas of their life:

FG Year 2

David (MS6): I'm currently a youth leader in Tallaght, like I work with young people so I'm on the leadership team in a youth centre, and it kind of helps working with ages from 11 to 18, so it's really handy.

Zoe (MS10): Like, it will show you, especially with leadership through service, it will show you different ways of progressing on into later life, through helping others and stuff and then learning as well.

Not all students see themselves as leaders, however for those who do not, it has served to help them refine what role they think they can usefully play in a project focused group. A student from Morning Star School comments:

INT Year 2: Em, we did have leaders but I didn't go for it because I don't think I'm a great leader, like I just, I can follow people, like I understand, I just think for myself, it's much harder because I'm more of like "I'll do that part and you do that part" but I'm not exactly a person that says, "Do that, do that, do that".

The Capability of Identity and Mentoring

In Year 1, there was a strong sense in all schools that mentoring influenced students' self-belief and sense of belonging. Students learned through interaction with their mentors that they could trust people who identified as college-going and as learners. This gave students the confidence to see that they too could belong in a college environment and underscored their self-belief and aspiration; a strong theme emerged that 'if they did it, I can do it.' This involvement with 'access' students from their own community is helping students to build knowledge about the social and cultural aspects of higher education and address their concerns about 'fitting in'. As Reay et al. (2009) observe, this will precipitate a clash of habituses for most students, as they navigate the tension between belonging and standing out but by embedding 'access' mentors within the local community, the project aims to support second level students in exploring these identity conflicts and developing their own values in relation to what they aspire to, what they are aware may be possible and what they wish to adhere to within their own communities.

Students in **Eagle Park School** talked about how trust had been built through their relationship with a mentor:

FG Year 2

Thibaut (EP4): At the start I think it was a bit awkward for everybody because you're only getting to know them. But then, as we got into it we found that we've a lot really similar to them.

Kevin (EP5): And that they've been through, like they haven't, TA21-CFES and all wasn't really around when they were there at the start but like they're

experiencing it now and like, I think we've a lot more in common with them than we have different to them and like, for me anyway like, I found it difficult to talk to older students but with TA21-CFES and all the activities we were doing we're actually being linked in with them a lot more, and you find out they're not that scary like, they're just a year or two older so.

Understanding that they have many things in common with college students from their community supported students to see that they would belong and helped in removing the fear of difference.

Institutional Culture and Identity

In some cases, in Eagle Park School for example, students pointed to the positive school culture as one in which student identities as learners are promoted and college as the post-secondary school option is normalised. This was cited as a key influencing factor in shifting students' sense that college could be an option for them. 'I find like they're (teachers) almost in it with us, they're giving us the information but they're on the same team not some authority figure.' This student suggests that teacher-student relationships have improved because of teachers giving them more access to information about options, proving to students that teachers are on their side and facilitating trust. This reflects the observations by Sen (1999), Nussbaum (2000), Burke (2013), Reay et al. (2009), Smyth and Banks (2011), McCoy et al. (2014) and Share and Carroll (2013) regarding the importance of institutional culture in influencing individual learner trajectories, through creating and sustaining high aspirations and positive student-teacher relationships. The project is supporting some change in the emergence of more trusting relationships between students and teachers.

Brenda in **Eagle Park School**, described how the college-going environment of the school supported them in understanding that they have a huge range of options from which to choose.

INT Year 2: Our school is so college driven I think it's encouraged us all to really think ahead. Like, just for me personally, I change my mind every day about what I wanna do because there's just so many opportunities and just I dunno because

before you wouldn't have really thought about college but now it's like, you're almost like 'woah, I could do so much' you know.

This student clearly identifies as having a broad range of choices, including the choice to go to college, and control over their future. They credit the school with supporting them to consider and plan for their future and for opening them up to a range of possible options.

In other schools, teachers also played the role of trusted mentor, assuring them that she could belong in college. A student in Lucky Lane School said, 'But the teachers taught us like that we're no different to other people.' Here we see institutional culture influencing the students' sense of identity and the development of a stronger, more trusting relationship between students and teachers in the schools, as teachers have used the project to tell their own stories about how they progressed to higher education. After becoming part of TA21-CFES and seeing other college students and discussing these experiences with their teachers, this student is reassured not only that she belongs but that her peer group also belongs, the fear of being different is removed and her sense of who she is and what she can be has shifted.

In Year 2, students from all schools reported that mentoring was impacting on their sense of identity. In Lucky Lane School, students referred to the networks they had built through TA21-CFES as being instrumental in their developing identity and talked about how hearing stories of hope, achievement and resilience is enhancing the sense that they too can become a college student and that they do not have to 'just go and get work, or go to FAS⁹ or something like....'

A student in **Eagle Park School** reported that they wanted to serve as mentors to younger students:

⁹ An Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FAS), referred to in English as the Training and Employment Authority, was a state agency in Ireland with responsibility for assisting those seeking employment. It has been replaced in recent years by an organisation with a similar brief called SOLAS.

INT Year 2

Cliona: And what kind of things would you like to do that might make you feel involved.

Brenda (EP1): Mentoring, like mentoring the first years or the second years.

Cliona: Oh, so you want to be mentors, and why do you think that would be great?

Brenda (EP1): It would just be fun I think, 'cause the sixth years seem to like talking to us as well and I'd say it would be similar with us.

Students relate this desire to pass on knowledge and to connect with younger students as an activity that would motivate them and drive them towards higher attainment, which in many instances will be important in being able to translate aspiration into successful college applications.

The Capability of Identity and Pathways to College

The provision of knowledge about educational pathways, possibilities and options for life after school was instrumental in students' sense of their shifting identities. The sections below examine the impact of this new knowledge on the development of the capability of identity.

Higher Education Institutional Choice and Identity

As Wilson-Strydom (2012) and Keane (2013) found, direct exposure to higher education campuses has a significant impact on student aspiration and identity. In Year 1, the main Pathways themes involving student identity revolved around gaining knowledge through a positive school environment and campus visits, which supported their hopes for progression to higher education. Most students express an understanding that college students are independent and self-directed and that having greater knowledge about future educational options is making them work harder to achieve their future goals. However, some students in all four schools express the view that college is not for 'people like them' but for 'people with money'. It was evident in all schools that students' current identities did not fully align with that of a college bound student. Students are conflicted

about whether they would ‘fit in’ in college. They talk about those ‘types of people’ and how ‘doctors and lawyers’ go to college.

Students in all four schools mention campus visits as the main vehicle through which information about college information was transferred. As part of the programme, the schools have organised visits to three or four higher education institutions, both universities and institutes of technology. Visiting college campuses has a big impact on students’ identity, as the experience of the environment breaks down perceptions that college students are all privileged and reinforces the understanding that they could relate to other students. In Eagle Park School, a student describes how the campus visit helped them to see the diversity in colleges, promoting a sense that they could fit in.

INT Year 1: Like, college isn’t like a one-person thing. That’s, that’s the good thing about it, it’s not like...I dunno like, it’s better cause there’s so many people there and so many different people there so you just fit in with your type of people or whoever you like. So, I don’t think there’s like one person and, if you’re not like them you’re not going to fit in.

Campus visits help students to see themselves belonging in the college environment. Students in Morning Star School visited a range of institutes of technology and universities as part of the Pathways core practice. This direct experience of a higher education environment has had an impact on their sense of identity as college going students. Students from Morning Star School believe they will ‘fit in’ in college, despite knowing they will feel nervous initially, one student remarks they do not feel concerned about fitting in ‘because they’re in the same category as you’. They clearly see college as places of diversity and fears about being different rooted in the belief that all those in college are from affluent backgrounds are diminished: ‘I thought they’d be like the same type like they came from privileged backgrounds and all that, like private schools and all of this but they didn’t . . . Everybody is different in the college but they all work together in the groups.’ Another student comments that it will just be ‘full of people doing the same course as you in college.’

Some students, however, still have concerns that they might not belong in college and these centre around relating across difference. Some students are more concerned that

they will feel uncomfortable about the differences between them and other students in college. This is clear in this exchange with students from Morning Star School:

FG Year 1

Cliona: So do you feel comfortable here?

David (MS6): Yeah.

Alex (MS7): Yeah, most of the time.

Cliona: So what's the difference then?

Alex (MS7): We know here

Cliona: You know here.

Alex (MS7): Yeah, you know the type of people here.

Cliona: You know the type of people here, okay. Do you think the type of people here might be different to the type of people there?

David (MS6): Some people.

Alex (MS7): Yeah.

Cliona: Some people. In what way?

David (MS6): Could just act differently.

Overall, students do not identify great concerns regarding fitting in in college and there is evidence that the process through which they have alleviated fears has been mediated by direct experience of a variety of colleges and through their mentoring relationships with college going students. Students believe that a common identity as students on the same course will make it easier to integrate as 'you have the same interests as the people that go, so it is easier to have something to talk about.' However, Fleming et al.'s (2017) and Share and Carroll's (2013) research indicates that there are differences in student experience of integrating within different higher education institutions, so although the TA21-CFES students have strengthened their confidence in being able to build a sense of belonging, it is not inaccurate for them to conclude they may find it an easier transition to make in social and cultural terms in some institutions than others.

Even after one year of TA21-CFES, some students were still reluctant to see themselves as belonging within universities that they deem 'higher class'. For example, one student said she would rather apply to a less selective university as one specific university is not for people like her, it is only for higher professionals. They show an awareness that it

may be easier to ‘fit in’ in some colleges than in others and it is clear they have discussed this perception with their teachers. This demonstrates an emerging identity as a college bound student, but circumstances, where they believe from considering their campus visits, the mentors they have been exposed to, their teachers and discussions with their parents, that college is about progressing in life but ‘fitting in’ is also critical, and for some students they have decided that will happen more easily in certain institutions than others. This echoes Burke et al.’s findings (2016: 34) that ‘identities are produced through the politics of recognition in which a person must simultaneously master *and* submit to the discourses that name and make that person in relation to particular discursive formations. To be recognised as ‘academically capable’, for example, the person must both master and submit to the discourses of ‘capability’.’ Students in this project are exploring the discourses of higher education, their own capabilities, the social and cultural capital within their own community and how these intersect with their identities and aspirations. While they are accepting some of that discourse around the value of post-secondary education and who is entitled to progress to which institution, they are not doing so uncritically, rather they are exploring its emotional dimensions, what their decisions would mean for themselves, their family and school community and based on this new knowledge, they are gradually reconstructing their identity.

Identity as Capable Students

There is evidence that the increased academic effort of students because of new information they have acquired through the project is building their confidence that they can improve their attainment; this gives them a sense of achievement. This indicates that student motivation is enhanced by access to earlier college knowledge, which may in turn impact on their attainment. Two students from **Morning Star School** comment:

FG Year 1

David (MS6): Because you want to get that, for yourself. It feels good when you do well in exams, and get a good grade like that.

Alex (MS7): So...it’s important, to do that, to get that. Because it helps your confidence in school.

Cliona: Okay, it helps your confidence in school?

David (MS6): Yeah.

Cliona: Can you give me an example of when this happened?

David (MS6): Yesterday. I had an Irish test on Friday, and I was the only person in the class to get everything right, I got 100%.

Cliona: Well done.

David (MS6): I got that in geography.

Cliona: Yeah. And how does that feel?

David (MS6): You feel like, like I don't know, proud.

In Year 2 students are still in the process of internalising the information they are hearing about college and there is evidence that there is a clash between an identity they have of coming from a 'disadvantaged' community, and new information being provided through TA21. One student from Lucky Lane School stated that people from where she is from usually have the attitude 'oh yeah I'm from Lucky Lane I don't need to do anything I won't get anywhere.' She refers to how she is trying to resist this view, and how the TA21-CFES project is supporting her to do so. However, some students still struggle to believe they will 'fit in' to the college environment, because richer students have 'the money and the grades' to succeed.

Institutional Culture and Identity

In Year 2, students' frequently express the view that their school places a positive value on educational progression, which has motivated them in their school work, prepared them for their future and built their self-belief. In Eagle Park School one student said, 'Well I think that the school has done like a great job with the TA21-CFES thing like about college and all 'cause it would make us work harder and then be prepared for when we leave school and help build our confidence.' Students report that not only are they being prepared with information and skills, but that this happens across the school. Another student, again in Eagle Park School, said 'like a lot of people in this school like they hope that when they finish they can go off to college so I think with the TA21-CFES it's kind of helped them to get ready and all.'

Continuing the theme of Year 1, where students reported the positive impact of campus visits, in Year 2 students from Eagle Park, Lucky Lane and Hope Avenue reported that they wanted more college trips to different campuses, including campuses across and

beyond Dublin. Students in Eagle Park School said continued exposure to different colleges in and beyond Dublin, would help them to feel involved, expand their knowledge of what is available and help them prepare for higher education. Many students from all schools reported that the project helped them to consider different future options for themselves. In some cases, this meant students considering college for the first time, while students who had long standing aspirations to attend college spoke about how the project changed their aspirations to more concrete objectives. They now see themselves, and their future identity, as one that includes attending a ‘good’ college.

The Capability of Identity and Leadership through Service

In **Morning Star School, Year 3**, students observe their own developing confidence and identity and attribute this to opportunities they have taken to lead on projects:

INT Year 3

Cliona: Yeah so from doing the project and then presenting it, what are the things that you learned, I suppose, about yourself?

Conor (MS2): Em that I am not as scared of crowds. That I am very interested in like, you know, the kind of psychology and all that of how drugs effect people and, you know, society as a whole. That’s mainly it, yeah.

Cliona: Yeah or do you think that it effects your sense of hope?

Conor (MS2): Yeah, I think it does. Like personally before I thought I would never get into college because you know, I thought that like I was just nothing more than a slacker, so I won’t get anywhere. But it has given me hope you know. I do kind of seeing myself in the future being able to get into college and doing something that I like.

Here the student demonstrates they have revised their self-concept because of confidence gained through acting in a leadership capacity and this has helped them to reconsider their post-secondary path.

However, students in **Lucky Lane School, Year 3** are still expressing some concerns about whether they will fit in within certain college environments:

INT Year 3

Cliona: What do you mean you don't think you're capable?

Sonya (LL2): Like a bit of both like if I go to Trinity, I'll be surrounded by people that are going to be in a different class to me and it's kind of like I know the dynamic of Trinity is changing and stuff and there's more people from DEIS areas now but it's still always that like stigma of like Trinity is for posh people and like we just go to Ballyfermot college¹⁰.

In **Hope Avenue School**, students also have this concern but mentors have helped them to rationalise it:

INT Year 3 - Aga (HA1): Well they (mentors) always tell us like, 'Not to worry. Like eventually you will fit in.' And as well as like there's loads of schools around Ireland but there's only like a few, not a few colleges but like a smaller number. So obviously like people from around the country have to move to go to a college they want to so like there will be a good mix of people and you'll come across some of them from like your country or like have the same likes as you for sure.

Students in different TA21 project schools are also beginning to differentiate themselves in terms of language and identity. In **Eagle Park School**, one student observes the language used by another project school in relation to their identity and she disputes this labelling:

INT Year 3

Brenda (EP1): Em... I think like being an access kind of school would probably you know like be a kind of concern for me because our school like we are not, like I wouldn't consider us a rough area... and I didn't get a very good impression of some of the other schools because I felt that like maybe I wouldn't personally want to be grouped into the same category as that because I felt like, like sometimes like when they talked about their projects, they all mentioned that well we are an access school and we can do this and people think we can't do this but

¹⁰Ballyfermot College of Further Education is a further education college located in Dublin 10 and providing mainly post-secondary education to local and other students.

in our school or in our communities, nobody ever tells us that we can't do anything. Like our school is really involved in our community and I think that our school is an institution that's getting very well-known and is kind of becoming... like I wouldn't say we are posh but I think like we have a really good image so I don't think we have a bad image and I don't think we are in the same category as an access school....

Cliona: So, do you worry about that then, if you'll fit in?

Brenda (EP1): Yeah, I think I'm a competitive person as well so I'd like to think that I could outdo anyone on my course or while we were in Trinity we talked about like if you do the best in your course you can get all of these like extra things and you can get everything paid for and you know like all of these great things but when I hear that, I'm thinking... I can so do that, like I'm thinking that's a goal, that's something that I can actually go forward for. I'm not thinking oh that's only going to be the kids from CUS and I'm not going to get there.

Although students in all schools are increasingly expressing a preference for one campus over another, they all express a belief that they have found a campus they believe they will fit into and that they fully expect to be there after school. Their campus choice is sometimes informed by location close to home, modern *versus* traditional campus and less often by course choice. It is essentially determined by where they can see themselves fitting in:

INT Year 3 - Emily (LL1): No. I think I would feel confident enough going into college. I don't think it's right to say but if I was foreign I would be really nervous about going in to college. Even though Ireland is really multicultural (is that the word?) I would still feel nervous and I think that is the way some of the girls in the class do feel and some of them who have a really thick Dublin accent, they would be nervous about going in.

Enabling and Inhibiting Social Conversion Factors in the Development of the Capability of Identity

There are four positive themes related to students developing the capability of identity through TA21-CFES project engagement: community pride, an emerging sense of self

facilitated by young adult and adult role models, positive choice making and greater confidence in their ability to fit in within a higher education environment. These positive themes have emerged through access to a wider range of role models, more information, campus visits and repeated practice of goal setting and hard work. However, these positive processes are challenged by a range of negative themes which increase as the project moves into Year 2. Students remark on the low expectations of some of their teachers and community. They feel a strong current against education and hard academic work from some of their peers, who are disengaging due to school alienation. In some cases, they are also dealing with conflicting expectations about their future at home and mixed messages between how they understand the 'success' of some of their family messages vis-à-vis the project messages. This is all contributing towards a sense of 'identity in flux' for students, who can more readily see the future but are still uncertain about how to incorporate into it their family and wider networks, past and present.

One student states she would apply to a less selective university as one specific university is not for people like her, it is only for higher professionals. This corresponds with research in the UK (Jerrim 2013), which demonstrates that even when working-class students achieve target grades for selective institutions, they are less likely to apply there because of this belief that they will not fit in. The ability to visualise themselves as belonging within certain institutions is a key factor in their decision making and this is clearly influenced both by direct exposure to a variety of institutions as well as meeting different people from their community who have progressed to college. However, this is not the case for all students. Some state that participation in mentoring and the pathways activities are influencing their sense of identity; students who had had long standing aspirations to attend college spoke about the project changing their dreams to reality. They now see themselves, and their future identity, as one that includes attending a 'good' college. One student talks about how her teacher reassured her that she could belong and that, after becoming part of TA21-CFES and seeing other college students, her sense of who she is and what she can be has shifted. She says, 'But the teachers taught us like that we're no different to other people.'

While there is evidence that students are conflicted regarding their shifting identities, it is also clear that their aspirations are shifting because of project engagement, evidence that they were already adapting their preferences prior to the project. Neither are students

accepting the options explored with them uncritically, rather they show the capability of practical reason and college knowledge is strong and developing, through discussions with their families, more trusting relationships with their teachers and an ability to observe their behaviour of their peers from some distance, weighing up the pros and cons of 'belonging'. In at least two of the schools, the institutional culture has notably shifted and both teachers and students are challenging deficit labels used to describe them and their community. To develop a college-bound identity, students need to be able to imagine options in their future that they do not currently have in their lives and that they do not see around them, discussing these options with trusted teachers and with mentors has made them concrete and helped to change students' habitual patterns regarding work, goal-setting and socialising. Although some students are still positive they will not continue with education after schooling is complete, they are doing so having weighed up all the information, integrated it with their own lived experience and the role models around them, and concluded they are making an informed choice about what for them constitutes 'a life of value'. In this sense, the project is also working for them as much as it is for students who now aspire to higher education, as they know there are options in their future which they could return to should their current trajectory change.

Conclusion

This chapter proposed that the capability of identity is essential to encourage working-class young adults to aspire to higher education. It explored the interrelationship between institutional culture, identity and adapted preferences. It examined student identity formation through the academic constructs of networks, trustworthy information and increased knowledge on how to navigate the educational system. It suggests that in this case, the intervention is having a positive impact on the capability of identity in working-class students, although this is not linear or uncomplicated. They are negotiating identities in flux and developing new navigational capital to help them to move between peers, family, mentors and teachers, all of whom have different expectations of them. The 'relatable other' in the form of mentor, has had a significant impact on students' confidence that they can develop an identity as a college-bound student and speak with confidence about this future. While there is some community and family challenge to this aspiration, students are showing educational resilience in being able to critique these challenges and persist with new habitual patterns in pursuit of their aspirations.

Chapter 7: The Capabilities of Social Relations and Hope and Navigational Capital for Higher Education Progression

This chapter builds on the argument in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 that working-class students need to develop the capabilities of autonomy, practical reason/college knowledge and identity to aspire towards higher education, by exploring the evidence regarding the importance of the capabilities of social relations and hope. The capability of social relations is defined herein as the capability to work with others to solve problems or tasks, being able to form networks of friendship, belonging and mutual trust to support the development of navigational capital for progression to higher education (Walker 2006; Wilson-Strydom 2012). The capability of hope is defined as aspiration, motivation to learn and succeed, to have a better life (Walker 2006).

The chapter begins by drawing once again on the four-school case study to provide evidence of the development of the capability of social relations through campus visits, positive engagement with teachers, peers, mentors and family and new information. It explores some challenges that are emerging, particularly in Year 2 of the project, in students' experience of their social relations and networks. It proceeds to explore the impact of the project on the development of the capability of hope, the role that newly emerging social networks play in this capability and some enabling and inhibiting social and environmental conversion factors in realising student aspirations. It demonstrates that broader networks and greater knowledge are having the greatest impact on the development of the capability of hope and students are more likely to work harder, set goals and talk to peers, teachers and family about going to college because of their engagement in the project. However, it notes the potentially destructive impact of Berlant's 'cruel optimism' or of encouraging 'false hope', in the context of a range of structural factors such as subject choice, the Junior Cert examination, low expectations of some teachers and family members and the pull of negative peer behaviour.

The Capability of Social Relations and Social Networks and Pathways to College

In **Eagle Park School, Year 1**, students have built networks through the project which they say have answered all the questions they currently have about college. Most students

observe that the project has improved trust between them and their teachers: ‘you know years ago it was like the teacher was like the authority figure and like it’s kind of evolving so quickly.’ The *Growing Up In Ireland* study (Williams, Greene, Doyle et al. 2011) highlighted the impact of negative student-teacher relationships on student capacity to learn, the behavioural dynamics of the classroom and the style of teaching. This all has impact on institutional culture and creates a ‘habitus’ that is challenging and limiting for both students and teachers. Eagle Park School has the largest number of teachers directly involved in the project and, as part of the project, they also established a whole school mentoring programme, which sometimes involved older students mentoring younger students. All students comment on how the project has provided opportunities for them to talk directly with teachers about their own college experiences, opening up a new aspect to the teacher-student relationship. This has created a stronger bond of trust between them and enhanced their respect for their teachers,

INT(s) Year 1

Yeah, definitely, so the teachers like, on the doors of every classroom there’s like the degree the teachers have and just like if we have any questions about college the teachers always ask.

You don’t even have to pick one thing though. Like my English teacher she was a journalist and then she became an English teacher so it’s not like you have to pick one career and stick with it for the rest of your life.

So it’s not always the teacher being like this kind of authority figure telling you what to do.

There are also strong student-teacher relationships evident in **Hope Avenue School**. In Year 1, they regard teachers as a source of advice and support and that they are aware these trusting relationships are not present in all schools:

INT Year 1

Cliona: Yeah. What about for yourself? How do you think your school is helping you to prepare?

Brenda (EP1): It's really enthusiastic. Like, it's em... it's a really good school like in that type of way. It's like all the teachers are there to help you, like that you know that they're kind of interested if that makes sense? Like they are there to help, where in some schools like, like I can't really name schools cause it's kinda bad out, but like students in other schools are be like 'aw no, my teachers like hate me, they don't care, they just like there to get paid.'

This has changed their view of their future:

INT Year 1 – Brenda (EP1): Em well before they did start talking about college and bringing us there I didn't really know what I was going to do in the future and I wasn't even thinking about what college to go to. And as soon as they mentioned Trinity, and the last trip we went to Trinity, I decided that I actually want to try to get into there.

The more open discussions with teachers, combined with more context about the teachers' own experience, and student direct involvement in college life through campus visits, are all building the capability of social relations in students and enabling factors in their development of college confidence. Project involvement is also encouraging students to have direct discussions with their families about their future educational trajectory,

INT Year 1 - Jack (EP2): I think that, we brought home the forms, it was, my parents were like, kind of shocked by the courses that we picked, and they had no clue about CFES at all, they didn't know what it was and I told them that it was for College for Every Student, it was like basically a pathway to getting you into college and it was to make sure you have a good future and they said they didn't have that back in their day, they just, you know it was just work, so it was kind of an insight for them because they were enlightened by what I was telling them and they were saying oh it's changed like so much now and they were interested in what courses I was picking and you know they were proud that I was picking the right courses for me and my future...

This echoes Holly's (2017) and Share and Carroll's (2013) findings that the families of students from working-class backgrounds were more likely to position the 'child as expert', to defer to their system knowledge and to be supportive of their educational ambitions, even if they did not fully understand them. This family interaction is indicative of a range of comments made by students, which clarified for them that while their family networks may not have much college knowledge, they are mostly very supportive and interested in the possibility of their child progressing onwards. In this respect, the emerging capability of social relations is helping students to build a support infrastructure that will help them to work towards their goals, through clarifying conversations both at home and in school.

Building Cultural Capital and Trust through Family Interaction

In **Morning Star School, Year 2**, the Pathways to College core practice continues to enable more student discussions about college with their extended family and friends. Some of them have family members who have been to college and they are trusted sources of information. While teachers and family are perceived as motivating them to work harder, friends are emotional support. This is clear from the following exchange,

FG Year 3

Cliona: What do you think your teachers expect for your future?

Alex (MS7): A lot.

Sarah (MS8): That all of us go to college.

Cliona: That all of you go to college, no question?

Alex (MS7): That we all...that we all we all do well and get what we want for our future.

Sarah (MS8): Achieve our goals.

Deolu (MS9): That you work to the best of your ability.

Cliona: That you work to the best of your ability. Okay, I ask you the same about your parents then, what would you say they expect for you for your future?

Alex (MS7): The same. And then your friends like, they're going through the same thing as you, so if your teachers are pushing you really hard and...like you need, not like sympathy, but just if you're like 'Uhh this is so stressful' Or

whatever, your friends are there for you as opposed to, not like your parents wouldn't be but your friends are going through the same thing....

Sarah (MS8): Like when you go home your parents are like 'go and sort yourself.' Like sometimes I just go home and sit and like I just forget about study, but then they kinda tell you go and study. You know, like they will help you.

While the cultural capital of family experience of higher education is limited, many students remark on how supportive their families are of their ambitions. In some cases, parents and siblings are motivating a young person to continue because they did not get the opportunity themselves,

FG Year 3 - Sarah (MS8): My parents did go to college but they got in like, they didn't do it the first year after they left school, they did it like two or three years later. I was like why didn't you go in straight away and they said they didn't have the financial means for it and they just didn't have the money to support for college like, so they waited three or four years and they had jobs so they were working as well but they just didn't get into college until like three or four years later, and it kind of gave me motivation to you know, go into college, but maybe take a year.

These networks of belonging and trust are deepening through student discussions with teachers, siblings and parents regarding their future, which in turn helps the students to strengthen their capability of social relations and social networks. The capability to draw on those around them for essential supports and advice will help students navigate educational pathways in the years to come. In **Morning Star School Year 2**, students have invited their parents into the school to explain TA21-CFES to them, this has facilitated family conversations about the project and also about their college going aspirations. Students are conscious of the impact of relatable, college going mentors and their own peer group on their own ambitions and focus and they show evidence of drawing on mentor input to strengthen their capability of social relations:

FG Year 2

Deolu (MS9): They're good support systems, like if you want to go to college don't surround yourself with people that don't want to go to college and think that it's like a waste of time.

Sarah (MS8): It did have an impact anyways because like it kind of gives you a link to college before you're even there, like I said like you wouldn't have an idea about college if it wasn't for it, because it just gives you a completely different outlook, because it's not teachers telling you. like someone around the same age as you, like not exactly the same age but when they're like 6 years older than you and they're telling you it's actually a good experience you're like, I'm gonna go do that. It seems more like, em, reachable, when someone from like your town and stuff like that is doing it.

In **Morning Star School, Year 3**, students have continued to benefit from campus visits and the wider range of college contacts they are developing. College visits are building their social relations and giving them more confidence that they will belong in higher education.

INT Year 3

Dylan (MS1): We've been to, I can't count that much but 4 or 5. We went to like Maynooth, DIT, UCD like there has been so much happening I can't remember half of them.

Cliona: What's it like going to visit campuses?

Dylan (MS1): Its, like you would expect it to be very, I don't know. I really don't know how to explain it but like, different. Like you would see the stuff on TV and think 'Oh that's what it's going to be like' but when you actually go into you realise 'Oh it's much different to this' and it's not scary at all like.

Direct experience of campus life is helping students to refine what they want to do in the future. It helps them to rule out areas they previously considered. For one student, it motivated her to contact a local IT company to get direct experience in the industry:

INT Year 3

Kelsey (MS4): Eh well so they showed us like Trinity and they showed us like some of the IT, the way they worked and stuff like that. And I was like 'Okay this

looks pretty cool.’ And then I thought, the guy was like recommending ‘Oh maybe you should work in IT if you are looking to do IT.’ So, I said ‘Okay’. I emailed some companies. I got one back to say ‘you can work here for 6 weeks’, I think. So, I did IT there.

Cliona: And you hated it?

Kelsey (MS4): I hated it so much.

Cliona: So, would you say that CFES had a positive impact for that particularly?

Kelsey (MS4): Yeah it opened my mind.

Cliona: But also, you took the initiative to email and follow up as well.

Kelsey (MS4): It gave me the courage.

This quote demonstrates the importance of this student pursuing broader social networks to explore her interests and she has the confidence to do so, this openness to exploring and learning from others is helping her to refine her future objectives.

In **Hope Avenue School, Year 3**, students also remark on the impact of wider social relations they experience because of involvement in on-campus outreach activities:

INT Year 3

Aga (HA1): Because like the street law not many signed up for it so there was only like 3 of us at it. So that was good because you see people that are from my area and they are in the kind of same state of moneywise and things like that and they are telling you like ‘Look we can do it so, why can’t you?’

Cliona: Yeah.

Aga (HA1): It kind of made it a bit motivating as well because you are kind of sitting here thinking ‘Aw I don’t want to not go to college now.’

Cliona: Yeah.

Aga (HA1): They are kind of giving you different insights like ‘If you don’t want to do it then don’t do this because there is no point if you don’t enjoy it.’ You know that kind of a thing?

The effect of seeing people from their own area who have progressed to college helps them to visualise their own future there but also provides an important impetus to step out of their local community and join those in college. This underscores the importance

of strong social relations for students to develop the confidence and commitment to post-secondary education progression. These college-going students also give important advice that is valued by the students because it is different to what they are hearing in other social networks. As Watts and Bridges (2006) observe, working-class students are more likely to make decisions on their future based on whether they will be employable after their degree but these college-going students are advising a shorter-term approach based on interests:

INT Year 3 - Aga (HA1): They're like - cause you know the way the teachers are like 'Oh maybe pick X' but they are literally like to you 'No pick a subject that you are finding interesting that you want to do. Don't pick one you are doing because your mam and dad want you to do it.'

Students in **Lucky Lane School, Year 3** show a deepening understanding of why post-secondary education might be important for any student and they relate this to a wider perspective on the world and how their world is structured. This is evidence of a developing capability of social relations that enables students to connect with others, listen to their perspectives and integrate it into their own future ambitions. Carly (LL4) (LL4)(LL4)comments on this:

INT Year 3 – Carly (LL4): Then at the end of the day, they say yeah you have to go. But why? Why are you actually going to college? To get what you want to do. You're not just going to get it by like some people do get it handed down like some people's families are wealthy and they get what they want but then there's some people you see that's literally like scraping on their hands and knees to get to where they want to go and I think that some people are actually doing well in life by doing that like I would rather work hard and get where I want than to just get it handed to me. The whole school is putting a bigger picture in everyone's head.

The Capability of Social Relations and Social Networks and Mentoring

In Eagle Park School, Year 1 students have opinions about the kind of mentoring that works to build their information and confidence in relation to higher education. Having

someone close to your age from within school is useful, as they are relatable and it is therefore easier to feel comfortable with them. However, the advantage of a college-based mentor is that they can explain the actual context, although while they are useful to share information with, they are ‘almost on a different level so it was more difficult to talk to them about how you felt and stuff...’

In **Morning Star School, Year 1**, students built the capability of social relations through interaction with mentors. There is evidence that this is increasing their confidence about progression to higher education, however the efficacy of this interaction is strengthened when it is reliable and frequent, as it is a valued source of trusted information:

INT Year 1

Cliona: Is there anything that could make mentoring better?

Dylan (MS1): Yes

Cliona: What?

Dylan (MS1): Coming regularly. Yeah, like every week. And make it longer, as in not just 5 weeks, like longer, like 7 or 8 weeks.

Building their knowledge through social relations with mentors is helping some students to feel greater confidence in their future trajectory and this is having a wider effect on their family relationships:

INT Year 1

Conor (MS2): It was just like, the way he was saying it, he was saying like it doesn't seem like such a hard thing when people are explaining it [oh college?] or something like that, but when he was explaining it to me and the rest of the people in the mentoring session I was starting to understand why it wasn't that hard at all. It's still a bit difficult but...

Cliona: And had you thought beforehand that you'd go to college, did you always think that?

Conor (MS2): No, I never thought I was going to go to college.

Students also remark that interactions with mentors help them to ‘think outside the box’ but that it is important that they feel they know the mentor to benefit from the discussion, this builds trust and relatability:

FG Year 1

Cliona: And what about your mentor, the person they are, do you think the relationship itself is important?

Zoe (MS10): Yeah, I think you can’t actually have like a proper conversation with someone unless you actually know them, so, I think the first session you’re just getting to know them, then you get right down to the work after that.

Alex (MS7): No, they do an excellent job, they tell us what they done in college, what they needed to do in college. And you can kind of relate to them because you can kind of see they were our age too and they went through the exact same thing so they’re telling us how they coped with those same things.

The fact that the mentor is perceived as relatable makes the information they share more trusted. Sharing their personal experience helps their mentees to see that it is okay not to understand the processes behind decision making regarding college and to feel greater confidence in exploring their concerns.

FG Year 1

Cliona: Yeah, you like it when they share like their personal experiences...

Sarah (MS8): Yeah, like saying what do you think about this or what do you think, it really helps people.

Students identify this as a motivating factor because it is not an authority figure:

FG Year 1 - Zoe (MS10): So, it’s not always the teacher being like this kind of authority figure telling you what to do.

In **Hope Avenue School, Year 1**, students remark that they are influenced by the opinions mentors share with them, as much as what they have done so far in their lives:

INT Year 1 - Ashley (HA2): I think like I'd nearly change the questions for some of them 'cause...I think you kinda like tell us like in more detail rather than just like 'yeah, I found that fun. Yeah, I thought that was okay, like', kinda like why they chose it more than they chose it 'cause like, it's kinda sometimes people's opinions can be more inspiration than the actual thing they did.

Building Peer-to-Peer Motivation

In **Eagle Park School, Year 2**, the students comment less on their relationships with teachers and more on the influence of other, older students in the school on their educational choices through the Mentoring core practice. Because of the Junior Certificate exams, the direct involvement of students and teachers in the project has reduced, so some of the momentum of the first year is lost. However, students are more influenced by the choice some students have made regarding transition year (TY). This has been discussed with their older peers in structured mentoring sessions. Where previously they believed the school was trying to 'sell' transition to them, they now believe they can decide about it themselves:

INT Year 2: Yeah, and they were telling us about like the subjects that picked for their leaving cert and why they picked them and then they were telling us, because TY's really big in this school so, like if you don't want to do TY it's really hard because you have to like get called out of class by the principal and you get asked oh why aren't you doing TY. So it's just like, basically they are selling TY to us, because we just had like before we just had the meeting that was like oh just do TY, basically like selling it to us by the teachers but, I think talking to the students kind of made it kind of, made me decide anyway."

In **Morning Star School Year 2**, despite reduced project activity, students are still using the information and cultural capital they have developed in Year 1 to support and motivate each other,

INT Year 2: Yeah, and even if one of my friends they weren't trying their best I'd kind of be like oh guys come on like what do you want to be how many points

do you need to get like, come on, like kind of pushing them a little bit and they do the same to me when I'm not trying my best.

In **Eagle Park School, Year 3** students continue to remark on the positive impact of their social relations with mentors and other networks in making post-secondary decisions.

INT Year 3

Cliona: And how did you find out those other ways to be involved (in politics) other than being a TD in the Dáil¹¹?

Brenda (EP1): Well, just from talking to past students. Like one of our past students she is studying in DCU now and she came in and like we talked a lot about college in that as well and our career choices and we talked about our communities and what we want to do about global issues and like issues that come right down to our community and stuff and I think that was something that really benefitted me as well.

Cliona: Your conversation with her?

Brenda (EP1): Yeah because with the programme I think they came in like five or six times and we just had a full day with them so five full days and I think it was really beneficial because we actually got to have them conversations about college and we talked a lot about access routes like TAP, SUSI¹² and like we all talked about like Foundation Years in other colleges because like I have always been really in Trinity and I think I most likely will go to Trinity because I've just been so exposed to it but I think it's important as well that we are exposed to other colleges. I think this is probably the first opportunity that we have actually gotten to really talk about another college so I think that was positive for a lot of people

In this school, most students continue to remark that their family are supportive of them going to college, even if their knowledge of the system is limited. Students in Lucky Lane School also note the impact of mentor networks on their development:

¹¹ The Dáil is the Irish parliament and a TD is an elected representative to the Dail.

¹² SUSI is the state financial support system for students in higher education.

INT Year 3 - Emily (LL1): Well yeah, I think it's good to talk to people who have been to college and it's harder to talk to a teacher about college than it is to talk to your mentor which sounds stupid because they will probably be like the same age or something but It really is a lot harder to talk to a teacher because like you feel like they've forgotten what it's like to go to college and everything that they've been through. Like mentors like, some way you feel like you can connect with them and you feel more obliged (if that's the word) to ask them questions.

In this school, students say that mentors have specifically guided them in making their post-secondary choices, the focus has moved from the mentor's experience to exploring the students' future and they once again comment on the importance of a mentor as someone you can relate to and as someone who is an alternative source of information:

INT Year 3 - Carly (LL4): Why they help us? Because as the years go on like at the start, they weren't talking about college really, they were just talking about what subjects we like to try to get across what we wanted to be like if we said maths they would be like aw, this job would be good for you when you're older and all... but now it's more like 'what do you want to be?', and if we don't know they kind of help us pick and choose what we want but I think from the person who said that's point of view, they do help a lot. Not just even in college but with school work as well if you need help with your homework and all and they will be like oh hey what's bothering you and all? They're not like teachers you can talk about anything with them like, if I said sorry after you're done can I talk to you for a few minutes, they would be like yeah of course and all and we just talk to them.

Here it is evident that the mentor supports the student by sharing college knowledge but also in more informal ways, through exploring what is happening outside of school and connecting the individual interests of the student to their longer-term interests. This individualised interaction is building trust for the student in their social networks, providing essential knowledge and helping students to believe they can actively determine their future trajectory. Similarly, in Hope Avenue School, students reflect on the impact of their social relations and how this informs decision making and habitual patterns.

INT Year 3

Kelsey (MS4): So, I was never around people who actually went to college.

Cliona: Yeah.

Kelsey (MS4): Like they would support and say like ‘you should go to college’ but I was never with people who went and were like ‘We done this and we done that.’ So, like when I kind of like came here I was kind of like ‘Oh I do want to go to college’. That was always my mind-set because of the influence of my mam and my dad and stuff like that.

However, in this school students express a varied experience with their mentors. Those who were less likely to turn up at the school when expected are considered untrustworthy but there are still a small number with whom the students have built trusting relationships:

FG Year 3

Cliona: That’s great. Em and did you feel like you could trust your mentors. You could tell them anything?

Ben (HA6): Probably yeah.

Holly (HA7): Not all of them. There were a few mentors, like in between. We changed because some couldn’t come so different people came but the main people who came in were pretty trustworthy.

Cliona: Okay so like it depends on the type of person maybe?

Eric (HA4): Yeah.

Holly (HA7): Yeah and the way they speak.

Cliona: And what does that mean. Like in what way, like?

Holly (HA7): Like if they speak straightforward and confident you probably believe them more than a person who doesn’t really know what they're saying.

Ben (HA6): Em one that will kind of listen to you and try to understand what you are saying and then give back their input in the best way possible.

Mentors who share their own history and experience, as well as making the effort to connect to the student’s experience, have the most impact. This echoes O’Sullivan et al.’s (2017) research in highlighting the importance of mentors who are relatable and reliable, as well as trained in interacting with the students and confident in the messages they are

communicating. Students in this school show a sophisticated level of understanding of the factors to consider in planning their future:

INT Year 3 - Ashley (HA2): Well I definitely want to go college. I'm not sure to what. I have a few ideas but definitely like the points because most of my friends are doing all higher level and that really like helps them and I'm doing two ordinary so that's already like put me down. Like maths you would get extra points just for doing the higher level. So that is kind of putting me down but other than that if my parents aren't kind of financially stable to support me, like there is always grants, so there is like, I am definitely going to go to college.

This knowledge has been supported through interaction with mentors:

INT Year 3 - Georgia (HA3): Yeah, well if we didn't have the mentoring like I'd still be scared to this day about college. I'd be like 'What?' Like you wouldn't be going on the trips but like being there and experiencing it and seeing students in college and like having lunch and like some of the students are like 'Oh what if I don't fit in?' Obviously, that's a big worry but like the societies in college, like all the teachers and the mentors always say like 'There's always a society. You can always, like even a Tea society, just go and drink tea.' Yeah.

Principal Perspective – Hope Avenue School

In **Hope Avenue School**, the Principal notes several positive processes through which students have developed the capability of social relations in the project. Mentors have had a huge effect on student aspirations. However, because the school is in a rural setting, it has been challenging for mentors to get there, especially those in STEM and health science subjects. The Principal is trying to deal with this by building stronger mentor networks locally but this is proving time consuming.

The Principal also observes that student capacity in Leaving Certificate is very limited, so involving them in their earlier years in second level has a greater impact:

INT Year 3 – Principal: It must be addressed. CFES has to be introduced maybe at the end of first year, start of second year to be a success. Really because that is where the drop off is in second year especially among boys.

Students gained most benefit from the involvement with college students on ‘shadowing days’ on campus¹³:

INT Year 3 – Principal: I think shadowing is an excellent – because they gain huge insight and also really try, you know, they are trying to see themselves in that situation or not.

Teachers in this school also view the campus visits and mentors as being most beneficial in building the capability of social relations:

INT Year 3 – Roisin (teacher): Engaging the students with college. Physically bringing them to college. Bringing people from college that the students can link in with and discuss with people that aren’t us...

INT Year 3 – Mary (teacher): The mentoring helps the pathways to college. The leadership through service, do you know what I mean? You are creating leaders which are the mentors, do you know what I mean. So, there is an awful lot, I couldn’t, I mean strand wise I think there’s, you know, and I think also it’s a moveable part. As each year has gone by different things have happened and we’ve tried things that haven’t worked and we have put them to one side. Do you know what I mean?

Students are learning transferable communication and persuasion skills within the project which some teacher’s remark they are using in other subject areas:

INT 1 Year 3 – Mary (teacher): It definitely had improved like our conversations with the kids. Em especially now in Year 3 and you can see where

¹³ Shadowing days partner second level students with undergraduate students in higher education campuses, so that the second level students get a direct experience of what it is like to be in university for a day.

we are having kind of cross curricular links with say English they would do their oral presentation in February. They would look up, research the college they want to go to and then they have to use their persuasive language that they are taught in English and deliver a speech about that college. So, they are becoming very college aware from second year on.

They are also using their persuasive powers to influence the ambitions of their peers, evidence of some cultural change within this school:

INT 2 Year 3 – John (teacher): Yeah particularly in 2nd year I had a thing where we had a student who was saying ‘I’m not going to college’ and there was a guy beside him saying ‘What do you mean you’re not going to college?’ Whereas I suppose in my fifteen years prior to that it probably would have been the reverse. Do you know that kind of way with a lot of students? So, it’s just more about having a conversation and college is part of their vocabulary now.

INT 1 Year 3 – Mary (teacher): Yeah, normalising it nearly which sounds like an odd thing to say. I suppose coming from my perspective where college was always in our house, do you know what I mean? It was a kind of a conversation about going to college and going through for a leaving cert and that. It would have been normal to me and I could never understand why it wasn’t normal to the students here but it’s beginning to come in, slowly. And they are thinking about it, you know.

INT 3 Year 3 – Ciaran (teacher): It has had an impact on levels as well. I work very close to the current 3rd years and they had a visit to Trinity and it actually impacted their levels. Like they actually realised that more higher level subjects are necessary and we actually had a case where even students that may not have been able to were trying to. And Even now they are still not wanting to drop down which is great in one sense. They are striving for the higher-level subjects because they know the points system now and stuff like that so.

While the capability of social relations is helping students to have college discussions in school, to engage with mentors in school and on campus and to present themselves more

confidently, there is also a risk in encouraging some students to aim higher, one teacher explains this here:

INT 3 Year 3 – Ciaran (teacher): When it gets to this stage at this time of year and you're really worried about the few in particular that will be borderline passing and you know if the right thing comes up they will be fine and if the right doesn't come up they may not be fine. So, it's great that they are pushing themselves and they really are and there are a lot students in my class that people are like "They're what, they're doing higher level?" But they really want to. After the visit last year, the second years to DKIT, they actually, there was a jump. Like five or six of them jumped to higher level maths, higher level English. It mightn't have lasted but the intention was there which is a good thing.

Inhibiting Conversion Factors in the Development of the Capability of Social Relations and Social Networks

Students noted that low expectations of some teachers for their students and the distracting effect of peers could be inhibiting factors in their development of higher education aspirations. In **Eagle Park School**, they remarked:

INT Year 2

Jack (EP2): Like you might have friends that like study with you but then you might have friends who are out like drinking every night or something like that. They can like pressure you and you're like you don't wanna do it just like, 'Aw just do it and all'.

Cliona: You end up doing it if they pressure you. And would em... do you think that would affect then your grades and your like ability to achieve things in the future?

Jack (EP2): Yeah, 'cause like it'll effect it because you won't really care anymore you just wanna like go out and like drink and all. You're just saying like, 'Aw I don't really care about my grades', and all.

In Year 2, some students in this school remark that there is increasing drink and drug use in their community and this has an effect on their perception of their immediate social

network, one student comments, 'It's like this generation they don't really care anymore. . . . they just like drink'. This was also evident in **Lucky Lane School**, particularly in Year 2 of the project. There was some evidence that students' social networks, within their families and communities, were having negative impact upon their educational aspirations. For some, there is an emerging conflict between the ambitions they are proposing and how they are perceived within their community. Students talk about being patronised and not having their goals taken seriously by those in their communities;

INT Year 2 - Carly (LL4): Like I'd be talking to someone about oh yeah I want to go to college and everything they'd be like, 'college, really? Oh nice', and they'd kind of just turn away. As if to say aw you're not going to get into college.'

In **Morning Star School, Year 2**, social relations are having a positive and negative impact, as the conflict between the actions of some peers and the school message, with a strong focus on college progression, is acknowledged by students:

INT Year 2

Cliona: Are there barriers that would get in the way of you achieving your goals?

Dylan (MS1): Em, I think it's just the stupid things that teenagers do, probably just drinking and drugs and all that stuff like, because I used to get into all that kind of stuff and it pulled me away from all my study.

Despite the evident conflict, this student locates their response as an autonomous choice that is each student's responsibility, which demonstrates practical reasoning and responsibility.

In **Hope Avenue School, Year 2** there is further evidence that social relations and networks are sometimes negatively affecting the educational objectives of students:

FG Year 2

Elaine (HA5): Well some of my friends dropped out of school they just go off track; no one's there to motivate them, and I really hate that because they're really bright and they should stay in school but like they just drop out of school and it's really a pity.

Cliona: And how are they now, the people who finished. . .

Holly (HA7): Well my friend, she dropped out of school like you get a choice like if you're 16 either do or don't come to school. I know a friend that's in fourth year now, she'll be coming back to my year next year, so she's coming back so that's good, but my other friend, she tried working but it's just, she doesn't even have like her Leaving Cert so they don't, they can't really employ her, yeah so it's really hard for her now.

These experiences affect the students' perception of themselves, and demonstrate that there is a clash between what they are experiencing in the TA21-CFES project, in the positive social relations and strong trust they are developing with new networks, and some experiences within their community. Share and Carroll's (2013) study in an Irish university and Burke et al.'s (2016) research in Australian higher education institutions similarly found that working-class students in higher education had to bridge several identities and inhabit compartmentalised lives in order to navigate through to achieve their goals.

While mentors have had a positive impact on students in the early stages of the project, by Year 3 students remark on the impact of mentors who do not turn up or make the effort to connect with their mentee. There has been high mentor attrition over the three years of the project and so their impact on the capability of social relations diminishes by Year 3. Nevertheless, mentors who are reliable, relatable and connected to students own interests continue to have a positive impact on student thinking and planning for the future.

This section has considered some factors that may encourage and negatively impact on student aspirations. The following sections consider the emergence of the capability of hope in the context of student engagement in the TA21-CFES project.

The Capability of Hope and Pathways to College

The pathways to college and mentoring core practices are aimed at providing students with information about the requirements to get into college, and providing them with a trusted network through which this information can be transferred. The evidence

emerging from the TA21-CFES project is that hope is developing in the students through expanded, trusted networks, greater knowledge about college and careers and an awareness of how to persist through barriers. These have been facilitated by pathways to college and mentoring practices. Students are clearer on their own role in achieving these goals and demonstrate an understanding of overcoming barriers to make their aspirations attainable. Casey (LL9) in Eagle Park School talks about visiting a higher-education campus and how the information, and exposure to the institution, has affected her sense of hope: ‘It makes your dream reality. . . Like you can always think about ‘Oh yeah, I’ll get my. . . third level education’ but actually going to Trinity College, seeing real students, real people, talking to real lecturers, it makes it [a] reality. It’s possible to go to college.’

The knowledge they have built through the project has developed their cultural capital and given them greater hope that they can get to higher education. Students demonstrate an understanding that there are alternative routes into higher education and this reduces pressure around academic attainment required in the final, second-level school examinations. It also contributes to educational resilience, as they no longer believe that there is one route only to their future. Some students are using this knowledge to develop new habitual patterns such as focused work, setting clear attainment goals for themselves, taking more ‘higher’-level subjects and staying away from social events with peers to ensure they complete the tasks they have set for themselves.

Other students believe that higher education will be more likely to deliver a job that ‘you want to get up every morning and go to. . .’. They associate not going to college with a lack of hope and imagine a life ‘living off and drinking alcohol every day. . .’ where if ‘you had no job you’ll be living on scraps’. In Lucky Lane School, students in the focus group talk about the importance of resilience and reflect on their own family experience and the lack of choice evident for those in their community with low educational attainment. This, alongside the new information from the TA21-CFES programme, is helping them to scaffold a different set of aspirations for themselves:

INT(s) Year 2

Sonya (LL2): Yeah! It really does because before it, I wanted to go to college but I wasn't really sure if I could because of finances. Like cause like I come from a background where money is kinda tight and not, not most of my family have got a degree or masters from college.

Sonya (LL2): Em, I dunno it's just like me da does buildings. I don't think he actually likes it cause he always like, he comes home tired but ye you'd be tired after working, but I think he just does it so he can like, help us with the money in the house and like, like with the food and all.

As Watts and Bridges (2006) highlighted, access to more information can prepare students for post-secondary education but it can also conflict and confuse them. Some students are still uncertain about the future and there is some evidence that informing students of the pathways to college can reduce their hope. Kiara (LL3) in Lucky Lane School talked about how she was unsure about her chances of realising her aspirations:

I don't know if in the future I'm going to be able to do what I want to do. . . like the job and everything and all this. . . in college, if you go to college and if you get the things that you need you should get what you want. . . like your goals achieved. . . but if that doesn't happen then you obviously can't reach them.

What is important about this observation is that students are being encouraged to examine their options and interests in relation to higher education, and while some were inspired and hopeful through these activities, others were not. While the TA21-CFES project encourages all students to consider some form of post-secondary education, it is essentially to support students to make informed choices about their future, whatever those choices may be. This reflects Watts's (2012) observation that a capability approach to widening participation foregrounds freedom of choice, including the freedom to reject what is considered by dominant social classes to be the better option. Other students are modifying their aspirations, based on a more realistic appraisal of what they are likely to achieve. This is evidenced by the conversation in a focus group in **Hope Avenue School:**

FG Year 2

Cliona: The things you want to be, is that something you think you can achieve?

Holly (HA7): No.

Cliona: No? Why not?

Holly (HA7): Like sometimes you have to like be realistic like.

Ben (HA6): Yeah, if you want to be like superman or something like.

Holly (HA7): That's not going to happen.

Ben (HA6): No, that's not realistic.

Holly (HA7): Exactly! It's not going to happen!

As Chapter 7 explored, some students are experiencing a conflict between their hopes for the future, their current identity and the information they are receiving in their families and in school. As Fox (2016) and Watts (2007) illustrated, the students are struggling to identify the value of their own social and cultural capital in an educational landscape that frames academic attainment and post-secondary progression as the legitimised and recognised forms of 'success'. **Eric (HA4)** in Hope Avenue School talks about different types of 'smartness' and how despite not having 'school smartness', he can still amount to something. He is trying to realign his own identity with the new knowledge he has developed through the project, and reassure himself regarding his future. Eric (HA4) also remarks on this and gave examples of smart people who were 'successful' but had not progressed to higher education:

FG Year 1:...and there's some people that haven't gone college that turned out to have great inventions so I'd kinda just follow that route like if I can't go to college I wouldn't just jump at a low paid minimum wage job, I'd kinda just try do something better and kinda think 'If I didn't go college, I still have hope'.

Students defend the choices of their family and it is evident there is some conflict for them between the information gained through TA21-CFES and their own family experience:

INT Year 1:

Kelsey (MS4): But isn't there other jobs that you don't need college for? If that makes sense, like you can, can't you work in certain offices if you're like. . . is that. . . right or wrong?

Cliona: What kind of offices?

Kelsey (MS4): Like, see if you finish your Leaving Cert, and you had got good points in your Leaving Cert but you didn't go to college, and you went to get a job. Would they not check your Leaving Cert?

This conflict between the key messages of the project and the family experience of some students is partially offset by students' engagement with their mentors. Almost all students refer to the importance of 'relatable' mentors in developing hope about progression to higher education. Students comment on how wider college networks, developed through the Mentoring and Pathways to College core practices, have made them more hopeful about their future. Some describe their mentors as 'someone to look up to', or 'someone you can ask questions to if you're not sure about college and stuff', which is 'really helpful', especially when they come from families where there are 'no people with masters or degrees'. Participation in college activities provides clarity on what students feel they can realistically achieve, which in turn impacts on their hope for the future. In Lucky Lane School students report a higher level of awareness of their abilities and limitations and explain how they have adjusted their aspirations in line with this information. In all schools students report the positive impact that early planning and guidance had on students' application to work and on their future hopes. For example, completing the college planning document provided information about grade requirements for courses, which transformed their perception of their own capabilities, and emerged in a sense of hope for the future. This reflects St John et al.'s recommendations (2006; 2011) that through addressing some social and cultural capital barriers, the likelihood of higher education progression is increased.

Higher education students visiting their schools has a notable impact and in Year 2 the impact of relatable role models on students' capability of hope is evident. In **Lucky Lane School** a student states:

INT Year 2: She said like she had kids and all that at a young age and eh that didn't stop her from going back into college when she like, grew older and eh she

was saying that, I dunno, I can't remember where she said she was from but, she was like it's nothing big and that if you're from anywhere you can put in the work, if you put in the work you'll get what you want.

In **Morning Star School**, a student explains how the information has helped to replace fear with hope, and the students are realising the scope of future possibilities,

FG Year 2

Sarah (MS8): I just know I can now because like, all the courses and all. There's loads of opportunities.

Students comment on how broader networks and the Pathways activities have made them more hopeful about their future and more likely to stay committed to school. A student in **Morning Star School** captures this sentiment; 'The activities made us more inspired to get to go to college, like they made us stay in school, and em, reach our goals.' For other students, the information they have acquired has given them hope and also alleviated fears, as the roadmap for their future now shows a variety of possible routes:

INT Year 2

Cliona: So, in terms of the CFES project then, how did it go for you this year?

Dylan (MS1): It went really well 'cause it helped me a lot to get used to going into college and what I will need to get into college and the points I need for my courses and different ways I can take courses, different courses I can take to get into college if I don't get them points. Like if one door is closed, another door opens.

In Year 3, students in all schools continue to develop the capability of hope through campus visits, discussions with their teachers, peers and family and through knowledge they are developing in the Pathways to College core practice. Campus visits build hope by changing student perspective in belonging in higher education, a student in **Morning Star School** remarks:

FG Year 3 - Zoe (MS10): I watch a lot of American TV so like they have like huge numbers on colleges. But then when I found out like economic wise, like

socially and what they can do for you and stuff like that I thought ‘Okay, this is much better than I thought.’

In **Eagle Park School** too, students are considering a range of options and feeling positive:

FG Year 3 - Nicola (EP6): I don’t know what college I want to go to. I would like to get up like because I’m in LCA¹⁴ I have to do a PLC, so I would like to go to a normal college and then go into like Trinity or something.

Emily (LL1) in Lucky Lane School describes the impact of this detailed exploration has been to help build the capability of hope in students but they are also aware that this strong emphasis on college may be alienating for some of their peers:

INT Year 3 – Emily (LL1): More hopeful em, I think it’s just because CFES is so positive towards going to college em, especially like the school, well this area, like not many people would go to college from it, eh CFES just makes you believe that you can go and makes you hopeful that you can go to college and even if it’s like through TAP or DARE or any of them like there’s ways that you shouldn’t just give up straight away.

Cliona: Yeah and do you think there are any downsides to that? Liking placing such an emphasis on college?

Emily (LL1): Yeah because some people might not want to go to college some people want to do em, what are they called, apprenticeships or they mightn’t just want to go at all and I think they should be able to say and feel that if they don’t want to go to college, they don’t have to go to college whereas I think CFES is a bit too forward on going. Like I don’t think... Like I know it’s all about trying to make people go to college but I think there should be something there for people who don’t want to go to college and what they might be able to do like if you don’t have qualifications.

¹⁴ LCA is the Leaving Certificate Applied. Students who take this route in second level are more likely to progress to the workplace or to further education. It offers more limited routes in post-secondary education than the conventional Leaving Certificate.

Here, the student is demonstrating the capability of hope for her future but she has also developed voice through this thickening aspirational map (Appadurai 2004), which helps her to see the limitations of the College for Every Student message in relation to some of her peers. This is important, as students can recognise the value of the information and preparation but also the centrality of individual choice and the necessity of knowing about multiple future trajectories, to determine their own future.

The Capability of Hope and Mentoring

Expanded networks and information gleaned from engagement in the Pathways, Mentoring and Leadership core practices are the main processes through which students are developing hope about their future. There was more project activity in Year 1 and therefore more evidence of change in their sense of future possibility. However, continuing conversations about their future with their school and family networks, combined with a deepening engagement with school and family cultural capital are impacting on their future aspirations. At the end of Year 3 there is a general sense that the TA21-CFES project has impacted upon their hopes for the future in college.

Students comment on how wider college networks developed through the mentoring and pathways to college core practices have made them more hopeful about their future, ‘the activities made us more inspired, to get to go to college like they made us (want to) stay in school, and em, reach our goals.’ They describe their mentors as ‘someone to look up to’ and ‘someone you can ask questions to if you’re not sure about college and stuff’, which is ‘really helpful’. Meeting people who have been to college has really had an impact, clear from this student’s remarks, ‘(mentoring) opens our eyes and says, ‘well they’ve achieved it... if they can do it then we can do it.’

In **Morning Star School** students say that the information gleaned from the project has made them feel hopeful and excited about their future;

INT(s) Year 3

Dylan (MS1): Yeah. Well before project I used to think that like, going into college would be boring and will be just like- just stressful and then after having

all the meetings and activities with the project, I'm starting to get excited for college.

Conor (MS2): Yeah, like I always sort of knew I'd wanted to go to college and it just, it's only, it hasn't made me want to go to college - well it has but it just inspired me to go more as opposed to changing my views.

In **Hope Avenue School** a student refers to the hope that they can change the future for their family:

INT Year 3

Cliona: What do you think, how do you think education can help you reach your goals in the future?

Aga (HA1): Well if I go to college, then I get to master what I want to do in life and it'll just help me and if I have kids I'll just pass it onto them, they'll have more of a chance to go to college as well. And I'll be like their... I'll be there to help them as well.

Cliona: Yeah, and has that happened in your family?

Aga (HA1): No one so far, like my parents never went to college and my brother now is sitting his leaving cert, he's looking to go to college, so yeah, and my older sister as well, is in fourth year and she wants to go to college as well. Yeah.

Students have also expanded their cultural capital and networks in school. In Eagle Park School, there was a teacher-student mentoring model and student reports show have they have become more hopeful because of a mentoring relationship with a teacher who has a passion for their subject:

INT Year 3

Olivia (EP3): Yeah, I definitely agree with that. I think you can really see it in teachers if they are really passionate about what they're doing. If it, you can actually see a teacher light up when they talk about something in that subject. I think, that really has an effect on all the students.

In **Eagle Park School**, they emphasise a ‘whole school approach’ to the project and students recognise that even the Principal is passionate about their futures; again, supporting that sense of hope for their future.

INT Year 3

Brenda (EP1): And just someone else that I think, our principal as well. I know a lot of students might not get a lot of contact with our principal but in our school like, it’s kinda, I dunno she gives us like.

Students are using new knowledge to develop the capability of hope and it has helped to dispel some concerns around the kind of people who go to college and the costs involved:

INT Year 3 -Brenda (EP1): Yeah! It really does because before it, wanted to go to college but I wasn’t really sure if I could because of financial. Like cause like I come background where money is kinda tight and not, not most of my family have got a degree or masters from college

In some schools the mentoring relationship is providing hope through allowing the students to see people from their own communities get into and through college. In Lucky Lane School one student reports when asked what she has learned from her mentor...‘It’s not just because of who you are that you can’t get into it’. It is evident that interacting with someone with whom they can identify has given them hope about what they can achieve in the future. Similarly, in Morning Star School they describe their mentors as ‘someone to look up to’ and ‘someone you can ask questions to if you’re not sure about college and stuff’, which is ‘really helpful’.

In Year 2, students cite the school itself as an important part of the network that has supported their higher education aspirations. This reflects a shift in institutional culture, where more positive student-teacher relationships are emerging and the language used to describe their community is also shifting:

INT Year 2 – Jack (EP2): Well I think that the school has done like a great job with the CFES thing like about college and all ‘cause it would make us work

harder and then be prepared for when we leave school and help build our confidence.

Principal and Teacher Perspective – Morning Star School

In Morning Star school, teachers observe that the TA21-CFES student group are the most ‘rounded’, ‘They wouldn’t be the most academically able, you know, of all the years but they are definitely the most together group.’ This has made running Transition Year much easier as they had built strong foundations for it through the two years of CFES and they had a strong group identity. This student group is also very well informed about post-secondary choices:

INT Year 3 – Ronan (teacher): looking at the college places and looking at the points and things. And a lot of them would know “Would I need that for college” or “I thought I saw”. So, the awareness would be huge, yeah.

Cliona: And would that awareness be different than you have seen in years past?

Ronan: Totally. Absolutely.

Teachers in this school echoed the students’ comments about mentoring, suggesting that the benefits are limited at this stage, unless the interaction focuses more on subject attainment:

INT Year 3 – Ciara (teacher): And I think as well if that was the way the mentoring was being done I think students would be much more willing to stay behind after school, if they thought they were getting a grind for want of a better word, you know. But it would be two-fold. They would think it would be a grind but obviously, it would be a mentoring package.

Inhibiting Social Conversion Factors in the Development of the Capability of Hope

While there is positive evidence that students are building the capability of hope through project engagement, there are several inhibiting social conversion factors that may affect its continued development in the years to come. This section highlights some of the main challenges.

Hard Work is Enough

Students in all schools had a growing understanding that hard work was required to reach their goals. They had internalised this message from interaction with teachers, mentors, peers and their families. Information they had built through the project had also clarified for them what goals they wished to reach and what would be required to achieve their aspirations. In **Lucky Lane School** a student remarks,

INT Year 2: It's not just because of who you are that you can't get into it. Like if you work hard, you will get somewhere.

Another student in Lucky Lane School said, 'I think anybody can fulfil their goals when it comes to hard work'. In reality, however, the obstacles faced by some students in the four schools are such that hard work may not be enough to progress to college. Some students are facing limitations at home, where they are required to do a lot of work inside and outside the home to contribute. Others are subject to significant peer pressure to be part of the social group, to go out at night and to discard college aspirations. Even though the project has helped students to build a much stronger knowledge base, some students have still not been able to take the subjects they need at the required level to plan for the career they had in mind. There is a danger that the project is raising their aspirations without providing them with the tools to contextualise their individual progress within the inhibiting social conversion factors they may meet in their environment. While their aspirations were apparently increased through the development of their emerging capability set it is not yet clear if these capabilities will 'thicken' (Appadurai 2004) the students aspirational maps or produce what Berlant (2006) calls 'cruel optimism', that is: optimistic aspirations but with little realistic possibility of attaining them. In Morning Star School, there was reference to family and teachers saying students could achieve anything, and that hard work is key to success;

INT Year 2

Cliona: Do you feel that you can be anything that you want to be?

Dylan (MS1): If you really work hard you can.

Cliona: Okay. So, you think you can because you can work hard and you can achieve it?

Dylan (MS1): Yeah.

Cliona: Yeah. And is there anybody in your life that makes you feel like you can do whatever you want?

Dylan (MS1): Yeah, your family telling you that you that you can achieve what you want.

Negative Impact of Social Relations and Networks

Some students are experiencing a conflict between their emerging identity as future college-going students, their hopes for the future and the negative reactions of people within their own community. A student in **Eagle Park School** explained:

INT Year 2: Oh yeah, people saying ‘oh yeah I’m from Eagle Park, I don’t need to do anything I won’t get anywhere’... and if friends ask me are you going to college I say, ‘yeah I want to go to college’ but they’d be like ah no, like not all of them say that but some of them you’d go to, and they’d be like ah no college isn’t for me, I’d rather just go and get work, or go FAS or something like....

Students were also concerned about not belonging within a college environment, and other students being ‘posher’ and thinking they are better;

INT Year 2: Some people do yeah. Like if you walk in you can have people being all snobbish saying aw yeah, I’m from this place and you’re not, I’m gonna get a bigger grade than you or bigger...

These views were significant barriers to students building the capability of hope for their future, and their beliefs about belonging in college.

Conflicting Family Expectations

Other students are navigating some conflicts of expectation in their environment, for instance, one young person wants to be a mechanic but his parents want him to be a lawyer. And another student is caught between parental expectations, where his mother wants him to go to college but his father wants him to go directly into work. The student remarks;

FG Year 2

Eric (HA4): I want to go to college but then sometimes I don't really know.

Cliona: Ok, because of what your dad says or because you see both sides of it

Eric: Yeah both sides.

Limitations around Subject Choice

The subject levels and possible subject combinations have also had a negative impact on students' developing capability of hope. Although some remain determined to go to college, they talk about subject level acting as a barrier. One student who had arrived in Ireland from another country had an ambition to be a primary school teacher but has only recently realised this requires higher-level Irish:

INT Year 2

Aga (HA1): Yeah, so it's like really hard to go from Ordinary Level to Higher especially in the Leaving Cert because I don't really have experience, and it's just like different.

At the end of Year 3, there are contrasting themes emerging in how students discuss their hopes for the future. On the one hand, they highlight their growing sense of autonomy, voice and hope. On the other, they are sometimes overwhelmed by the conflict between their expectations, the impact of school structural issues, such as streaming, subject choices, levels and timetabling and the expectations of their family. In Year 2, there is abundant evidence that students experience a negative pull between what they believe is

good for them educationally and for their future goals and the desire to be part of a peer group, some of whom are becoming alienated from school and socialising more. One student expresses his frustration and hopelessness when considering the apathy of his generation. There was reference to studying being ‘uncool’ and how he chooses to go along with his friends rather than stay in class.

FG Year 3

Eric (HA4): We are living in the wrong generation, like nobody cares anyway, no one cares. School, like they’re not taking it serious like they’re obviously gonna like regret it in the future but right now, like with my friends and all they actually don’t care.

Cliona: And so, sometimes do you go along with your friends instead of like staying and studying and stuff.

Eric (HA4): Yeah, I do.

Cliona: And what would your friends say to you if you didn’t go out?

Eric (HA4): They wouldn’t really say much but there’s some people that would be like aw you’re a nerd and all that like why are you studying like, it’s only this small test and all. But then they don’t realise that could learn a lot from it.

Observations of this kind were common in Year 2, and combined with some alienation from schooling due to the perceived limitations of the Junior Certificate examination on the whole year. Taken together, these factors could be considered corrosive disadvantages (Wolff and de Shalit 2007), which may militate against some of the young people realising their future aspirations, even if they have the ability, the attainment and the desire to progress.

The third year of second level clearly holds challenges that are directly impacting upon students’ developing sense of hope. Students refer to the pressure of the Junior Certificate throughout the interviews; they discuss how it has stopped the project, and how there is a sense of dread and stress associated with the exam year. These comments identify stress and fear as processes through which developing hope is negatively impacted, one student states ‘It’s just too much eh, stress about Junior Cert, all of the teachers telling you, ‘you have to study, study, study and if you don’t study you’re not going to do good and all.’

The emphasis within schools on the Junior Cert is clashing with peer messages. Students remark that their generation does not care and they feel a pressure from many of their peers to not study. The conflict between the school message, the peer messages and the reduced participation in TA21-CFES activities combines in some cases to reduce the hope which emerged in Year 1.

Students are evidently experiencing some conflict regarding these competing forces, however they are also very reflective about the life choices they perceive as being available to those within their family and community, the choices available to them and the factors that might inhibit them in making healthier choices. One student remains clear and hopeful about the components of ‘a good life’ and how they will achieve this life, they use the mentor in their life as a role model to support this vision:

INT Year 3: Yeah, because you kind of like you notice that certain people go certain places, but with TA21-CFES like you know when they were telling us their stories and stuff like that, they’d end up doing a lot of studying and then get through, usually when you think of college, you pay to get into it, but it’s not like that anymore, like with TA21-CFES we learned that. Like even me and my friends were talking about it the other day we were like Oh my God like you can just go to college if you want to go to college.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a rationale for including the capabilities of social relations and hope in a pragmatic list to support the development of higher education aspirations in working-class students. It has explored the evidence of their developing capability set on students, they are building cultural capital and a knowledge base to make more informed educational choices. Many students in Year 2 of the project experience a conflict between the project messages, teacher demands regarding the Junior Certificate exams and some of their peers, who are developing new behaviours outside of school related to drink and drugs. For some students, there is a significant ‘pull’ factor of this out of school activity combined with some low expectations for them within their school and community. Going to visit colleges has reassured students that they will build friendships there. Other than good grades and ambition, students remark on the positive

educational effect of good social relations and the necessity of a wide network of social supports as they persist in their educational ambitions.

They are drawing on teachers, mentors, peers and family for advice on their post-secondary trajectory. The students are very conscious of the importance of being surrounded by positive role models and peers who are focused on post-secondary educational progression and they are critically assessing the negative social relations in their environment. Students are changing their habitual patterns and are more likely to have discussions with peers, teachers, families and mentors about progressing to higher education. Conversely, they are also more conscious of the factors that may limit their progression to certain courses or colleges, which relate to subject choice, attainment or the institutional culture within some higher education institutions. This has made most students more realistic but still aspirational. However, it has negatively impacted on other students, who are less certain of their future. This is being dealt with through students 'asking the right questions' of their teachers and mentors. They are also critically exploring family experiences of decision making and creating for themselves a vision of what they consider to be 'a life of value'. While the re-imagining of their future trajectory is complex and it requires considerable navigational capital and resilience to persist, students show remarkable capacity to integrate new knowledge and experiences into a thickening aspirational map for their future.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The study applies the capability approach as an evaluative lens through which to explore the range of capabilities that emerged in young people over the three-year period of the TA21-CFES project. The emerging capabilities contributed to by project participation are: autonomy, practical reason and knowledge, identity, social relations and hope. This final chapter summarises the study and its unique contribution to knowledge. It begins with a discussion of the main findings. It proceeds to evaluate the research design, which used QLR over a three-year period. It evaluates the theoretical and conceptual framework and it assesses the usefulness of the capability approach, used in combination with theories of social and cultural reproduction, social justice and critical pedagogy to explore the research question, which is:

How do social and academic support services for students, provided within the context of a school-university partnership, contribute to the development of student capabilities?

Finally, this chapter recommends some possible future areas for research.

Discussion of Key Findings

This thesis explored the question of how social and academic supports for students, provided within the context of a school-university partnership, would contribute to the development of student capabilities. In so doing, it aimed to use the capability approach as an evaluative lens through which to explore the student experience of the TA21-CFES project. It addresses this question through examining how the TA21-CFES project, which focused on three core practices with students: Leadership through Service, Mentoring and Pathways to College, contributed to the development of students' capability set.

The study demonstrates three main findings: first, specific student capabilities do emerge because of their engagement in the core practices of Leadership through Service, Mentoring and Pathways to College. These are: autonomy, practical reason/college knowledge, identity, social relations and networks and hope. Second, students encounter a range of inhibiting social conversion factors in developing capabilities and persisting with higher education aspirations. These are: the negative pull of peer relations; pressure related to the Junior Certificate; limited subject choice and conflicting family

expectations. Third, it is the combination of their own emerging capability set along with a network of trusted relationships with others and hope that enables them to overcome potentially corrosive disadvantage and translate their experiences into fertile functionings.

There are four themes that arise throughout: (1) the centrality of informed choice, (2) confidence, (3) resilience and (4) trusted relationships with relatable others to working-class students persisting with higher education aspirations. Students began their involvement in the TA21-CFES project in second year (age 14). Having access to early information about subject choice and levels enabled them to consider their educational choices in the longer term and understand how thinking about their future now might positively impact on their progress. Through the Leadership through Service core practice, they developed the confidence and ability to ‘ask the right questions’, this also enabled them to broaden their networks outside of the immediate community, through campus visits and business presentations. Students built new, trusted relationships with their mentors, which made them believe that ‘if they can do it, then so can I!’ This encouraged them to discuss their future with their families and teachers, which in turn, for most students, improved the quality of those relationships. Having access to relatable others and to information on the variety of entry routes to post-secondary education, supported students’ educational resilience, as they internalised the message that there are many ways in which they can progress and that they could draw on their social networks. This built their navigational capital, even while some of the students were clearly encountering significant inhibiting social conversion factors through peer, family and examination pressures.

The main findings related to each emerging capability are now discussed in more detail in the following section of this chapter. In Chapter 2, this study considered the challenges of operationalising the capability approach. In Sen’s formulation, it is deliberately underspecified, to allow for democratic discourse that is context-specific in the formulation and defence of relevant capabilities. Robeyns (2005) proposes procedural criteria for the selection of capabilities and both Walker (2006) and Wilson-Strydom (2016) have developed capability lists directly relevant to working-class students’ progression to higher education. This study adapts Wilson-Strydom’s (2016) ‘top-down and bottom-up’ approach to developing a capability list for working-class student

progression to post-secondary education. It proposes an ideal-theoretical list (Walker 2006), which combines the literature on access, widening participation and education policy with the body of research on using the capability approach in education (top-down). In this research, the ‘ideal-theoretical’ list is tested through QLR with second level students to determine the key capabilities that enable them to plan for higher education progression. The use of QLR strengthens the participative element of the ‘bottom-up’ approach, as the development of a capability list is iterative and re-worked with the students each year in response to key themes emerging from their previous interviews and focus groups. As Wilson-Strydom (2016) remarks, there has been limited study to date in developing capability lists in the context of widening participation. Combining Wilson-Strydom’s ‘top down/bottom-up approach’ to capability list development in the context of a lived project, where data is gathered and analysed year-on-year and discussed in the following wave of data collection contributes to literature in widening participation, as it is using the capability approach as an evaluative lens to consider how widening participation processes and outcomes might be conceptualised and measured differently.

This research takes the view that the capability approach will have greater impact on policy and practice if there is scope to operationalise it in a participatory manner, while taking account of the fact that young people from working-class groups may have adapted preferences and be unclear about the scope of future freedoms that are not currently visible in their day-to-day context. This deeper understanding of the processes informing their planning and choice-making could inform the development of widening participation interventions and the opportunities they have more broadly in their schooling to develop key capabilities for progression to post-secondary education. It also facilitates the testing of the capability approach in developing interventions to widen participation in higher education with second level students, as one mechanism towards realising greater social justice (Wilson-Strydom 2016).

Robeyns (2003) proposes that the capability approach is operationalised through a set of criteria for selecting capabilities. In Chapter 2: 85-87 (Tables 2.2 and 2.3) adapt Wilson-Strydom’s (2012) approach to specifying how she has met these criteria in developing a capability list for higher education transition.

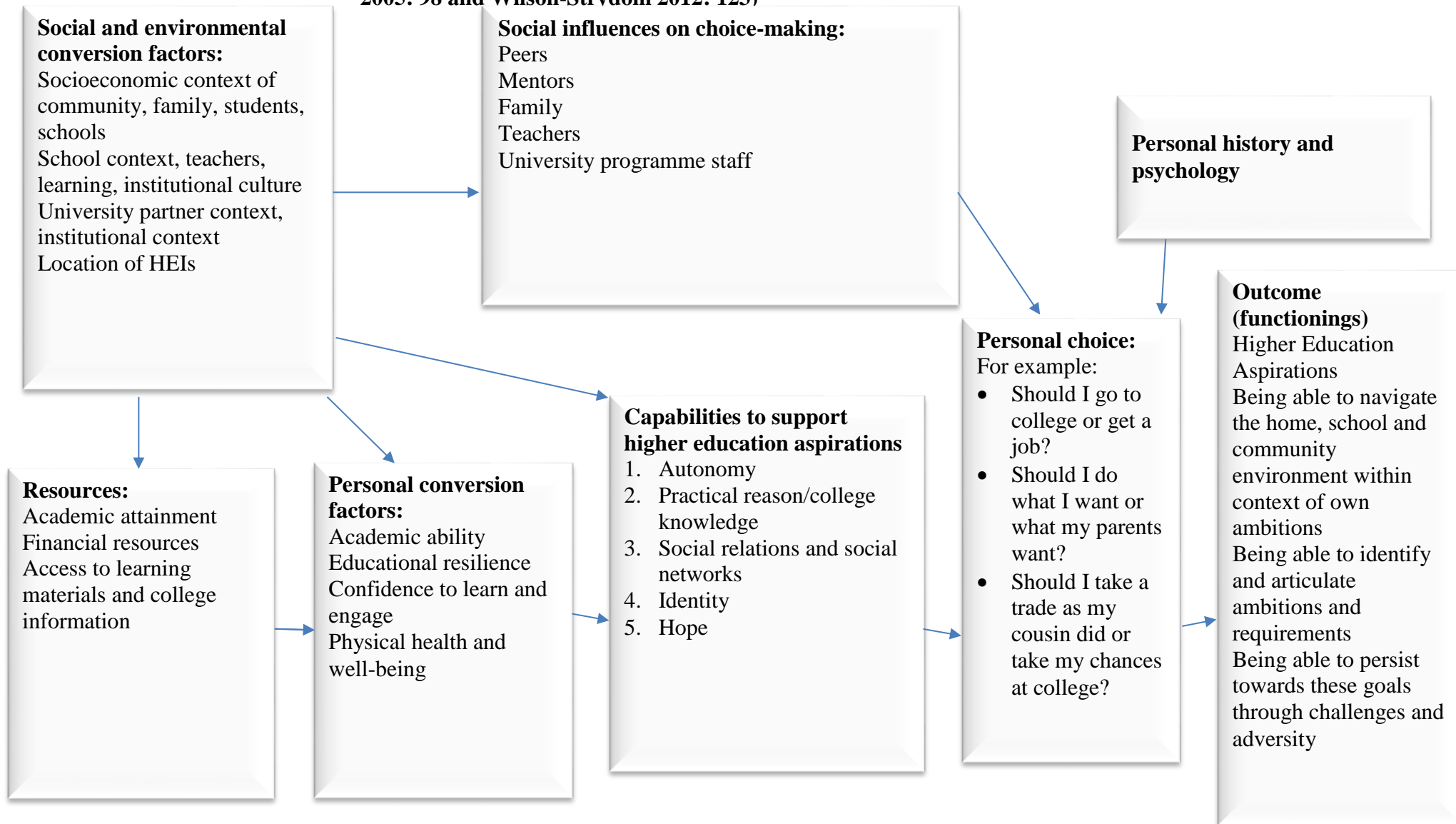
Having followed Robeyns's (2005) process for operationalising the capability approach (see Chapter 2) and adapted Wilson-Strydom's (2016) 'top down/bottom up' approach (see Chapter 2: 85-87), this study proposes that there are five key capabilities which students develop through their engagement in this university-to-school partnership project, TA21-CFES. These capabilities are enriching student ability to make informed choices about their future, to feel more autonomous as young adults, to build trusted networks of relationships across their communities and to engage constructively with their own 'identities in flux' to refine and embellish their hopes for the future. The capabilities emerging through this application of the capability approach are autonomy, practical reason and college knowledge, identity, social relations and social networks and hope (defined in Chapter 2: 87 above).

Conversion Factors

The pragmatic capability list provides a framework for what university-to-school partnership projects could usefully do to enable working-class students to aspire to higher education. However, as Wilson-Strydom (2012) observes, it is also important to identify conversion factors that impact on a person's ability to convert resources into opportunities or capabilities. This draws attention to the point at which agency and structure intersect and therefore provides a mechanism to explore how individual agents can engage with positive or negative structural processes, or conversion factors, to realise their goals. In this analysis, it is proposed that the TA21-CFES project provides a range of social processes through which students interact differently with their environment and that this project has the effect of creating both enabling and inhibiting conversion factors. However, it is acknowledged that the project takes place in the context of a school and out-of-school context where students are exposed to a wide range of influences and therefore it is not the only social process affecting the development of their capability set. These are producing a range of emergent functionings which could support working-class student progression to higher education. However, they are also causing some inhibiting factors to the development of capabilities and the project is limited in what it can achieve with students by some structural arrangements related to school, family and community. Figure 3 below adapts a table from Robeyns's (2005) research and Wilson-Strydom's (2012) study to provide an overview of the main findings of this study, before proceeding to discuss in more detail the findings as they relate to each capability.

Figure 3: Adaptation of a capabilities framework for preparing working-class students for higher education (adapted from Robeyns

2005: 98 and Wilson-Strvdom 2012: 123)



Autonomy

Through the Leadership project, students in the four schools described how they are developing more confidence in their ability to lead and cooperate and more trusting relationships with their peers and their teachers. The ‘enabling’ conversion factors have been a realisation that they can work together as an effective team, a deepening of trusted relationships with teachers, who have supported them to build their team and newly extended social networks providing support for their projects. This is social and cultural capital aligned with greater trust, expanded networks and a new information base. Students are also building a stronger sense of autonomy through Mentoring. It has helped them to build social capital, through broader networks of trustworthy, relatable role models. Positive and negative processes impact on the emergence of autonomy. Increased motivation is a positive process, precipitated by campus visits, meeting college students and a greater sense of being able to shape their own future. However, information and new networks are also at times inhibiting conversion factors, as some students are more fearful because of what they now know.

Students’ involvement in planning, cooperating, leading and completing a service-focused project are acting as enabling conversion factors in the development of their autonomy and providing them with confidence to achieve valued functionings. There is also evidence that some students are beginning to challenge perceptions of ‘what we can do’; nevertheless, students felt structural limitations to the continued development of their autonomy, through the impact of the Junior Certificate examination, combined with a sense that they were ‘having’ to participate in the TA21-CFES project. By Year 3, students in all schools had begun a robust critique of structural factors in their schools and communities which were affecting their academic progress and attainment. This is an area that has scope and potential for greater impact, if it can be harnessed at the right point in their educational cycle. Students who can diagnose and discuss these kinds of structural limitations may be less likely to internalise a ‘deficit’ understanding of themselves and their community and develop greater educational resilience and political agency to navigate obstacles.

Students demonstrated a strong appetite to share information and experiences with other, younger students. Relationships with their peers were strengthened through cooperation

and teamwork in the Leadership core practice. Relationships with teachers improved because of discussing their future with them and developing a better understanding of the educational history of their teachers.

The evidence presented indicated that the Pathways to College core practice was addressing some structural challenges through supporting the guidance counsellor to develop a 'whole school approach' to guidance and to ensure that Junior Cycle students are getting the guidance they need at an earlier stage. Pathways to College was also influencing institutional culture, through creating a framework to deliver and discuss information relating to post-secondary choices early in the second level cycle and through strengthening student-teacher trust.

The Leadership through Service core practice yielded greater evidence of change to student autonomy than did Mentoring or Pathways to College. However, evidence points towards the conclusion that students have developed a stronger sense of their own autonomy through the opportunity to engage in teamwork with a project goal. This, combined with new information on future options and wider networks of college-going young people are all working together to have a positive impact on their aspirations towards higher education.

Table 8.1: The capability of autonomy

Leadership through Service core practice			
Conversion factors within this core practice	Emergent functionings	Inhibiting Conversion Factors	Impact
Teamwork; Project leadership; Responsibility; (planning and implementation)	Confidence in ability to lead and take decisions independently and with others; Trusted relationships; New networks of support; Pride; Purpose; Praxis – action/reflection/action; Empowerment; Sense of impact on others; Sense of responsibility; Confident in subject choice; Clearer on future ambitions.	Junior Certificate Examination; Necessity to engage in TA21-CFES project; Project design – only a select group are leaders in Year 1.	Feeling of ‘obligation’ to participate in project; Limiting sense of autonomy; Perception that only some students are ‘special’ and ‘capable’.
Pathways to College core practice			
Information; Goal setting	Awareness re: future; Trust in ability to reach goals; Happiness; Value and impact of hard work; Sense of new possibilities; Greater focus; Understanding importance of choice-making; Higher student-teacher trust; New habitual work patterns.	Information	Raises fear for some about their academic ability and the worry that they will not manage financially.
Mentoring core practice			
Information; Goal setting	New habitual work patterns; Longer term goal setting;		

	Understanding importance of choice-making.		
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Practical Reason and College Knowledge

The Pathways to College core practice has had the greatest impact on the emerging capability of practical reason and college knowledge. There is evidence that students now see new higher education possibilities. This is encouraging new habitual work patterns and college-focused conversations within their family, school and community. They also demonstrate increased motivation through internalising the habit of goal-setting in their approach to school work. However, Chapter 5 also highlights some inhibiting social factors, such as concern about college costs, an increasing pull against higher education progression by some of their peers, limited subject choice and level, the Junior Certificate examinations and more restricted project activity in Years 2 and 3.

Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that students consider access to early information and guidance is providing them with a ‘road map’ for their future. They are more aware of the importance of repeated and longer term goal-setting, hard work and extending and building their networks to help them with educational resilience for the years ahead. They also report being calmer in school and having better, more trusting relationships with their teachers, particularly in second year of second level. Exposure to different kinds of cultural capital, broader social relations and networks, new college knowledge based on campus visits, relatable mentors and a new-found confidence in their ability to ‘ask the right questions’ are all enabling conversion factors through which students are developing the capability of college knowledge and practical reason.

Table 8.2: The capability of practical reason and college knowledge

Pathways to College core practice			
Conversion factors within this core practice	Emergent functionings	Inhibiting Conversion Factors	Impact
Factual information; Experiential information; Goal setting.	Refined information on subject choice; Confidence; Sense of new possibilities; Trusted relationships: parents, mentors; New attitudes to college; Clearer about plans; New habitual work patterns; Educational resilience/navigational capital; Cultural capital from family discussions; Communication skills; Realistic about future; Sense of belonging; Shifting sense of identity to encompass new possibilities.	Costs of college; Geographical location of some colleges; Size of some colleges; Junior Cert examination; Reduced project activity; Knowledge regarding subject choices available in school.	Fear; Worry that they are too far from home; Concern that some colleges are too large and/or old; Stress and fatigue; Lower morale, sense of direction dissipating; Awareness that some options not available, and others are unappealing.
Mentoring core practice			
Experiential information; Factual information; Goal setting.	Sense that ‘if they can do it, then so can I!; New possibilities – knowledge regarding new routes to college; Social capital - awareness of role of wider social relations and networks in reaching goals; Appreciation of importance of hard work in reaching goals.	Mentors who were un-relatable or unreliable; Knowledge regarding what was required	Sense that the mentor was too far removed from context and ‘not like us’ and disappointment that they did not follow through; Realisation that some goals were not within reach.

Identity

There is evidence that some students experience a clash between their understanding of coming from a ‘disadvantaged community’ and new information they are gleaning from the project. Some students continue to struggle to believe they will ‘fit in’ to the college environment. However, the positive institutional culture within their schools and the focus the schools place on educational progression is motivating many students to work harder. Campus visits are also playing a pivotal role in helping students to develop the capability of identity. Students in all schools reported that the project helped them to consider different future options for themselves. In some cases, this meant students considering college for the first time, while students who had long-standing aspirations to attend college spoke about how the project changed their aspirations to more concrete objectives. They now see themselves, and their future identity, as one that includes attending a ‘good’ college.

There are four positive themes related to students developing the capability of identity through TA21-CFES project engagement: community pride, an emerging sense of self facilitated by young adult and adult role models, positive choice making and greater confidence in their ability to fit in within a higher education environment. These positive themes have emerged through access to a wider range of role models, more information, campus visits and repeated practice of goal setting and hard work. However, these processes are challenged by a range of negative themes that increase as the project moves into Year 2. Students remark on the low expectations of some of their teachers and community. They feel a strong current against education and hard academic work from some of their peers, who are disengaging due to increased social activity and some alienation from schooling. In some cases, they are also dealing with conflicting expectations about their future at home and mixed messages between how they understand the ‘success’ of some of their family messages vis-à-vis the project messages. This is all contributing towards a sense of ‘identity in flux’ for students, who can more readily see the future but are still uncertain about how to incorporate into it their family and wider networks, past and present.

While there is evidence that students are conflicted regarding their shifting identities, it is also clear that their aspirations are shifting because of project engagement. Neither are students accepting the options explored with them uncritically; rather they show the capability of practical reason and college knowledge is strong and developing, through discussions with their families, more trusted relationships with their teachers and an ability to observe their behaviour of their peers from some distance, weighing up the pros and cons of 'belonging'. In at least two of the schools, the institutional culture had notably shifted and both teachers and students are challenging deficit labels used to describe them and their community. To develop a college-bound identity, students need to be able to imagine options in their future that they do not currently have in their lives and that they do not see around them, discussing these options with trusted teachers and with mentors has made them concrete and helped to change students' habitual patterns in relation to work, goal-setting and socialising. Although some students are still positive they will not continue with education after schooling is complete, they are doing so having weighed up all the information, integrated it with their own lived experience and the role models around them, and concluded they are making an informed choice about what for them constitutes 'a life of value'. In this sense, the project is also working for them as much as it is for students who now aspire to higher education, as they know there are options in their future which they could return to should their current trajectory change.

Table 8.3: The capability of identity

Pathways to College core practice			
Conversion factors within these core practices	Emergent functionings	Inhibiting Conversion Factors	Impact
Institutional culture; Praxis – action/reflection/action for the students; Community culture	Fitting in – reflecting on belonging; Community pride; Emerging sense of self vis a vis adult role models; Positive choice making.	Low expectations among some teachers; Peer culture—negative peer pressure; Community culture—negative response from some within own community to goals; Family expectations.	Identity in flux – deflated in Year 2; Feeling apart from peers and community; Conflict with peers regarding increased social activity.
Leadership through Service core practice			
Project leadership; Teamwork	Trust in teamwork; Group identity	Group conflict	Feeling left out; Negative peer relations.
Mentoring core practice			
Goal setting; Experiential knowledge	Sense of self-belief; Belonging; Confidence; ‘Fitting in’ identity; Sense of new possibilities; Educational resilience towards goals; Giving back to younger students; Aiming for higher attainment; Relating to college students and different higher education institutions; Self-concept as ‘capable student’.	Group conflict	Feeling left out; Negative peer relations.

The Capabilities of Social Relations and Hope

Students have developed the capability of social relations and social networks through improved relationships with teachers, college-focused conversations with their families, campus visits and talks with university personnel, expanded networks with mentors and by providing information to other students in their school as the project progresses.

Students are affected by the low expectations of some teachers and this could be acting as an inhibiting factor in the realisation of higher education aspirations. They are also affected by patterns of drinking and drug use in their community and its impact on their immediate peer network. They are conscious of an increasing alienation from school and increased apathy among some of their peers. For some, this means navigating an emerging conflict between the ambitions they are proposing and how they are perceived by some people within their community. These experiences affect the students' perception of themselves, and may indicate a pull between some of the experiences in the TA21-CFES project, in the positive social relations and strong trust they are developing with new networks, and some experiences within their community.

Campus visits have helped students to believe they will belong in college. They are drawing on teachers, mentors, peers and family for advice on their post-secondary trajectory. The students are very conscious of the importance of being surrounded by positive role models and peers who are focused on post-secondary educational progression and they are critically assessing the negative social relations in their environment. Going to visit colleges has reassured students that they will build friendships there. Other than good grades and ambition, students remark on the positive educational effect of good social relations. While Mentoring had the biggest impact on students' development of the capability of social relations, Pathways to College helped them to build more trusted relationships with teachers and to open different conversations with family members, while the Leadership through Service core practice supported the development of positive interaction with their peers towards a shared goal. The capability of social relations and social networks is building trust, positivity about their future, educational resilience and a stronger identity in relation to college-going goals.

Students cite the institutional culture of their school as an important part of the network that has supported their higher education aspirations. This reflects a shift in institutional culture, where more positive student-teacher relationships are emerging and the language used to describe their community is also changing. While there is positive evidence that students are building the capability of hope through project engagement, there are several inhibiting social conversion factors that may affect its continued development in the years to come.

Students in all schools had a growing understanding that hard work was required to reach their goals. They had internalised this message from interaction with teachers, mentors, peers and their families. Information they had built through the project had also clarified for them what goals they wished to reach and what would be required to achieve their aspirations. However, the obstacles faced by some students in the four schools are such that hard work may not be enough to progress to college. Some students are facing limitations at home, where they are required to do a lot of work inside and outside the home to contribute. Others are subject to significant peer pressure to be part of the social group, to go out at night and to discard college aspirations. Even though the project has helped students to build a much stronger knowledge base, some students have still not been able to take the subjects they need at the required level to plan for the career they had in mind. There is a danger that the project is raising their aspirations without providing them with the tools to contextualise their individual progress within the inhibiting social conversion factors they may meet in their environment. While their aspirations were apparently increased through the development of their emerging capability set it is not yet clear if these capabilities will 'thicken' (Appadurai 2004) the students aspirational maps or produce what Berlant (2006) calls 'cruel optimism', that is: optimistic aspirations but with little realistic possibility of attaining them.

Some students are experiencing a conflict between their emerging identity as future college-going students, their hopes for the future and the negative reactions of people within their own community. These views were significant barriers to students building the capability of hope for their future, and their beliefs about belonging in college. Other students are navigating some conflicts of expectation in their environment, for instance, one young person wants to be a mechanic but his parents want him to be a lawyer. There was evidence of internal conflict and indecision that is inhibiting the development of the

capability of hope. The subject levels and possible subject combinations have also had a negative impact on students' developing capability of hope. Although some remain determined to go to college, they talk about subject level acting as a barrier. At the end of Year 2, there are contrasting themes emerging in how students discuss their hopes for the future. On the one hand, they highlight their growing sense of autonomy, voice and hope. On the other, they are sometimes overwhelmed by the conflict between their expectations, the impact of school structural issues, such as streaming, subject choices, levels and timetabling and the expectations of their family.

Negative community reactions to some students' college ambitions combined with increased alienation from schooling due to the perceived limitations of the Junior Certificate examination and 'pull' factors exercised by peers who were increasingly disengaged in education could be considered corrosive disadvantages (Wolff and de Shalit 2007), which may militate against some of the young people realising their future aspirations, even if they have the ability, the attainment and the desire to progress.

Students identify stress and fear related to the Junior Certificate exam as processes through which developing hope is negatively impacted. While some students are experiencing conflict regarding these competing forces, they are also very reflective about the life choices they perceive as being available to those within their family and community, the choices available to them and the factors that might inhibit them in making healthier choices.

In summary, the TA21-CFES project has positively affected student hope through new networks and knowledge. Students are changing their habitual patterns and are more likely to have discussions with peers, teachers, families and mentors about progressing to higher education. Conversely, they are also more conscious of the factors that may limit their progression to certain courses or colleges, which relate to subject choice, attainment or the institutional culture within some higher education institutions. This has made most students more realistic but still aspirational. However, it has negatively impacted on other students, who are less certain of their future. This is being dealt with through students 'asking the right questions' of their teachers and mentors. They are also critically exploring family experiences of decision making and creating for themselves a vision of what they consider to be 'a life of value'.

Table 8.4: The capabilities of social relations and hope

Social Relations and Pathways to College and Mentoring			
Conversion factors within these core practices	Emergent functionings	Inhibiting Conversion Factors	Impact
Institutional culture; Family engagement ; Building peer-to-peer motivation; Relatable role models (mentors)	Trust—teachers; Sense of new possibilities; Family support—greater confidence in goals; Peer support—greater sense of educational resilience and emotional balance; Higher motivation; Flexibility of thinking.	Low expectations among some teachers; Peer culture—negative peer pressure; Community culture—negative response from some within own community to goals.	School alienation; Conflict with peers and community; Sense of apathy and hopelessness.
Hope and Pathways to College and Mentoring			
Conversion factors within these core practices	Emergent functionings	Inhibiting Conversion Factors	Impact
Goal setting; Experiential knowledge; Factual knowledge	Cultural capital—family and peer group; Sense of new possibilities; More higher level subjects—higher attainment; New habitual work patterns.	Factual information; Community culture; Institutional culture.	Fear/conflict with peers and family regarding future; Conflict with idea of college vis a vis own family history; Peer pressure re anti-social behaviour; Conflict with family re some expectations; Limitations re subject choice in their school vis a vis the goals they have set.

This section has discussed the main findings of this study as they relate to the students emerging capability set. The following section will discuss the unique contribution to knowledge that this research makes and then evaluate the research design, namely a qualitative longitudinal study.

Contributions of the Study

This study is unique as it is exploring the impact over time on students of a project designed to build their capabilities as they relate to higher education at an early stage in their second level education. Following a review of Irish and international literature, I have not encountered any study that is the same as this one, combining QLR with the capability approach to explore a widening participation project. The research makes a key methodological contribution, some empirical contributions and a conceptual contribution to the literature on widening participation and building aspirations towards higher education for working-class students. It makes a methodological contribution as is the first use of QLR in Ireland related to a ‘lived’ project aimed at working-class students over a three-year period. It is therefore able to capture the development of students’ capabilities over time and to consider the impact of challenges and obstacles they face in their educational choice-making. It contributes empirically as it provides new knowledge about the impact of interventions aimed at developing students’ capability set and how these might help them to develop navigational capital and post-secondary educational aspirations. It also makes a conceptual contribution to how we frame the design and evaluation of impact of widening participation initiatives, as it takes a capability approach to considering how students develop higher education aspirations over time, towards what they consider ‘a life of value’.

Beginning with students in second year of second level, this study offers insight into the processes by which working-class students make their educational choices and the effect of the information, role models and institutional culture on their decision making. The value of using QLR is that it involves students directly in responding to the project in respect of their own lived experiences and it offers three points over a three year period of change for the young people involved to explore their project experience in the context of other factors influencing their development. This offers the scope to deepen the

analysis of emerging themes and to cross reference those themes with each other year-on-year. It also presents the opportunity to explore changes they experience over time, although in this case it is most specifically related to the project experience. It echoes other Irish longitudinal studies, such as Foley's (2017) QLR study on youth transitions of Russian-speaking populations and longitudinal study undertaken by McCoy et al. (2014) in respect of the importance of institutional culture in shaping preference formation, the critical role played by guidance counsellors and teachers for working-class student decision making, the negative impact of a dearth of information on subject choice and level at Junior Cycle level and the relative lack of information working-class students have regarding the full range of opportunities available in post-secondary education. These findings are not dissimilar to Wilson-Strydom's (2012; 2016) findings within the South African context, who also reported working-class students having difficulty accessing timely information and suitable sources of support and guidance at critical junctures. She recommends close, sustained collaboration between higher education institutions and schools to try to address these areas, so that students can make informed choices at these important transition points.

Taking a capability approach to widening participation interventions, this study makes a key conceptual contribution, as it operationalises the capability approach in the context of an unfolding educational process with working-class students and provides evidence that this intervention supports students to develop the capabilities of autonomy, practical reason, social relations, identity and hope. This enables us to visualise the impact widening participation interventions might have if they were designed to widen the capability of working-class students, towards valued beings and doings, rather than a principal focus on ensuring more students' complete schooling with the attainment required to progress to higher education. Its conceptual contribution is therefore to combine the capability approach with theories of social and cultural reproduction, social justice and critical pedagogy to develop a pragmatic list to best prepare working-class students to aspire towards higher education. It enables us to build a picture over time of what student capabilities are emerging and how these may be either strengthened or diminished by social, personal or environmental conversion factors. Taking a capability approach, it proposes that a starting point for widening participation university-to-school partnerships is to consider what kind of intervention might best support all students to develop necessary capabilities in order to have clearer aspirations about their post-

secondary choices. The capability approach is a justice-based framework concerned with exploring individual freedoms and agency within a wider structural context. As such, it provides scope to advocate for a justice-based approach to developing widening participation interventions, which consider and debate the inequalities experienced by students in certain circumstances, in this case within DEIS schools, in reaching their full educational potential. Rather than a focus on skills development, this implies a focus on the development of evolving capabilities in combination with basic and internal capabilities, or personal powers (Nussbaum 2006) within an acknowledged context of structural inequalities. This provides a unique understanding of how we might use the capability approach to better design educational interventions, with the objective of providing each individual with an institutional framework within which they could draw on their agency to independently explore their own valued beings and doings and what might be for them ‘a life of value.’

The capability approach has been used to explore higher education transitions and integration within the higher education context but it has not yet been used to explore the unfolding of second level students’ capabilities over time, as they relate specifically to widening participation to higher education. This study argues that if educational interventions had as their starting point the objective of empowering students to develop to their full potential, through a focus on the capabilities they need to continue to aspire, then students would be more likely to develop educational resilience and navigational capital to persist and to focus on their longer-term goals, even in the context of environmental adversity. It also proposes that students who have the knowledge they need to make informed choices, at an earlier stage in their second level education, are less likely to be inhibited in their decision making by adapted preferences and, whether they choose to progress to higher education, are at least making their choices in the context of a more complete information base and relatable, college-going networks. There is evidence too that the TA21-CFES project is helping to build a more positive institutional culture, through stronger, trusted relationships, a more empowered student body and information for students which is reframing their aspirations.

However, there are acknowledged challenges, or inhibiting social conversion factors, which students increasingly encounter throughout their involvement with the project. These are the negative pull of peer relationships, the pressure of the Junior Certificate

examination, limitations in subject choice and level within some schools, conflict with their families regarding their future aspirations and, for some, the challenge of realising that they may not have the academic ability to guarantee progression into the areas that interest them. These factors may prevent students from converting their emerging capabilities into functionings in the future.

The value of taking a capability approach to student development is that we can explore the interplay of agency and structure over time, considering ways in which some inhibiting social conversion factors can propel students to develop greater educational resilience. For example, some students realised after the Junior Certificate that their higher education aspirations may be unrealistic. Because they know of other progression routes, such as Foundation Courses, post-leaving cert courses and the option of returning to education as a mature student, they are motivated to persist and to think flexibly about how they envision their educational trajectory. Rather than taking an excessively deterministic approach, as some theorists of social and cultural reproduction may do, this study therefore aims to capture the dynamic interaction between the TA21-CFES project, the students, their wider environment and the development of their capabilities over time.

This section has considered the unique methodological, empirical and conceptual contributions of this study. It has argued that it is the first study in Ireland to use QLR to examine the impact of a widening participation initiative on the development of student capabilities. It has provided new empirical insights regarding the students' development of higher education aspirations over time. It proposes some conceptual insights arising from the operationalisation of the capability approach to our understanding of how students develop through widening participation initiatives and which capabilities might prepare them to draw on and develop their social and cultural capital as it relates to higher education. The following section will evaluate the research design and theoretical framework.

Evaluation of the Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This study used a qualitative longitudinal research approach over three data waves across a three-year period in four case study sites. It focused the qualitative data waves

specifically on capabilities emerging in students because of their participation in the TA21-CFES project. By conducting three consecutive waves of interviews, it was possible to reflect on the educational development and post-secondary goals of participating students. The first wave of interviews happened in spring of second year in their second level education, when students had spent almost one academic year involved in the TA21-CFES project. By the third wave of data collection, students were in either Transition Year or 5th year (if they chose not to do TY) and they were looking towards the subject choices they might make for their Leaving Cert, as well as beyond to post-school options. Students had overcome the stressful educational hurdle of the Junior Certificate examination and most of them remained in the school. Two students were not available to participate in wave 3 of data collection, one of whom was in foster care and the other student was a foreign national who moved out of Dublin.

Students were interviewed within their school during school hours to minimise disruption and any concern to them. The semi-structured interview allows some flexibility to students in their responses. The schedule was adapted each year, to prevent respondent question fatigue and to help the students to recall and relate to what they had said the previous year. This allowed them to recall the extent to which they had developed as individuals since the previous year but also to critically assess their personal involvement with the project, how it had been enabling and inhibiting of their progress and other factors that impacted on this. This process of repeatedly eliciting the student perspective on their project engagement and development also speaks to Sen's argument that the development of capabilities should be context specific and involve a participatory component, so that it reflects the lived experience and the values of each specific context. Equally, to operationalise the capability approach in this context, the interview schedule was helpful as it was drafted with reference to related research on the capability approach, social and cultural reproduction theories and the policy landscape in Ireland.

The qualitative data allowed for an in-depth exploration of the processes that enabled and inhibited the development of their capabilities as they related to higher education aspirations and to get a sense of their perception of the institutional culture in their school and other educational domains they had visited. Probing these change processes was a strength of the QLR approach, which would have been difficult to achieve through other methods, such as a survey.

As I acknowledged in Chapter 3, a challenge in this research is that I have worked in educational access for twenty years and I am also director of the TA21-CFES project. There is therefore a risk of researcher bias. Repeated waves of data collection and clarifying researcher perception with respondents has helped to mitigate these biases. I invited the students to confirm or clarify their experiences of the previous year and paraphrased back to them what they had said, to ensure my understanding of their perception was accurate. The data were also shared and discussed with colleagues not directly involved in the project and with school personnel. Interview findings were triangulated with focus groups, to determine whether the emergent themes were accurately reflecting the student voice in each school. I present the analysis herein as an honest and critical exploration of the data, considering my own subjective reality and experience to date. I have endeavoured to safeguard against bias by incorporating reflexivity but I take the position that no social research is truly value free and entirely objective, which does not discount a critical exploration of any subject matter, so long as the prisms through which we evaluate specific other's daily lived realities are acknowledged and addressed.

The Capability Approach as a Theoretical Framework

This research proposes that the capability approach provides a useful framework within which to consider widening participation policy and practice. Sen (1992) and Nussbaum's (2005) capability approach proposes that social arrangements should aim to expand people's capabilities, which is their freedom to promote or achieve functionings that are important to them. Structural or social arrangements affect the capacity of individuals to convert capabilities into functionings. This study has explored this space between structure and agency, drawing on the concepts of enabling and inhibiting conversion factors. Within these spaces, it is argued, individuals can draw on social and cultural capital provided by the project, and their own navigational capital, to develop the educational resilience to persist towards their post-secondary aspirations. However, it is also acknowledged that there may be personal factors that contribute towards corrosive disadvantage impeding the progress of some people and that others will leverage the capital provided by the project to generate for themselves fertile functionings (Wolff and de Shalit 2007).

As Chapter 2 explores, Robeyns describes the capability approach as underspecified and it has been the subject of criticism for the lack of a normative account of the distinction between individual and collective responsibility (Saito 2003). It is also distinctive in every application, which Sen defended because it should allow for democratic discourse that is context specific. This perspective would also align with Freirean (1970) thinking regarding the conscientization of oppressed communities and challenging cultures of silence. Questions are raised, however, about the degree to which this can be applicable to children, where the selection of capabilities may relate to future rather than current freedoms and their preferences may already have been adapted by circumstance (Nussbaum 2006). This study takes a similar position to Foley's (2017) thesis, that students at any age have a voice and perspective that are essential to consider in determining how to shape their future. To bring about change that is individually and socially of value, it is also critical to engage people in considering what is of value to them and where they wish to catalyse change. There will be commonalities across working-class communities, but there will also be differences and by taking Nussbaum's approach to the development of a capabilities list, this study acknowledges that there is value both in the personal and local internalisation of circumstances, as well as in the wider structural analysis provided by other research and policy literature.

This study has aimed to bridge the gap between human capital and capability theories by integrating both, and arguing that students who are increasing their own 'store' of social and cultural capital are developing a range of emerging capabilities that will support their post-secondary aspirations and build their human capital. While acknowledging Sen's arguments for participatory processes, it anchors the process in Wilson-Strydom's (2016) 'top down and bottom up' approach to capability list development. The implications of this study are that policy aiming to prepare all young people, regardless of SES background, for progression to post-secondary education, would aim to deliver early stage projects in second level providing information, relatable role models and leadership opportunities, to provide them with the capital constructs they need to develop educational capabilities that will help make informed choices about their post-secondary trajectory.

This study also drew on theories of social justice, including Rawls (1999) who contends that our socio-economic position is largely the outcome of a natural lottery and cannot, therefore, be considered just (Sandel 2010; Wilson-Strydom 2012). The central thesis of this study aligns with Sen's (1979) argument, that rather than striving for a perfectly just system, we focus on eliminating the practical realities of injustice in the contexts in which we find ourselves. The capability approach is appealing in this context, since it focuses on the nature of individual disadvantages while acknowledging the importance of structure in shaping them. This approach connects individual biographies and social arrangements by examining the intersections between structure and agency. This provides a 'rich picture' of how the unfolding of individual capability is impacted positively and negatively by the structural arrangements in which these young people are living. Focusing on capabilities requires us to evaluate not just satisfaction with individual learning outcomes but to question the range of real educational choices that achieve a valued educational functioning (Unterhalter et al. 2007).

Critics suggest that the capability approach is excessively individualised and cannot therefore lead to widespread social change. However, this study aligns with Walker (2012) and Dewey's (1916) thinking on the potential of progressive, participatory education and with the Freirean perspective on conscientization of the 'oppressed' through participatory pedagogy, arguing that education is the only sure method of social reconstruction, as it creates social change by mediating a process of sharing in social consciousness and the adjustment of individual activity based on this consciousness. Therefore, as Walker (2012) contends, the expansion of capabilities to choose lives of value creates the possibility of reform. Sen's capability approach, Dewey's perspective on participatory pedagogy and Freire's focus on 'praxis', the everyday cycle of action/reflection/action that individuals engage in, all offer new pedagogies of hope, which liberate us from the deterministic constraints of social and cultural reproduction theories (Glassman and Patton 2014).

As this study argued in Chapter 2, taking a human capability perspective to students' development of higher education aspirations articulates a way of considering the relationship between goals and fields of action, where 'fields' provide a way of viewing the types of games people engage in as they live in communities and participate in education (St John 2013). There is no perfectly just society; equally there is no structure

that is not open to the potentially transformative impact that individual action can have. It is through locating and exploiting these 'fields of action' (St John 2013) that we can find the opportunities for individual and collective change.

This study has drawn on Bourdieu's (1984) paradigm of cultural reproduction and specifically the concept of habitus as a barrier to student development. It has explored some ways in which the students' navigational capital, and their newly acquired social and cultural capital impact on their habitus. This developing habitus is also precipitating the emergence of capabilities that are supporting their post-secondary aspirations. However, it is acknowledged that these developments may be negatively impacted by external events relating to their habitus, caused by family and school factors or by their own academic attainment. In examining these effects, this study also drew on the concept of adapted preferences (Watts 2012) where students may limit their plans due to lack of information or to take account of complex domestic circumstances. Watts argues that the adapted preference problem must be directly acknowledged and that students should be engaged with as individuals free to make an informed choice to either accept or reject the possibility of higher education progression. If interventions are not framed in this way, then they reinforce the idea that working-class students are operating from a deficit base and need to fill in their social and cultural capital 'gaps' to belong.

Echoing the discussion in Chapter 2, it is therefore important to consider how the resources available to individuals in different educational contexts might best facilitate the development of substantive freedoms to convert the available resources into functionings. Fox (2016), Glassman and Patton (2014) highlight limitations of Bourdieu's (1984; 1986; 1990) and critical theorists, suggesting that they unwittingly frame students' progress as related to the social and cultural capital deficits they need to address to successfully address and progress to a higher education institution. This research takes a more Freirean perspective, that the students themselves have considerable 'community cultural wealth' (Yosso 2005) to bring to their educational experience, some of which emerges over the course of this study as navigational capital, strong self-awareness and educational resilience. They draw on examples of hard work within their families, role models who have achieved but without the experience of higher education, their own reflections on the negative pull of peer pressure and the recognition

that having trusted networks both in and out of school will be invaluable in supporting their future progression.

The capability approach provided a powerful lens through which to consider student development. While the review of literature and policy that preceded wave 1 analysis guided the researcher to create an interview schedule focusing on a broader list of ‘ideal-theoretical’ capabilities, as those most likely to prepare students to aspire for higher education, it was clear in wave 1 that students were really developing a more limited range of capabilities through the project. These were: autonomy, practical reason/college knowledge, social relations and networks, identity and hope. There were many ways in which these capabilities were mutually reinforcing too – for instance their growing ability to use new knowledge to reason about their current choices and future options gave them hope; their social relations and networks provided strong support from which to successfully develop effective leadership projects, which helped them to develop the capability of autonomy. Equally, some of the inhibiting social conversion factors, such as the negative pull of peer pressure, appeared to improve the navigational capital and motivation of some students, who were choosing to resist group identity pressure and work towards their longer-term goals instead. While the capability approach enabled this illuminating exploration of each individual student, it is also a challenge to operationalise it and specify its potential relevance in the context of such a significant global focus on the human capital outcomes of education. This narrative has been internalised by teachers, school leaders, families and students themselves. Taking a capability approach, while also acknowledging the importance of human capital outcomes is an effort to combine the two. This is important because while higher aspirations may positively impact on the habitual patterns of students, as they relate to organisation, harder work, they must also reach certain academic standards to reach their goals and no amount of freedom, hope and higher education identity will get them there unless they have the academic capacity to reach the required attainment levels.

Implications for Policy

This study has particularly highlighted the alienating impact of the focus on state examinations, the limited range of higher education role models at home or in DEIS-type communities and student uncertainty regarding identity and belonging. The study

examined these systemic and structural barriers and argued that practical sources of support and information, if provided at an early enough stage, could help students to chart their own course and maintain motivation towards longer-term goals.

The main policy implication of this is that higher education institutions could best partner with DEIS schools to work with students at an early stage in their second level education and to provide opportunities for students to develop their capabilities to their full potential. This will not serve as a comprehensive antidote to the many other pressures students encounter inside and outside of school, or to address any specific personal challenges they may face, but it can provide information, hope, agency and a network of others who have traversed similar terrain. This does not imply that other agents within the education system, such as school and higher education personnel, parents and community activists should not also advocate and work for change of some of the major structural inhibitors to student development, rather, these processes of activism towards structural change go hand-in-hand with providing, in the here-and-now, opportunities to think differently about how working class young people's development can be conceptualised within unequal structures and how today's students might be offered scope to develop in different directions. In this sense, a policy focus that aims to draw on students' own community cultural wealth and their emerging capabilities is likely to generate educational resilience and navigational capital that will carry them and some of their networks through to different possibilities. These imagined futures would therefore be predicated on informed choice and interaction with trusted others, as an alternative experience to progressing through a school experience feeling impeded by systemic barriers that may not be fully acknowledged, much less considered, discussed and overcome.

Implications for Practice

As Keane notes (2013), there has been limited research in Ireland on the impact of higher education-to-school partnerships in widening access and participation to higher education. This research aims to contribute to the literature on evaluation of widening participation interventions by drawing on a justice-based framework and involving student participants in a QLR study over a three-year period. This offers insights into their experience of the project, its relationship to some school and community structures

and student insights into the factors that enable and inhibit their development. It draws on the capability approach and other theories, to develop a capability list related to this intervention. This list focuses on the kind of interventions that would prepare and motivate working-class young adults to consider higher education progression. While recognising that there are other influential environmental factors, it nevertheless seeks to find the spaces through which the higher education institution might have most influence in its partnership with DEIS schools. Within these spaces, it is proposed that the following interventions have positive impact on student aspiration and motivation for higher education (Wilson-Strydom 2016):

Social and Environmental Conversion Factors

- a. providing students with opportunities to plan, lead and co-organise a service focused project, where the student voice is central and they collectively use their agency for local impact.
- b. the availability of relatable mentors with varied lived experience and trajectories, who will engage in structured, long term mentoring relationships with the students.
- c. activities that develop trusted relationships between students and their closest networks, such as teachers, school leadership, parents and peers.
- d. activities that provide information on varied post-secondary trajectories as well as the scope to explore on the job training and apprenticeship schemes, while avoiding the presentation of same as the expected destination of working-class students.

Personal Conversion Factors

- a. activities that provide information at an early stage in the second level cycle and processes through which students can deconstruct this information.
- b. the opportunity to contribute to the design and development of higher education to school partnerships, as key stakeholders in their successful implementation.
- c. the opportunity to move beyond the school and community environment and into a range of different higher education ‘cultures’, so that they can make more informed choices.

- d. the opportunity to discuss and analyse social and environmental factors in their lives which they consider have either positive or negative impact on their development, to diagnose areas where they can improve through navigational capital and educational resilience and areas that are structural and systemic, requiring larger scale efforts to change. The opportunity to understand that sometimes their own ‘community cultural wealth’ will be an asset in navigating new terrain (Yosso 2005). An understanding of structural factors, such as the examination process, the curriculum, pedagogy, school types and geography, social class, in the context of their lived experience.

In addition, the higher education institutions could embrace the capability list presented here as important in designing and delivering their outreach initiatives. As Wilson-Strydom (2012) remarks this approach takes account of university readiness as a ‘multidimensional construct’. It is clear from this study that there are many systemic and structural constraints on student progress within the second level school system and the studied intervention does not claim to be addressing these factors. However, it is important to consider the outcomes in the context of what higher education institutions could do to support students in such schools to access information at an early stage, build supportive educational networks and sustain their focus despite inhibiting conversion factors. It is proposed that long term partnerships between higher education institutions and schools, focusing on deep engagement with as many students as possible from the earliest feasible stage would have a much bigger impact on student outcomes. The current focus of higher education-to-school partnerships is almost exclusively at senior cycle level, a point at which most students have already made self-limiting subject choices and other decisions about where they might belong in their post-secondary world. By taking a capability approach to widening participation at an early stage, the focus can be on how such interventions help young people to develop the capabilities to sustain themselves through second level and access sources of support and information when they need them. As Wilson-Strydom (2012) points out, this approach is quite distinctive from a deficit understanding of students requirements for higher education, it asks what is needed to develop the capabilities students will need most to help them prepare for post-secondary education. This provides a space within which to examine each young person’s experience of structure/agency conflicts and how they change and develop through the process of negotiating these; it also provides a way of thinking about their experience of

schooling and how they bring that experience to other domains of their life, including their family and peers.

As Wilson-Strydom (2012) observes, the capability approach can also be used as a participatory planning process to identify with schools and communities how students and teachers are developing and how their approach and experience might differ if they considered their own development from a human development perspective. This kind of approach could be useful within linked community education contexts, to help reach families and wider networks connected to the students. There has been considerable work drawing on the capability approach in the development studies field, so there is a wealth of experience to draw from in designing activities with human capabilities in mind. This involvement would strengthen the agency of all stakeholders.

It is also worth considering the extent to which the findings are generalizable or transferable either from an empirical or a theoretical perspective. The schools were drawn from urban DEIS schools and there are over 200 DEIS schools nationwide. The schools are selected through a process that combines census data with student and school data and these data indicate a threshold below which schools are eligible for additional resources and supports from the state, to counteract likely processes of educational disadvantage. As these schools are located nationwide and in both rural and urban contexts, they will necessarily differ. However, they also have characteristics in common related to DEIS data. All DEIS schools are linked with higher education institutions for widening participation outreach and admissions interventions. In addition, research in the Irish context has identified challenges students faced by students in DEIS schools (McCoy and Smyth 2004 2011; Smyth, McCoy, Darmody and Watson 2014). It is proposed, therefore, that findings in this study would also be relevant DEIS schools and higher education institutions generally, which may benefit from a policy perspective that focuses the lens on human development as well as human capital outcomes from education. The theoretical frameworks which provided the canopy for this study have a broad research base, from Rawls' theory of justice, to Freire's pedagogical theory regarding 'concretization', to Bourdieu's theory on social and cultural reproduction. In addition, there is a growing body of literature related to the operationalisation of the capability approach and this study specifically adapted learning from Robeyns (2003; 2005), Walker (2006; 2012) and Wilson-Strydom (2012; 2016) to the Irish second level

context. As such, the capability list in Table 8.2 and the capability framework in Figure 3 could be regarded as adaptable to other contexts and therefore of broader relevance and applicability, as a theoretical contribution to the literature on operationalising the capability approach.

Areas for Future Research

This study explored the emerging capability set in working-class young adults over a three-year period. These students are currently in senior cycle and it therefore lends itself to two further waves of research in order to explore their continued development and how this is impacted by their post-secondary transitions. In addition, it would be valuable to operationalise the capability approach within the communities to which the students belong and with the teachers in the schools they attend, as they are the primary agents of influence and each group is also embedded in communities experiencing a variety of chronic challenges. There is a growing emerging focus on well-being in schools and this too may be fertile ground within which to explore student progress from a human development perspective, to assess how we might consider the education system and our desired outcomes for the human capital needs of our economy from a young person's perspective. Finally, the capability approach has been operationalised to some extent in university contexts in other geographies but it has not yet been adapted to the Irish context. Examining the working-class student experience and their development from a capability perspective, as they progress through different higher education sites, would be an interesting comparative study.

This research examines possible ways in which the capability approach can be aligned with theories of social and cultural reproduction to support working-class students to develop higher education aspirations and/or make more informed choices regarding their post-secondary options. The early evidence shows that the TA21-CFES project, a school based initiative, which focuses on social and cultural capital formation processes, can be linked to the capability approach, to enhance our understanding of what limitations students perceive they are encountering, how this kind of initiative is supporting them to challenge and circumvent those challenges and what that process adds to their capabilities as they relate to higher education aspirations. However, it also provides a lens through which to consider and assess the social and environmental conversion factors that may

affect students' ability to convert their capabilities into functionings, which may happen within these circumstances because of corrosive disadvantage. This helps us to better analyse the structure/agency conflict these students are facing and some of the navigational capital and resilience they bring to these conflicts. In this respect, we develop a deeper awareness of how students are changing as individuals in the context of the limitations they encounter, where they may have adapted their preferences and what capabilities they may be better able to develop if they have trusted relationships, opportunities to exercise greater agency and access to information at an early stage in their second level education. This study also illuminates the underlying conditions in which the choice to participate in higher education is made (Hart 2013). It indicates that a lack of connectedness and knowledge and fear of not belonging, which are more common in working-class students, can influence their future functionings. In conclusion, there was positive evidence in this study that providing students with access to such capital had impact, and supported the development of the students' capabilities, which in turn influenced their perception of their own potential and what constitutes a life of value.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Project Information and Consent Forms

Parent/Guardian Information Sheet

May 2014

Dear Parent/Guardian,

This year, your school is collaborating with an education project called **Trinity Access 21** (TA21). This project is a collaboration between the Trinity Access Programme, the School of Education, and the School of Computer Science and Statistics in Trinity College Dublin. The principal investigator is Professor Brendan Tangney.

TA21 aims to transform the Irish education system, in partnership with schools, communities, other education organisations and businesses, so that every student can reach their full educational potential. The project includes the development of four 'core practices' to encourage a strong, college-going culture in schools: 21st Century Teaching and Learning; Pathways to College, Leadership, and Mentoring.

The project will take place during school time throughout the school year. During the programme, professional development workshops and seminars will be offered to staff. Members of the project team may spend time in the school delivering workshops and supporting teachers and the principal.

Training programmes may also be provided for students in relation to the development of the four core practices. These programmes will take place either in school or in a purpose designed learning space in Trinity College. As part of the programmes, your child will be using modern technology, which will include access to the internet and use of cameras. They will be under the supervision and guidance of adults at all times. All activities will comply with best practice in Child Protection and the policies of Trinity College in this area, as well as any relevant school policies, to ensure that students benefit from the learning opportunities offered by technology in a safe and effective manner. Management of photographic images will be strictly in compliance with the above policies.

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the project, researchers from Trinity College will collect information about the students' learning experiences at various stages during the school year. During class activities, interactions between students working together and between teachers and students may be videoed or audio recorded. Students and teachers may be asked to complete questionnaires, feedback forms or reflections at various intervals during the project, and a sample of students and teachers will be asked to participate in interviews and focus group discussions, of no more than 30 minutes duration. The research team may ask the school for data relating to students' attainment and grades.

All information that is collected by the researchers will be anonymised and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act at Trinity College, Dublin. For the questionnaires and grade information, each student will be allocated a unique identification number, which will permit the researchers to track changes in engagement, but will not be able to be used to identify the student by name.

In the unlikely event that information about illegal activities should emerge during the study, the researchers will follow the school's Child Protection policy and inform the relevant authorities. There may be lectures, Ph.D. theses, conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles written as a result of this project, however the students and school will not be identified. All TCD staff have undergone the Garda Vetting procedures to receive clearance to work with minors.

We wish to seek your permission for your child to participate in the research part of the programme. Participation in this part of the programme is voluntary and you may remove your child from the process at any time, for any reason, without penalty and any information already recorded about them will not be used. Should you wish your child to be omitted from the research aspect of the project, they will still participate in the programme, but none of their information will be used in the research.

From time to time, we may also record video footage and images of your child and their classmates and teachers at work, which might be used in communications and promotional/marketing material about the **TA21** programme, or in dissemination activities such as conference presentations. Use of video footage and images will be strictly in accordance with best practice in Child Protection policies and guidelines. Your child's name will not appear alongside any images/video footage. Should you wish your child to be omitted from such

promotional material, they will still participate in the programme, but no images/video footage of them will be used.

Please sign below to indicate your consent and return the form to the School Principal's Office as soon as possible. If you have any questions in relation to this, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Tangney

Brendan Tangney, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D., F.T.C.D.

Professor in Computer Science

Principal Investigator Bridge21

Tangney@tcd.ie

TA21 Teacher Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in the **TA21** research project this year. This project is a collaboration between the Trinity Access Programme, the School of Education, and the School of Computer Science and Statistics in Trinity College Dublin. The principal investigator is Professor Brendan Tangney.

TA21 aims to transform the Irish education system, in partnership with schools, communities, other education organisations and businesses, so that every student can reach their full educational potential. The project includes the development of four ‘core practices’ to encourage a strong, college-going culture in schools: 21st Century Teaching and Learning; Pathways to College, Leadership, and Mentoring.

The TA21 programme will take place throughout the academic year. During the programme, professional development workshops may be offered to participating staff, addressing the four core practices. Members of the project team may spend time in partner schools delivering workshops, engaging with students and supporting teachers and principals.

Throughout the programme, the project research team will collect information about students’ and teachers’ experiences. During class activities, interactions between students working together and between teachers and students may be videoed or audio recorded. Students and teachers may be asked to complete questionnaires, feedback forms or reflections at various intervals during the programme and a sample of students and teachers will be asked to participate in interviews and focus group discussions, of no more than 30 minutes duration. Teachers may be invited to participate in community of practice workshops and events in TCD with teachers from other participating schools. The research team may ask the school for data relating to students’ attainment and grades.

All information that is collected by the researchers will be anonymised and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act at Trinity College, Dublin. In the unlikely event that information about illegal activities should emerge during the study, the researchers will follow the school’s Child Protection policy and inform the relevant authorities. There may be lectures, PhD theses, conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles written as a result of this project, however the students and school will not be identified. All TCD staff have undergone the Garda Vetting procedures to receive clearance to work with minors.

From time to time, we may also record video footage and images of you and students at work to use in communications and promotional/marketing material about the programme, or in dissemination activities such as conference presentations. Use of video footage and images will be strictly in accordance with best practice in Child Protection policies and guidelines. You have the right to remain anonymous and to choose where your information may be used. Should you wish to be omitted from any promotional materials, you can still participate in the programme, but no images/video footage of you will be used.

Participation in this programme is voluntary. Teachers may withdraw from the process at any time, for any reason, without penalty and any information already recorded about them will not be used. Should you wish to be omitted from the research part, or if you do not wish images of you to be used, you can still participate in the programme, but your information will not be used in the research or promotional material. Please sign below to indicate your consent. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

Brendan Tangney, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D., F.T.C.D.

Professor in Computer Science

Principal Investigator Bridge21

Tangney@tcd.ie

Participant Information Sheet

Your school has agreed to participate in the Trinity Access 21 (TA21) research project. This project is a collaboration between the Trinity Access Programme, the School of Education, and the School of Computer Science and Statistics in Trinity College Dublin. The principal investigator is Professor Brendan Tangney.

During the programme you will be involved in different innovative learning experiences and researchers from Trinity College would like to collect information about your views on those experiences. You can choose whether or not you would like to participate in this research, which could involve the following: Interactions between you and your classmates working together may be observed and recorded; interactions between you and your teacher may be recorded; you may be asked to complete questionnaires and feedback forms at different times during the programme; you may also be selected to take part in an interview either individually, or with a small group of your classmates, which will last between 20 and 30 minutes. Your school may also be asked to share information about your academic attainment or grades.

All information that is collected by the researchers will be anonymised (all names will be removed) and stored in Trinity College, Dublin. For the questionnaires and grade information, each student will be allocated a unique identification number, which will permit the researchers to look at changes over time, but will not be able to be used to identify any student by name. In the unlikely event that information about illegal activities should emerge during the study, the researchers will have to inform the relevant authorities. The results of the research are likely to be used in lectures, Ph.D. theses, conference presentations and journal articles, but you or your school will not be identified.

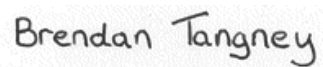
Your participation in the research aspect of the programme is voluntary and you can change your mind about it at any time – in that case we will not use any information already collected about you, but you will continue to be involved with any of the TA21 activities that are being run by your school.

From time to time, we may also record video footage and images of you, your classmates and your teachers at work, which might be used in communications and promotional/marketing material about the **TA21** programme, or in dissemination activities such as conference presentations. You have the right to be anonymous;

therefore your name will not appear alongside any images/video footage. Please keep in mind that you can change your mind at any time about the use of your image, and in that case we will not use any images/video footage associated with you.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask your teacher, or [Kevin \(EP5\)@bridge21.ie](mailto:Kevin(EP5)@bridge21.ie).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brendan Tangney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light grey shadow effect behind the text.

Brendan Tangney,
Professor in Computer Science
Trinity College Dublin

TA21 Parent/Guardian Consent Form

I _____ (name of parent/guardian) have been provided with an information letter that outlines the activities that _____ (name of child) will take part in, how research data will be collected and stored and how I can contact the research team. I understand that I may withdraw my child from the research project at any time should I wish to do so for any reason and without penalty.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

	Yes	No
I consent to my child filling in questionnaires relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to my child participating in individual interviews relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to my child participating in focus group interviews relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to grade information relating to my child being provided to the TA21 research team by the school.		
I consent to images/video footage of my child being occasionally used for promotional material about the TA21 program, or in dissemination activities such as conference presentations, and understand that they will not be identified by name.		
Data Protection: I agree to Trinity College, University of Dublin storing of any personal data relating to my child that results from this project. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the research project as outlined to me.		

Signature of parent/ guardian: _____

Date: _____

TA21 Teacher Consent Form

I _____ (name of teacher) have been provided with an information sheet outlining the activities that students and teachers will take part in, how data will be collected, stored and used, and how I can contact the research team. I understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time should it wish to do so for any reason and without penalty.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

	Yes	No
I consent to filling in questionnaires relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to participate in focus group interviews relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to images/video footage of me being occasionally used for promotional material about the TA21 program, or in dissemination activities such as conference presentations, and understand that I will not be identified by name.		
Data Protection: I agree to Trinity College, University of Dublin storing of any of my personal data that results from this project. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the research project as outlined to me.		

Signature of teacher: _____

Date: _____

TA21 Participant Consent Form

I, _____ (your name)
 have read the information sheet provided about the project and know how information
 will be collected and stored. I understand that I can choose not to take part in the
 research at any time.

Please answer all the following (tick the appropriate box):

	Yes	No
I consent to filling in questionnaires relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to participating in individual interviews relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to participating in focus group interviews relating to the TA21 project.		
I consent to my grade information being provided to the TA21 research team by the school.		
I consent to images/video footage of me being occasionally used for promotional material about the TA21 program, or in dissemination activities such as conference presentations, and understand that I will not be identified by name.		
Data Protection: I agree to Trinity College, University of Dublin storing and using my information from this project.		

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Project Leader (TCD): _____

Date: _____

Principal/Board of Management - Information Sheet

Your school is invited to participate in the Trinity Access 21 (TA21) research project. This project is a collaboration between the Trinity Access Programme, the School of Education, and the School of Computer Science and Statistics in Trinity College Dublin. The principal investigator is Professor Brendan Tangney.

TA21 aims to transform the Irish education system, in partnership with schools, communities, other education organisations and businesses, so that every student has the opportunity to reach their full educational potential. The project includes the development of four 'core practices' to encourage a strong, college-going culture in schools: 21st Century Teaching and Learning; Pathways to College, Leadership, and Mentoring.

The TA21 programme will take place throughout the academic year. During the programme, professional development workshops will be offered to participating staff addressing the four core practices. Workshops may also be offered to students and these may take place in school or in a purpose designed learning space in TCD. Members of the project team will spend time in partner schools delivering workshops, engaging with students and supporting teachers and principals.

As part of the programme, the project research team will collect information about students' and teachers' experiences. During class activities, interactions between students working together and between teachers and students may be videoed or audio recorded. Students and teachers may be asked to complete questionnaires, feedback forms or reflections at various intervals during the programme and a sample of students and teachers will be asked to participate in interviews and focus group discussions, of no more than 30 minutes duration. Teachers, and senior management, may be invited to participate in community of practice workshops and events in TCD with staff from other participating schools. The research team may also ask the school for data relating to students' attainment and grades.

All information that is collected by the researchers will be anonymised and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act at Trinity College, Dublin. In the unlikely event that information about illegal activities should emerge during the study, the researchers will follow the school's Child Protection policy and inform the relevant authorities. There may be lectures, PhD theses, conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles written as a result of this project,

however the students and school will not be identified. All TCD staff have undergone the Garda Vetting procedures to receive clearance to work with minors.

We wish to seek your permission for students and teachers from your school to participate on the programme, including the research aspects thereof. Where appropriate, we would also like to publish work they may create during the programme that would be of educational benefit to other students. From time to time, we may also record video footage and images of students and teachers at work to use in communications and promotional/marketing material. Use of video footage and images will be strictly in accordance with best practice in Child Protection policies and guidelines.

In order to engage with the research aspect of the programme, we will seek permission from the individual teachers, students and their parents. Participation in this aspect of the programme is voluntary for all individuals, and students and teachers may withdraw from the process at any time, for any reason, without penalty and any information already recorded about them will not be used. Should any of the students and teachers wish to be omitted from the research part, they can still participate in the programme, but none of their information will be used in the research.

Please sign below to indicate your consent. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us.

Brendan Tangney, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D., F.T.C.D.

Professor in Computer Science

Principal Investigator Bridge21

Tangney@tcd.ie

TA21 Principal/Board of Management Consent Form

The board has been provided with an information sheet which outlines the activities students and teachers will take part in, how data will be collected, stored and used and how it can contact the research team.

The board understands that it may withdraw the school from the project at any time should it wish to do so for any reason and without penalty.

Signature of Chair of Board of Management: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Principal: _____

Date: _____

Name of school: _____

Signature of Project Leader (TCD): _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: 2015 Focus Group and Interview Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Opening Questions

1. Do you know what the CFES program is about? (describe)
2. How do you feel about being a CFES student? (good and bad points)
3. What do you think that the program has done for you so far?

Questions about activities and participation

4. Tell me about the type of activities you have taken part in in school (if any).
5. How have these (that activity) helped you?
6. What are some of the activities you know about, but have not taken part in? Why not?
7. Have your parents taken part in any of these activities? Which ones?
8. What have they said about the activities?

Questions about plans

9. What do you plan to do after secondary school?
10. Has being a part of CFES affected this decision?
11. What would you like to do when you are an adult (what kind of work)?
12. What are you doing now to make those plans come true?

Probes: course options, social groups in school and outside of school

Core Principle I: Pathways to College

During the year, you have taken part in some college planning activities and assignments, you may have also visited a college campus the next section will ask you about this

13. Has this part of the program influenced your desire to attend college?
14. What questions or concerns do you have about going to college based?
15. What things have you learned about the college-going process (i.e. requirements, admissions, financial aid)?
16. How has your participation in CFES influenced your understanding of what it takes to go to college?

Core Principle II: Mentoring

17. What kinds of mentoring have you received through CFES?
18. What relationships have you developed because of mentorship?

19. How would you describe these relationships?
20. What have you learned from your mentor if anything?

Core Principle III: Leadership through Service

21. What leadership roles have you had or do you currently have in your community?
22. In what kinds of service activities have you participated?
23. How has the program helped to develop your leadership abilities?

College and Academic preparation

24. Have you visited a college campus? (where? How did you feel being there?
Explore belonging)
25. How is college paid for?
26. How much do you think it costs to go to college?
27. What type of jobs do you think people who go to college work in?
28. How much money do you think they earn?
29. What type of people go to college? (why do you think this is? How do you know this?)
30. If you decided you want to go to college what would you need to do to get there?
31. How are you preparing for your future?
32. What does your family think of people who go to college?

Networks and trust

33. Who do you talk to about what you want to do when you leave school? (tell me about the relationship you have with these people (explore trust))
34. Has this changed since you became a CFES Scholar?
35. What do you think the people in your life want you to be when you're older? (do different people want different things for you- discuss how)
36. What type of jobs do people in your community generally have? (what do you think of these jobs)
37. What do your teachers expect for your future?
38. What do your parents expect for your future?
39. What do your friends expect for your future?
40. What do you want for your own future? (explore choices) (has this changed in the last year)

Capabilities

41. Do you feel like you can do or be anything you want in life? (if yes discuss why, and who supports this, if no discuss why and what stops this)
42. When you think of your future what choices are open to you? What can you be?
43. What do people in your community do? (For example,)
44. Is there anything or anyone in your life that inspires you? (discuss what and why)
45. Can you plan your own life? (if yes then who and what supports this, if no then what gets in the way)

Closing Questions:

46. How can the CFES be improved?
47. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?

Interview Schedule

Hi, my name is Cliona today we will be doing a short interview to get some idea of your views on life and college. During this time, I will be recording you but you should know this is completely confidential and you can stop any time you like. Have you any questions?

1. What is important in your life now?
2. What do you think will be important in your life in the future?
3. What do you think is important in terms of education?
4. What do you think you will need to help you go to college? (probe –social, family, financial)
5. What is your school doing to help you prepare for the future? (what is family and friends also)
6. How do you think going to college will affect you and your life?
7. Do you think you would fit in in college? (discuss why)
8. If you don't go, describe the life you think you'll have in ten years' time.
9. What do you think you can do now to create the life of your dreams for the future? (Who helps you with this, is there any obstacles that stand in your way)
 - a. What are the physical things that help you take part in school? Are there any physical things that can get in the way (illness, food)?
 - b. What emotional things help you take part in school? Are there any emotional things that could stop students taking part in school?

10. When you think about places you most enjoy being, where are they and who is with you?
11. When you think about 'fitting in' in your future life, where is it and who is there?
12. Has being CFES student shaped your opinions about life and what you can do?
13. Has mentoring helped you? If so how?
14. Has doing college assignments and meeting people from college influenced you?
(in what way)
15. Has the leadership program had an influence on how you see yourself? (discuss)
16. Do you believe you can fulfil your goals? Why?
17. What are the most important opportunities a child should have in his/her life?

Thanks for participating have you any questions you would like to ask?

Appendix C: 2016 Focus Group and Interview Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Opening Questions

1. What has CFES been like this year in your school
2. What do you think that the program has done for you so far?
3. Are there things you liked most? Least? Why did you like these?

Questions about activities and participation

4. Tell me about the type of activities you have taken part in in school (if any).
5. How have these (that activity) helped you?
6. What are some of the activities you know about, but have not taken part in? Why not?
7. Have your parents taken part in any of these activities? Which ones?
8. What have they said about the activities?

Questions about plans

9. What do you plan to do after secondary school? Has CFES helped you decide this? (why and how?)
10. What would you like to do when you are an adult (what kind of work)?
11. What are you doing now to make those plans come true?

Probes: course options, social groups in school and outside of school

Core Principle I: Pathways to College

“During the year, you have taken part in some college planning activities and assignments, you may have also visited a college campus the next section will ask you about this”

12. What was this like?
13. Did it help you decide what you want to do later in life? (how)
14. What things have you learned about the college-going process (i.e. requirements, admissions, financial aid)?

Core Principle II: Mentoring

15. What kinds of mentoring have you received this year? What was it like? (good points and bad)
16. How would you describe mentoring? And what it has done for you?

17. How could we make this better?

Core Principle III: Leadership through Service

18. Has CFES helped to develop your leadership abilities? - How?

College and Academic preparation

19. How is college paid for?

20. How much do you think it costs to go to college?

21. What type of jobs do you think people who go to college work in?

22. How much money do you think they earn?

23. What type of people go to college? (Why do you think this is? How do you know this?)

24. What does your family think of people who go to college?

Networks and trust

25. Who do you talk to about what you want to do when you leave school? (tell me about the relationship you have with these people (explore trust))

26. Has this changed since you became a CFES Scholar?

27. What do you think the people in your life want you to be when you're older? (do different people want different things for you- discuss how)

28. What type of jobs do people in your community generally have? (what do you think of these jobs)

29. What do you want for your own future? (explore choices) (has this changed in the last year)

Closing Questions:

30. How can the CFES be improved?

31. Last year lots of students said if I work hard I can get anywhere- do you agree with this, what things could get in the way of this? Who tells you this?

32. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?

Interview Schedule

Hi, my name is Cliona, today we will be doing a short interview to get some idea of your views on life and college. During this time, I will be recording you but you should know this is completely confidential and you can stop any time you like. Have you any questions?

Ok so last year I interviewed you about your life and CFES, we want to follow up from that and see what has changed since last year?

1. Tell me a little bit about your year in school, what was good what was bad?
2. Tell me about CFES – how did it go?
3. Last year you talked about the leadership project helped to make you confident and it being a good thing for you, how has this developed this year? Have there been many more opportunities to take part in LTS? Describe the impact?
4. Have there been other opportunities in CFES for you to develop your confidence? Describe?
5. The pathways to college activities, like college investigations, seemed to help you prepare for college early, which was a benefit. Can you tell me about this year and how the activities have worked out, and affected you?
6. What activities did you do this year, did you visit a college? How did that affect you?
7. Last year you said that anything is possible with hard work? Do you still think this? Who tells you this? Has CFES told you this? How does that get communicated?
8. What do you think will be important in your life in the future?
9. What do you think is important in terms of education?
10. What do you think you will need to help you go to college? (probe –social, family, financial)
11. How much is college? Who has taught you this)
12. What is your school doing to help you prepare for the future? (what is family and friends also)
13. What about mentoring, what was that like this year? Last year you said that it really helped you because you felt like – if they could do it so could you- can you talk to me about how this happened?
14. You said that CFES has made you work hard- is this still true? Why?
15. Last year you said you were talking to your family and friends about college – is this still the case, can you tell me what they think of your plans?
16. Has being CFES scholar shaped your opinions about life and what you can do?
17. Do you believe you can fulfil your goals? Why?
18. What are the most important opportunities a child should have in his/her life?

19. What would you say is a good life?

20. How has the Junior Cert affected you this year? Has it changed your view of college?

Thanks for participating have you any questions you would like to ask?

Appendix D: 2017 Focus Group and Interview Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

Opening Questions

1. What has CFES been like this year in your school?
2. What do you think that the program has done for you so far?
3. Are there things you liked most? Least? Why did you like these?

Questions about activities and participation

4. Tell me about the type of activities you have taken part in in school (if any).
5. How have these (that activity) helped you?
6. What are some of the activities you know about, but have not taken part in?
Why not?
7. Have your parents taken part in any of these activities? Which ones?
8. What have they said about the activities?

Questions about plans

9. What do you plan to do after secondary school? Has CFES helped you decide this? (why and how?)
10. What would you like to do when you are an adult (what kind of work)?
11. What are you doing now to make those plans come true?

Probes: course options, social groups in school and outside of school

Core Practice 1: Pathways to College

“During the year, you have taken part in some college planning activities and assignments, you may have also visited a college campus the next section will ask you about this”

12. What was this like?
13. Did it help you decide what you want to do later in life? (how)
14. What things have you learned about the college-going process (i.e. requirements, admissions, financial aid)?

Core Practice 2: Mentoring

15. What kinds of mentoring have you received this year? What was it like? (good points and bad)
16. How would you describe mentoring? And what it has done for you?
17. How could we make this better?

Core Practice 3: Leadership through Service

18. Have you taken part in leadership activities this year?
19. What were they like (good points/bad points)
20. Has CFES helped to develop your leadership abilities? - How?

College and Academic preparation

21. How is college paid for?
22. How much do you think it costs to go to college?
23. What type of jobs do you think people who go to college work in?

Networks and trust

24. Who do you talk to about what you want to do when you leave school? (tell me about the relationship you have with these people (explore trust))
25. Has this changed since you became a CFES Scholar?
26. What do you think the people in your life want you to be when you're older? (do different people want different things for you- discuss how)

Closing Questions:

27. How can the CFES be improved?
28. Last year lots of students said if I work hard I can get anywhere- do you agree with this, what things could get in the way of this? Who tells you this?
29. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences?

Interview Schedule

Hi, my name is Cliona, today we will be doing a short interview to get some idea of your views on life and college. During this time, I will be recording you but you should know this is completely confidential and you can stop any time you like. Have you any questions?

Ok so last year I interviewed you about your life and CFES, we want to follow up from that and see what has changed since last year?

1. Tell me a little bit about your year in school, what was good what was bad?
2. What are you doing- TY, LC or LCA? What made you choose this option? (probe opinions on each)
3. Tell me about CFES – how did it go? (ask about mentoring/leadership/pathways)

4. Last year a student said this when she talked about mentoring, “...*They’re just more like reassuring... they make sure that you can do that course Just like, you know that you can get there if you wanted, because they got there.*” - can you tell me why they might have said this, how does this comment relate to you?
5. Another student said “...*I was always really afraid of college...it is this big thing that like I probably wouldn’t be getting into, and now I see it like it’s not just because of who you are that you can’t get into it. Like if you work hard enough you will get into somewhere. Even if it’s not the college you exactly want to be in you’ll still go to college and do what you want you want to do and if you study hard enough you’ll get to where you want to be.*” – do you think CFES has helped her change this view, can you tell me how? Has it changed your view?
6. Last year some students said they felt more independent because of CFES, they felt more able to decide what they wanted to do in the future – can you relate to this? Can you explain why?
7. Last year some students said they felt more hopeful because of CFES, can you talk to me about this/ what things in CFES make you feel hopeful?
8. There were students who felt that they might not fit into college, that their accents and family background were different from the students who ‘usually’ go...is this something you can talk about? Has CFES changed or helped this?
9. Lots of students said that being in CFES has given them lots of new knowledge about college and education, is this true for you- can you tell me what that knowledge is and what parts of CFES has helped this? (mentoring, pathways, leadership)
10. What do you want to do after school, why have you decided this? Who has influenced this decision? Are there any barriers you see to this?
11. Last year you said that anything is possible with hard work? Do you still think this? Who tells you this? Has CFES told you this? How does that get communicated?
12. What do you think you will need to help you go to college? (probe –social, family, financial)
13. What is your school doing to help you prepare for the future? (what is family and friends also)
14. You said that CFES has made you work hard- is this still true? Why?

15. What would you say is a good life?

Thanks for participating have you any questions you would like to ask?

Appendix E: Background, philosophy and rationale for the Trinity Access 21-College for Every Student project

In Ireland research has identified a number of limitations which act as significant barriers to educational progression. These include student underperformance at second level, long-term processes of educational (dis) engagement, school effects including school organization and process, and availability of information, advice and guidance in the Junior Cycle. The Trinity Access 21 project (TA21) impacts on educational disadvantage and supports post-secondary educational progression by partnering with schools to develop strong ‘college going cultures’ and innovative approaches to teaching and learning through the use of four ‘core practices’: Pathways to College, Mentoring, Leadership through Service and 21C Teaching & Learning. The aim of TA21 is to build capacity within partner schools so that all students are informed and prepared to make post-secondary educational choices which will support them to realise their full educational potential.

The TA21 approach is based on the insight that a whole school approach to social capital development¹⁵ combined with a change in classroom pedagogy¹⁶, supported by appropriate professional development for teachers (university accredited and non-accredited workshops), provides an environment in which all students can grow and develop by taking responsibility for, and ownership of, their own learning and school culture. In such a school environment, the effects of educational inequality are lessened and students are empowered to develop 21C skills. Therefore, the goals of the TA21 project are to support:

- educational attainment and post-secondary progression in geographical areas where progression to higher education is historically low.
- schools to develop and promote 21st Century Teaching & Learning practices.
- development of an evidence base that has systemic impact by informing policy and structural change.

¹⁵ As embodied in the College for Every Student / CFES approach - an educational non-profit in the US - www.collegefes.org – involving core practices of Mentoring, Leadership through Service and Pathways to College.

¹⁶ As embodied in the Bridge21 model - www.bridge21.ie.

In 2014-17, the TA21 project carried out a longitudinal, action research project which has tracked the educational outcomes of 1,100 students in 11 Trinity Access Programme (TAP) linked schools. This evidence base has revealed the positive impact that TA21 has had upon whole school culture; it is increasing college-going aspirations in students, and supporting the increased use of innovative, project-based teaching practices within the classroom. Based on this evidence, the project is now poised to scale nationally in TA21 Phase 2; expanding its reach and range of partnerships across other communities with low progression rates to higher education in the 2017-20 period.

The TA21-CFES programme builds a school team within each partner school, with groups of teachers leading on the development of 4 core practices: Mentoring, Leadership through Service, Pathways to College, 21C Skills Development. The **mentoring** core practice aims to mobilise volunteer mentors to help improve access to education for students in low progression schools (those part of the DEIS and Schools Completion Programme). The first 320 mentors were recruited from ‘access’ undergraduates and graduates who had progressed to Trinity College Dublin and wished to be involved in delivering a structured mentoring programme back in their community. Students from areas with low higher education progression are more likely to be the first in their family or peer group to access higher education. Confidence and self-direction are thus important factors in the student’s ability to overcome the barriers associated with accessing higher education. The **leadership** core practice helps in the development and encouragement of these traits in students as well as developing important skills like project and time management, by engaging them in small projects to help their school or local community. **Pathways to College** seeks to address the growing inequality in career guidance for second level students. Limited resources force schools to focus their guidance efforts almost exclusively on senior cycle students but this is often too late as many students will make subject choices affecting their chances of further progression in education long before this. TA21 has developed a number of extra-curricular activities for students to engage with from their first year in second level that have been successful in helping students understand the broader educational system and enabling them to make informed choices. Pathways to College is usually led by the school guidance counsellor and it aims to make guidance a whole school activity. At senior cycle level, Pathways includes a range of focused educational programmes aimed at broadening awareness of and progression into particular professional areas, such as Pathways to Law, Pathways to

Business and Pathways to Technology. Pathways to College involves all participating schools in College Awareness Week, a TAP-led national awareness raising week focusing on post-secondary educational progression.

Research emerging from the *Growing Up In Ireland* study has shown that students in DEIS schools are much more likely to experience teacher directed rather than active learning pedagogical approaches. This difference in style can also relate to classroom behavioral issues. In 2014, the TA21 team developed a Postgraduate Certificate in **21st Century Teaching and Learning**, in collaboration with Trinity's School of Education. The qualification is a year-long professional development certificate for teachers in the area of inclusion, leadership & change management, the teacher as co-researcher, 21st century teaching and learning, digital media literacy and coding skills. It aims to provide teachers with the theoretical and practice tools to leverage technology to create more active, student-led pedagogical approaches, while also preparing them to identify and change structure and culture across the school.

- **Project evidence base**

Researching the impact that engagement with TA21 has had on students, teachers, and the community is a vital part of the project as it provides the evidence base from which to influence policy makers and the wider education system. The longitudinal nature of the research is a distinguishing feature of TA21. The student element has employed a quasi-experimental design; where 1100 students from the 11 linked schools completed pre and post quantitative and qualitative questionnaires/interviews over the course of three years, alongside this, 200 students from two TAP linked schools not participating in TA21, and 200 students from two schools with established high progression rates to university, acted as research comparison groups and completed all of the quantitative measures. Findings reveal that after participating in the TA21 project there was a 10% increase in the number of students planning to complete a degree (from 50% of students to 59.5%), this increase was matched by an 8% decrease in the number of students planning to complete a trade. The research has also shown that Mentoring, Leadership and Pathways to College activities significantly predict student aspiration to progress onto a university degree. It shows that the TA21 students are improving in grade retention and college knowledge when compared with the comparison groups. The research also tested the impact that the fourth core practice, 21st Century Teaching and Learning, has

had on teacher confidence, teacher sense of autonomy and on 21C teaching practices. This research has shown that participation in the fourth core practice results in increased use of technology in the classroom, increases in the use of project-based, collaborative teaching practices and increased teacher autonomy.

At a school level testing has revealed that a whole school approach to educational uplift has the capacity to make a much wider impact on student aspirations than outreach projects that 'select' students for university-based activities. Testing has shown that when universities work in partnership with schools and communities to develop activities that support aspiration development a wider effect is observed.

At a student level testing has revealed that TA21 is providing students with meaningful opportunities to develop new identities; identities that include higher education participation.

At a teacher level the testing has revealed that when teachers were provided with meaningful opportunities to develop their teaching practice, they experienced a renewed enthusiasm for their profession which has translated into more positive interactions within the classroom. Teachers described how the change in school culture was creating a more trusting classroom environment, one teacher states..." the classroom was calmer..." another said "... there is no them versus us in the class now

Success for the TA21 project is multi-layered, beginning with the student and extending to systemic change. It means (a) getting all students through to the end of second level cycle with the information and relationships to make informed choices about their post-secondary life (b) seeing a transformative change in the aspirations and attainment of students in our partner schools, so that many more apply to further and higher education and to higher professional courses they may have previously considered 'out of reach' (c) effecting pedagogical change so that teachers and students embrace the opportunities provided by technology but all are supported to be innovative in its implementation so that teacher and student strengthen their '21C skills' (d) effecting structural change within schools, so that the leadership can make evidence-based choices on how to adapt the structure in their own school to capitalise on promising 'cultural' changes (e) seeing our project impact on national policy decisions and influence the policy landscape in other countries.