

The Pound Road The Challenges of Knowledge Creation and Equity in Third Level Education

Ann O'Brien, NUI Maynooth
Maeve O'Byrne, DCU
Dr. Anne Ryan, NUI Maynooth

A paper presented at the ANZSSA Biannual Conference – Reinventing the Future at the University of Christchurch, New Zealand, December 2001

ABSTRACT

Ireland's economy has changed dramatically over the past six years and is changing once again. Since 1990 there have been significant developments in the area of access and equity both at institutional and national policy level.

Third level education is strategically positioned to influence the future direction of the formal education system and in so doing to influence the responses of individuals and communities to current development challenges. This paper focuses on how third level education providers exercises this influence with particular reference to the ways in which they engage with those sectors of the population who are currently under represented or excluded from education. The paper explores the responses to access in Ireland and highlights the new initiatives at Third Level and the links at community level. It argues that the nature of this response has far reaching consequences not only for the well-being of those at the periphery but also for the on-going relevance of the knowledge base that underpins the entire formal education system.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to look at how universities in Ireland respond to those sectors of the population who are currently under-represented or excluded from third level education.

We called the paper the 'Pound Road'. The title was chosen to reflect the themes of the paper through a reference to an experience of marginalisation in the Irish context. The 'Pound Road' is the name of a real road on the tiny island of Inisboffin situated off the west coast of Ireland. A number of generations back when the people of the island were tenant-farmers, they were required to pay rent to absentee landlords who either lived far away on the mainland, or more usually, abroad. If the islanders failed to pay their rent their resources - normally livestock, would be seized by the landlords' agents and impounded in a field close to the jetty. The road to the jetty, the only road off the island came to be known as 'The Pound Road'.

The islanders were in many ways seen as 'other'. They spoke a different language to the landlord. They were isolated from their neighbours on the mainland who also viewed them as different to themselves. They lived in a harsh, tough environment and were materially poor, though far from culturally impoverished. In the mind of the mainlanders these islanders had a wild streak, an untamed aspect to them. They were 'outsiders' who were sometimes referred to as 'mid Atlantic savages'. The 'Pound Road' was the only access route, the one gateway through which the islanders and their resources were channelled. It was heavily guarded by those in control, those in the mainstream positions of power.

It seemed to us that the notion of these people who were viewed as different and needing to be controlled and brought to heel was a fitting metaphor to set the tone for a discussion on the current responses to broaden access to Third Level education.

The paper provides an overview of our experience of the education system in the Republic of Ireland, and, in particular, the upsurge of activity in the area of access or equity over the past six to seven years.

In the Ireland of today it is clear that some groups and communities are under-represented at third level, including students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students, Travellers (an indigenous minority ethnic group in Ireland), other ethnic minorities, students with disabilities and women students of non-traditional areas.

The main body of research on educational disadvantage has tended to focus on access to third-level by students from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds. This concern was highlighted by both the government White Paper on Adult Education (2001) which focused on lifelong learning and the Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level (2001) which emphasised the under-representation at third level of mature students, people with disability and disadvantaged school-leavers.

This paper proposes to examine the developments in access initiatives for the socio-economically disadvantaged from 1994 to 2001 in particular, and will address some of the major developments with regard to mature students. In the course of this exploration we hope to raise larger questions about the nature of the system itself, not only in relation to how it interacts with those on the periphery, but also on the ongoing relevance of the knowledge base that underpins the entire formal education sector.

1. Setting the Context

1.1 The Irish Education System

In terms of demographics, up to very recently, the education system in Ireland, has not experienced the same reduction in the traditional student cohort as other countries. There has been a surplus of demand over supply. The overall rate of admission to third level has risen noticeable from 20% in 1980 to 46% in 1998 (Clancy and Wall, 1998). However, now with the decline in the 17 –18 year-old school-leaving cohort, the pressure to engage with non-traditional students poses a new and real, rather than a theoretical implication for life long learning or equity. The notion of widening rather than increasing participation is only now beginning to impact on the system.

Broadly speaking the Irish education system consists of three levels: primary education (from 4 to 11 or 12 years of age), post-primary

education from 12 to 17 or 18 years of age) and third level education. Normally, post-primary education consists of a three year junior cycle followed by a two year senior cycle. A 'Transition Year' between the two is optional. Education is compulsory up to 15 years of age. Third-level education consists of degree courses in universities, or degrees, three-year diplomas or two year certificates offered by Institutes of Technology or business colleges.

For school-leavers entry into university is decided on the basis of performance in a competitive exit examination (the Leaving Certificate) and places are allocated according to a centrally operated points system. Points limits are set according to the academic standards of the courses and the demand for a limited number of places. (Appendix 1).

Third level tuition fees for full-time courses were abolished in 1995. Financial assistance for third-level students in Ireland consists of a means-tested system of grants, but the main problem is that the maximum grant is less than one third of what it costs to survive for the nine-month academic year. If you are poor enough to qualify for a grant - by definition - you are too poor to survive on it. In 2001 the government, acting on a recommendation from the Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001) introduced a special enhanced maintenance grant targeting those on the lowest incomes. This enhanced grant effectively doubled the amount available to eligible students. From an initial impression after one year, there does not seem to have been the expected take up due possibly to the very strict selection criteria imposed by the new scheme.

1.2 Who Goes to College? Socio-Economically Disadvantaged School Leavers

Most of the research on access to third-level has been related to socio-economically disadvantaged groups. As a result the main thrust of the third level response has also concentrated on this group. The work of Prof. P. Clancy of University College Dublin in particular has focused on an analysis of the student body in various colleges (Clancy: 1982, 1988, 1995, 1998). While not directly related to the third level experiences of young people, these large scale statistical surveys are useful in that they give an indication of relative participation. Clancy uses the concept of participation

ratio. This allows him to show the degree to which each social group is ‘over-represented’ (a ratio greater than one), proportionally represented (a ratio equal to one) or ‘under-represented’ (a ratio less than one). Figures for his four studies are outlined in Table 1

Table 1

| Socio-Economic Group | Participation Rate 1998 | Participation Ratio 1992 | Participation Ratio 1986 | Participation Ratio 1980 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Farmers | 0.75 | 1.35 | 1.45 | 1.22 |
| Other Agricultural Occupations | 0.35 | 0.60 | 0.48 | 0.22 |
| Higher Professional | 1.00 | 2.47 | 3.00 | 3.37 |
| Lower Professional | 0.48 | 1.47 | 2.14 | 1.92 |
| Employers and Managers | 0.84 | 1.86 | 1.72 | 2.38 |
| Salaried Employees | 0.55 | 1.48 | 2.30 | 2.93 |
| Intermediate Non-Manual Workers | 0.33 | 0.91 | 1.21 | 1.10 |
| Other Non-Manual Workers | 0.31 | 0.72 | 0.45 | 0.47 |
| Skilled Manual Workers | 0.34 | 0.71 | 0.51 | 0.47 |
| Semi-Skilled Manual Workers | 0.23 | 0.44 | 0.42 | 0.47 |
| Unskilled Manual Workers | 0.22 | 0.37 | 0.16 | 0.13 |

Source: Clancy and Wall 2000

These figures reveal as Clancy puts it “Very large disparities by socio-economic group”. He notes that there has been some decline in inequality over the period but it has been far from substantial. A child whose father/mother is in the higher professional category has a seven times better chance of going on to third-level than his/her counterpart whose father/mother is an unskilled manual worker.

Another interesting aspect of the issue, which Clancy examines, is the transfer rate of the various types of Post Primary School. There are three types of Post Primary schools: secondary schools, vocational schools and community or comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are in the majority and are normally run by religious orders or church authorities and historically these schools were fee-paying. Vocational schools and community/comprehensive schools are not controlled by religious interests but are controlled by boards of management or local education committees as part of the State system. While all three types of school are funded by the State, many secondary schools

operate a system of selective entry. This can result in a disproportionate number of high ability students in secondary schools with a correspondingly lower representation in vocational or community/comprehensive schools.

The transfer rates which Clancy examines reflect the numbers going on to third-level from the various school types as a percentage of the numbers preparing for the Leaving Certificate in those various categories of schools. These outcomes are set out in Table 2.

He emphasises at various stages in his report, that different schools and indeed different types of schools vary greatly in their retention rates to Leaving Certificate. The varying transfer rates “represent only the final state of differential selectivity which is operational throughout the whole Post Primary system” (1995, p.80).

Table 2

| School Type | Leaving Students | Certificate | New Entrants to Upper Education | | Transfer Rate |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Fee-Paying Secondary | 3,325 | 6.7 | 2,316 | 9.9 | 69.7 |
| Non-Fee Paying Secondary | 31,075 | 62.2 | 15,724 | 67.1 | 50.6 |
| Vocational | 9,217 | 18.4 | 2,814 | 12.0 | 30.5 |
| Comprehensive | 1,171 | 2.4 | 1,977 | 8.4 | 38.2 |
| TOTAL | 49,960 | 100 | 23,423 | 100 | 46.9 |

Source: Clancy, 1995

The Three Critical Transitions

The main focus of Clancy and Wall’s work has been on patterns of access to third level. As the Table 2 shows, it is well established that patterns of inequality which are apparent at the point of entry to third level are the result of a cumulative process of disadvantage which first manifest themselves much earlier in the educational cycle. The source of educational disadvantage is rooted in the different economic, social and cultural capital of families. Three crucial schooling transitions have been identified, at which the effects of social background are significant:

- Students from lower socio-economic groups are significantly less likely to complete second level education

- Those students from lower socio-economic groups that sit the Leaving Certificate tend to achieve significantly lower grades, and
- For students with modest levels of performance in the Leaving Certificate, those from higher socio-economic groups have a higher transfer rate to third level.

(Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education 2001 p.34)

A final interesting aspect of Clancy's work is that there is considerable selectivity within third-level in both the type of courses attended and the courses taken by students from different social classes. Students from working class backgrounds (Semi-Skilled and Unskilled) are far more strongly represented in the IT sector than in the universities (Clancy 1995).

Other studies show that social class inequality of participation at third-level has not improved (CMRS (1992); INTO (1994); HEA (1995); Department of Education White Paper on Education (1995); Clancy (1995); Kellaghan et al (1995)). Despite an eleven-fold increase in enrolments in third-level from 1950 to 1990 the social class profile of participants remains the same (Clancy 1995).

1.3 Who Goes to College? Mature Students

The European Commission White Paper on Teaching and Learning (1995) identified the Irish education and training system as a facility often only open to the young. Extensive lobbying by groups representing adult learners led to the appointment of a Minister of State with responsibility for adult education, the publication of a Green Paper on Adult Education in 1998 and the White Paper, Learning for Life in 2000. The White Paper indicated that adult and community education had a key role to play in introducing the concept of lifelong learning in a meaningful way into the Irish education system.

The most recent OECD statistics on educational attainment of the adult population (Education at a Glance 2000) shows that 49% of Irish adults aged between 25 and 64 have less than upper second level education. Only Greece, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Portugal and Turkey ranked lower. Ireland ranked 17th out of 28 countries surveyed on the number of adults completing third level education (21%). The international Adult Literacy Survey showed that at

least a quarter of adults in all countries tested, performed below the desirable minimum, but in some countries the proportion at this level was 50% or more (including Ireland, New Zealand, Poland and the UK).

In 1997 Kathleen Lynch carried out a comprehensive survey on mature students at third level. A mature student is defined as someone over 23 years of age at year of entry. Lynch found that of the 6.667 mature students enrolled at third level, more than three quarters were engaged in part time study.

In 1999 the Report of the Commission on the Points System recommended that by 2005 each third level institution should set aside a quota of at least 15% of places for mature students. The setting of quotas for mature students is also a key recommendation of the Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education (2001).

1.4 Key Reports 1992-2001

The Interim Report of the Technical Working Group of the Steering Committee on the Future Development of Higher Education (1995) referred to the three crucial transitions as outlined in section 1.2.1 with regard to access to third-level by students from lower socio-economic groups. This analysis highlights the need for policies and interventions to be targeted at all levels of the education system, culminating in specific and targeted interventions at third-level.

The White Paper on Education: Charting our Education Future (1995) made clear recommendations with regard to how third-level institutions might begin to tackle the problem of unequal access. The Paper states that each third level institution will be encouraged to:

- develop links with designated second-level schools, promoting an awareness of the opportunities for, and the benefits from, third-level education;
- devise appropriate programmes to ease the transition to full-time third-level education;
- make special arrangements for students to be assigned to mentors who can advise and support them on a regular basis during their first year.

Further to this, the White Paper adopted and reiterated the objective set by the Report of the National Education Convention (1995) which sought to achieve an annual increase in participation of 500 students from lower socio-economic groups in third-level education over the next five years (i.e. 1996-2001). It was also recommended that initiatives be developed to further facilitate participation by mature students and part-time students.

In 2001 the Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education took account of developments to date and made recommendations with regard to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students and students with a disability. The key recommendation with regard to students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds were to:

- set quotas for participation of students from those socio-economic groups identified as least represented by Clancy and Wall
- set up a special enhanced maintenance grant targeting students from lowest income families
- set up a National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education to co-ordinate the various schemes at third level

The key recommendation with regard to mature students were to:

- initiate urgent discussions on the development of systemised national entry routes to third level other than the Leaving Certificate; recognition of access courses for mature students; exploration of partnership models between further and third level sectors; co-ordination of a national assessment procedure of mature student applications.
- improve pre-entry adult guidance provision
- pay fees for part time mature student who are dependent on social welfare
- allocate a quota of 15% of full-time undergraduate places for mature students by 2006

The key recommendation with regard to students with a disability were to:

- set up alternative direct entry routes
- develop appropriate assessment arrangements
- establish an entitlement-based funding scheme

- allocate a quota of 1.8% of full-time undergraduate places by 2006

1.5 Higher Education Authority: Targeted Funding and Evaluation

From 1996 the Higher Education Authority - the funding and policy government agency with responsibility for the university sector in Ireland, allocated funding towards a number of targeted groups, including socio-economically disadvantaged students and mature students.

The third level response, which will be examined in detail in section 2, was to appoint Access Officers with responsibility for access and equity issues. Most universities introduced access initiatives featuring the creation of links with designated schools, the development of special entry mechanisms, and the development of comprehensive post-entry support for students. Some universities developed pre-entry access courses targeting both socio-economically disadvantaged students and mature students.

In 2000 an external evaluation of these initiatives was commissioned by the HEA and carried out by Prof. Bob Osborne and Helen Leith. The subsequent report concluded that the universities had responded positively to the challenge of addressing access opportunities aimed at the target groups. Judged on a numbers basis the resulting schemes had not matched expectations, however, the report argued, it is not appropriate to judge the effect of these scheme solely on numbers considering the extent to which the task of increasing entry is a long-term one, and given the effects of a booming economy during the time under review.

The report called for a national strategy and state support for widening access which is not just a task for the universities alone.

2. *The Third Level Response: Access Initiatives 1994-2001*

2.1 Socio-Economically Disadvantaged School-leavers

The response of the third level institutions recognises that while the primary access barrier for those from a socio-economic disadvantaged background is economic, social and cultural barriers

are of considerable significance as are education-specific constraints (Lynch & O’Riordain, 1998). The various institutional responses are comprised of Access Programmes and Access Courses. A number of the institutions have focussed on a community-based approach and forged links with communities and schools. These initiatives are predominately community driven while the Access Programmes and Courses reflect an institutional approach.

Against this background the Universities have appointed Access Officers with specific responsibility for access issues. In 2000 the Department of Education and Science made funding available to the Institutes of Technology to appoint Access Officers and develop their access initiatives. Most of the universities have also introduced measures to create entry routes for these students in the form of direct entry or ex-quota places.

Access Programmes

The Access Programmes are driven by a commitment to equality of educational access for all. The programmes aim to address the financial, social, cultural and educational barriers facing students from socio-economically-disadvantaged areas from accessing third level education. The Programmes are generally targeted activities that are school based. Links are established on an ongoing basis with the school population and various initiatives are introduced at different stages of the school cycle. The Programmes are informed by the principle of subsidiarity - of working in partnership with parents, schools, Area Based Partnerships, community groups, guidance counsellors and home school-liaison officers and the staff, students and graduates of the institution along with other third level institutions. The Programmes generally comprise a range of pre-entry activities with the targeted schools. An integral element of the Programmes is the post-entry supports provided for the undergraduate students by the Access Officer. Key elements of the Access Programmes at pre-entry include:

- Visits to the Third Level Institution
- Summer Schools
- Award Schemes
- Shadowing Day
- School Visits / Outreach School Programmes
- Transition Year Projects

- Study Skills Seminars
- Supervised Study Programmes
- Mentoring Programmes
- Easter Revision
- Programmes for Parents

At the post-entry stage, students from the targeted initiatives have access to all the student services of the institution as well as the additional support of the Access Officer. The students also participate in a range of further undergraduate supports such as:

- Summer Orientation Courses
- Scholarships / Studentships
- Tutorial and Academic Support
- Mentoring / Peer Support
- Personal Tutor System
- Career and Postgraduate Opportunities Workshops

Access Courses

More recently some third level institutions have responded by providing Access Courses for students from disadvantaged areas. The courses are designed for young people who have completed the Leaving Certificate, who have a particular academic strength or interest but who require an additional year of education to prepare them for a third level course. This course aims to offer an alternate pathway to third level education for young adults whose social, economic and cultural experiences have prevented them from realising their educational potential. A repetition of the Leaving Certificate is not a realistic nor viable option for these students. The course is intended to ease the transition from school to an independent learning environment. Schools and / or community organisations nominate applicants on the basis of socio - economic disadvantage or applicants may have attended a school linked to the third level institution. Course participants are selected on the basis of an interview.

The course content is comprised of core modules and elective specialist modules:

Core Modules include: Study Skills; Educational Guidance; Writing and Communication Skills; English Language and Literature; and Economics/Business/Finance

Specialist Modules include: Social and Political Studies; English; Continental Language; Science; Biology/Chemistry/Physics; and Information Technology

On-going support is offered to these students including meetings with the Access Officer, financial support and a personal tutor system. The criteria for successful completion of the Access Course involve adequate attendance and satisfactory performance in all elements of the course. Participants who successfully complete the Access Course are eligible for direct entry to a full-time undergraduate course.

Community Based Initiatives

The Community Based Initiatives were established with the specific intention of attempting to have an educational impact on severely marginalised communities. The aim is to create a small yet increasing critical group of educational achievers to act as role models in the community. The interventions, both financial and cultural aim to increase educational aspirations, not only in the local schools but also in the wider community. These activities are targeted at all levels of the school system, from book awards at primary level, encouraging Science at second level to undergraduate societies at Third level. This continuum of support at community level encourages visible role models within the schools and community. Community Based Projects also forge links with a local third level institution and in some cases with more than one university.

2.2 Cross Institutional Co-operation

Access Officer Networks

While Access initiatives such as those mentioned above are an important first step, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the problem needs to be tackled on a national level. There is much valuable work being done at the level of building links between institutions and their local communities, however in the long term, consideration needs to be given to a national co-ordinated access strategy. At present, given the nature of the access initiatives in place, co-operation across institutions is difficult to implement. However, beginnings have been made in this area. The Access

Made Accessible (AMA) is a national network of Access Officers who meet regularly to share information, provide mutual support and discuss and act on access related issues. The CHIU (Conference of Heads of Irish Universities) Access Officers Group are those Access Officers in the University Sector who meet three to four times a year to discuss access issues and to advise and consult with CHIU.

Common Application Form

The Access Officers from seven institutions developed a Common Application Form to co-ordinate approaches to Access between institutions. This initiative means that students may now apply to any of the participating institutions' Access Programmes. This required the group to agree common admission procedures and to define criteria for disadvantage. A Common Application Form explanatory booklet has been compiled and circulated to the link schools. This development means that students linked to an individual institution now have a greater choice of access options.

“Take 5”

The “Take 5” project is an exciting and innovative inter-institutional initiative for Transition Year students attending Access schools in the Dublin area affiliated to five Dublin Higher Education Institutions. The aims of the programme are to:

1. Give Transition Year/Fifth Year students a sense of the choices available to them
2. Give Transition Year students an introduction to the campus environment of the participating third level institutions
3. ‘Bridge the gap’ between second level and third level
4. Foster future links with Transition Year students for their senior cycle
5. Work together as third level institutions on co-ordinated access strategies

The students spent a day on campus in each institution. Some elements of the programme are common to all institutions such as a Campus Tour, IT and a sporting activity while other elements are specific to the particular institution. The overall project is co-

ordinated to ensure that students were exposed to a range of subjects.

2.3 Mature Students

The University sector has recently appointed Mature Student Support Officers. The Access Officers in the IT sector hold the brief for mature students. The government's White Paper on Lifelong Learning has highlighted the need for institutions to look at lifelong learning and put in place the relevant supports for these learners.

Entry mechanisms for Mature Students still remains ad-hoc and confusing for mature applicants as each institution has its own processes. This results in mature students having to make multiple applications to individual institutions as well as making an application to the Central Application Office. Mature students often have to attend a number of interviews or take aptitude tests. Orientation courses are also available to help mature students to make the transition to third level. Mature Student Support Officers provide workshops and seminars for mature students to assist them in their return to the educational system.

Future developments will focus more on part-time and modular courses being provided for these learners as well as the development of distance and e-learning modes of delivery and accreditation.

2.4 Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are supported by designated Disability Support Officers in the University Sector and by Access Officers in the IT sector. The two key areas for this cohort of students are entry routes and post –entry supports. Students apply through the Central Applications Office and are advised to tick the relevant section indicating disability. The institutions then contact the student and in some instances interview them and offer the student a place on a direct entry system.

Post-entry supports for students with disabilities include note-takers, personal assistants, the provision of personal computers and other technology as required and where resources permit.

All of these initiatives are concentrated on student access and support. To facilitate full integration by non-traditional students the systems also need to embrace change. It needs to consider whether these initiatives are designed to control those who enter the system or whether it can extend itself to full and real integration.

3. *Beyond The Pound Road*

The earlier sections of this paper outlined the changes in Irish society that have sparked an interest in promoting access to third level education and detailed how access programmes are now operationalised in Irish universities. This section reflects on the dominant approaches to education that underpin these responses. While the timing of what is currently happening in Ireland very much relates to local factors, moves to diversify the profile of those entering third level education have been central to the education agenda of many western countries for at least a decade. We hope therefore, that these observations although based on our specific experience in Ireland, have relevance for everyone here involved in access and equity programmes whether in Australia, New Zealand or South Africa.

3.1 Democratising Knowledge

In Ireland as elsewhere, the desire to make third level education available to a broader constituency is driven by a complex range of forces including financial considerations, demands for greater equity, changing demographics, a desire to respond to new demands from pressure groups including industry, the availability of funding supports for initiatives that promote greater access, and a commitment to a vision of education that is participatory and democratic. Whether access initiatives will be responsive to the diversity of perspective and ways of thinking resulting from broadening the student base, or merely offer opportunities for larger numbers of learners to participate in a fundamentally unchanged and essentially elitist system, is largely dependent on the philosophy of education that informs these initiatives. Another way

of putting this is to ask will the emphasis be on making the students fit the existing system or will there be equal emphasis on making the system fit the students? Because knowledge is at the heart of the education system, fundamental changes in the system have to address questions such as:

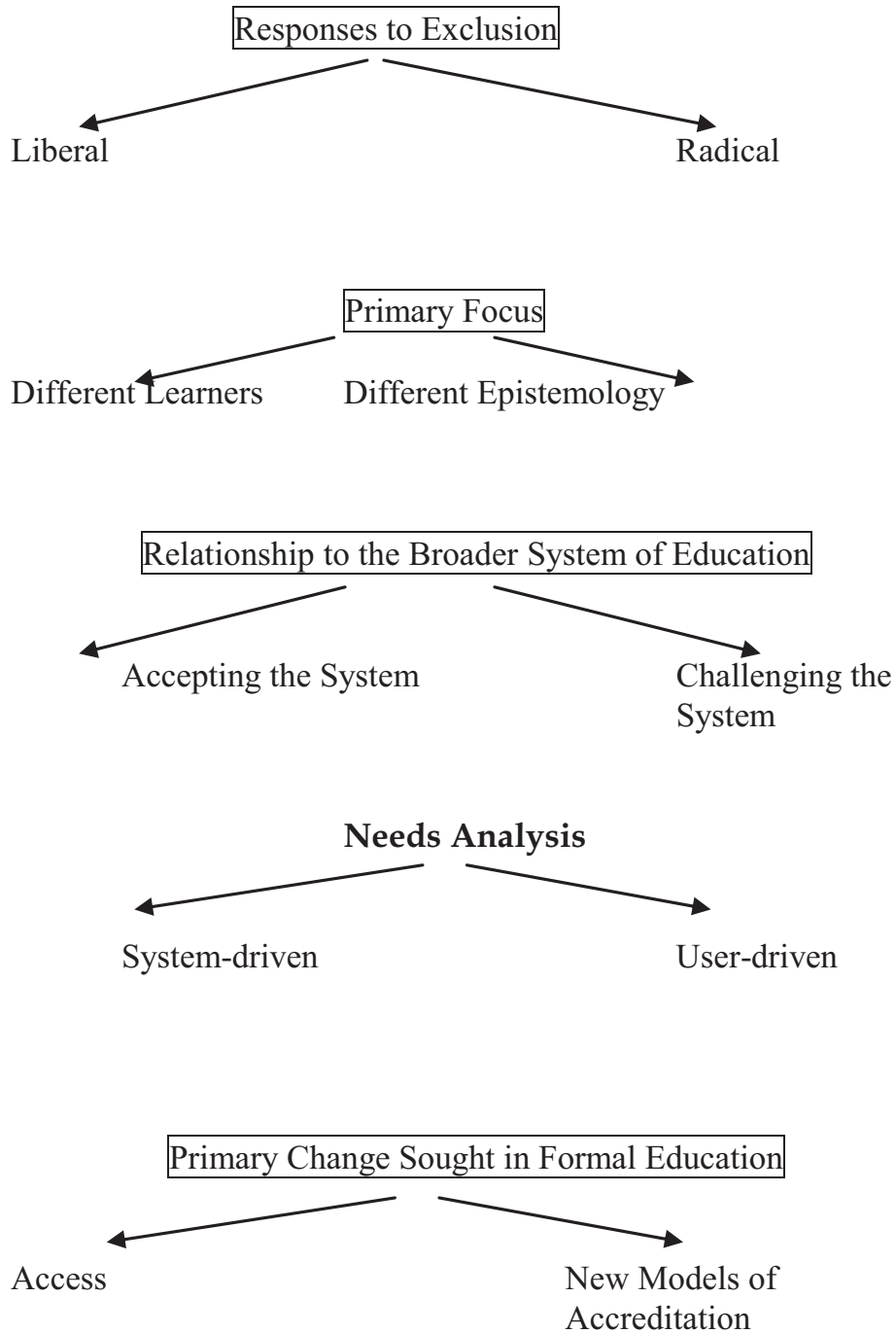
- How is knowledge created?
- How is knowledge disseminated?
- Who is included in these processes?
- Who is excluded from these processes?

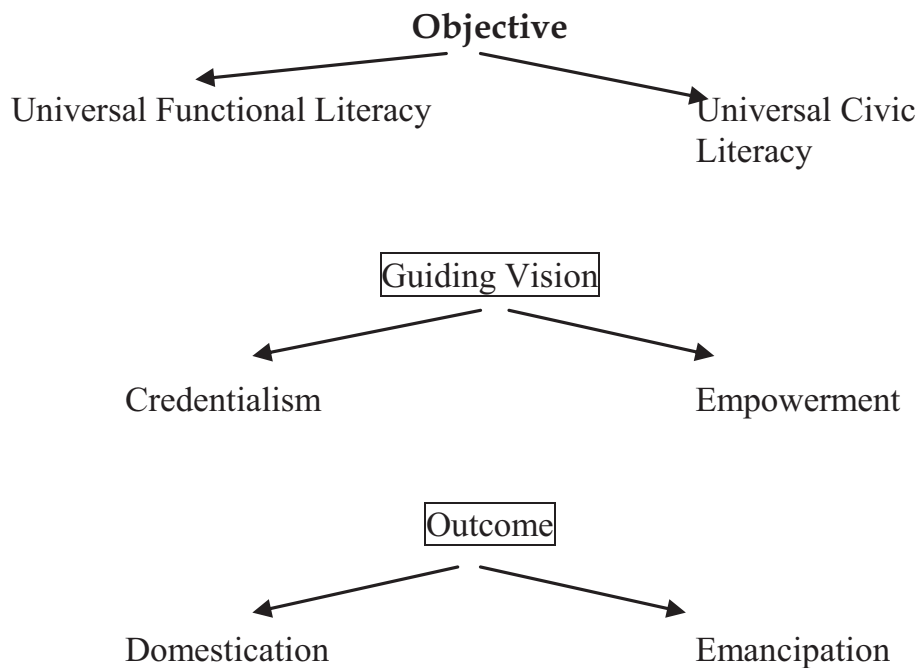
It can be argued that those who are targeted by access programmes and by inference were unlikely to gain entry to third level education before these programmes were put in place, were in the past excluded from the process of knowledge creation. They were perceived by the system as 'not knowing', as 'other', as an outsider. Across the world it is those from the most disadvantaged areas, or those who belong to the most disadvantaged sectors of the population, who were least likely to enter third level education.

A strong link between socio-economic status and retention and performance rates are apparent across all OECD countries (Clancy, 1999; Wagner, 1999). While academic ability may appear to be the decisive factor that determines one's likelihood of gaining and retaining a place in third level education, one has to conclude that ways of accessing this ability are decidedly class specific. They are also gender specific in the case of poorer countries, or in the case of certain subject areas in better off countries. In any consideration of education from a global perspective it is clear that large numbers of people have been relegated to the status of outsider or bystander. The exclusion or nominal involvement of such large numbers has a negative impact not only on those who are excluded, but also on an education system that consequently lacks exposure to diversity in approaches to problem solving and ways of thinking. It is for this reason that initiatives that seek to be inclusive need to consider how to reflect this inclusiveness in what is taught and how it is taught in universities. The extent to which this concern to democratise the process of knowledge creation is attended to is dependent on whether the access initiatives are driven by a liberal or radical vision of education and knowledge.

3.2 Liberal versus Radical Responses to Exclusion

The following diagram depicts the distinguishing characteristics of liberal and radical responses to the challenge of exclusion.





The Liberal Response

A key difference within both responses relates to how the problem of exclusion is defined. The liberal response assumes that the system of education is fundamentally a benign force reflecting "universal values authorised by reason" (Santos, 1999). The fact that a student belongs to an under-represented sector of the population entitles him/her to avail of special supports. However, the under representation of these sectors is viewed as essentially due to factors such as a lack of motivation to participate on their part, little encouragement from peer group and family, financial constraints, and fear of failure. As such exclusion is seen as resulting from a set of unfortunate circumstances occurring haphazardly; circumstances that can be compensated for by directing additional resources to support individuals who are judged on a case by case basis to be deserving. The aim of a 'liberal' access initiative is to expand and modify existing selection procedures to accommodate these students. Individuals are hand-picked from among formerly excluded sectors. Those who are selected are deemed to be the most likely to succeed in adapting to the system as it exists and therefore to benefit. They constitute "*the*

relatively advantaged among the disadvantaged" (Lynch, 1999: 309). These students enter the system knowing they have been afforded a privilege rather than granted a right.

On-campus supports for those described variously as 'mature' students, students with 'special needs', 'older' learners, and 'non-traditional' students emphasises the 'otherness' and 'outsider' status of these students. Their 'otherness' is defined in terms of how they process information, or respond to established teaching and examining procedures, and the specific supports they need such as childcare or wheelchair ramps. The focus is on the student's ability to fit into the system rather than the capacity of the education offered by the institution to be inclusive. Initiatives that focus exclusively on supporting the individual student to cope with the demands of the institution implies benevolence and ideological neutrality on the part of a system that accommodates them as exceptional cases.

The Radical Response

The radical approach is concerned to tackle not just the manifestations of exclusion but the also the causes. Rather than locate the problem among those who are under-represented, it recognises the system as exercising strong social, cultural, economic and gender preferences that have effectively served to exclude these sectors. This means that the radical response has no commitment to maintaining the integrity of the current educational system. On the contrary, it perceives the problem as endemic to the system in which it occurs and assumes that unless the system is fundamentally reformed, it will continue to exclude in ways that are eminently predictable. It further assumes that the factors that exclude specific groupings from participation in education also serve to exclude those same groupings from other services. As such the problem is deep rooted, systemic and self-perpetuating. Embedded in these beliefs is an assumption that knowledge is not value-neutral.

A radical approach is concerned to reveal whose 'reason' is being presented under the guise of 'universal values' in determining what constitutes the typical learner, selection procedures, what knowledge is deemed worthwhile, how it is created, the purposes of learning and how it is measured and how these values are replicated throughout the entire educational system from pre-school onwards.

To date critiques of the broader educational system that raise all of these questions have served to inform the provision of appropriate pre entry courses and support services to students and staff to make access for a broader range of learners possible. While these are important interventions and ones that need to be attended to, the tendency to remain aloof from critiquing the knowledge base of the entire education system, has allowed piecemeal adjustments to be made to the system, enabling it to flourish without fundamental change.

Radical education theorists and practitioners concerned with these realities are faced with the challenge of defining the principles that inform their analysis of the context in which access initiatives are taking place. In so doing they must challenge institutions to acknowledge that the values embedded in previous practices that excluded these learners, and in current liberal practices that seek to include them, constitute an unchanged elitist stance. The fundamental difference between democratising opportunities to avail of education and democratising the process of knowledge creation has to be emphasised.

Radical changes across the system require forums where all of the stakeholders, particularly those who are not well served at present, can voice their dissatisfaction and play an active part in refashioning the provision of educational services and the allocation of resources within the services, so that diversity can be nurtured as a source of strength. Forums of this nature are needed at the levels of policy-making and co-ordination of provision as well as at the level of implementation.

Until diversity is nurtured as a source of strength, access initiatives are in danger of perpetuating a 'Pound Road' approach to education where those who are different are corralled and manipulated until they conform to the mainstream ideal.

Appendix 1.

Entry to Third Level is based on a points system gained from the results of the Leaving Certificate Examination. Courses at third level have a restricted number of places available to be taken up annually. The greater the demand for a course the higher the points required to get into that course.

All students who wish to study at third level apply through a central system, the Central Application Office (CAO). The CAO offers places based on the points gained at Leaving Certificate.

To counter this competitive demand for places Access Programmes provide entry through an alternate system, direct entry or ex - quota places.

Direct Entry.

The student makes an application directly to the college and is not required to make an application to the CAO. Conditions apply relating to the particular Access Programme run in the Institution. The college will make an offer of a place directly to the student through the Access Programme.

Ex -quota Places.

The students are required to make application through the CAO and also directly to the college. The student may receive an offer through the CAO depending on their Leaving Certificate results. However the college may offer a student a place directly from a reserve of places held outside the CAO quota even if the student does not have the required points for entry.

Appendix 2

Area Based Partnership.

The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme is part of the Irish government's National Development Plan. The Programme supports integrated social and economic development, promotes social inclusion and equality and provides local communities with an opportunity to counteract disadvantage. Area Based Partnership companies manage and deliver the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme at local level.

REFERENCES

- Action Group (2001) *Report of the Action Group on Access to Third Level Education*. Dublin, Government Publications Office
- Clancy, P. (1982) *Participation in Higher Education*. Dublin, Higher Education Authority
- Clancy, P. (1988) *Who Goes to College?* Dublin, Higher Education Authority
- Clancy, P. (1995) *Access to College: Patterns of Continuity and Change*, Dublin, Higher Education Authority
- Clancy, P. (1999) "Education Policy" in Quin, S., Kennedy, P., O'Donnell, A. and Kiely, G. (editors) Contemporary Irish Social Policy. Dublin: University College Dublin Press (pp72-107).
- Clancy, P. and Wall, J. (2000) *Social Background of Higher Education Entrants*. Dublin, Higher Education Authority
- C.M.R.S. (1992) *Education and Poverty*. Dublin, Education Commission, Catholic Major Religious Superiors
- Commission on the Points System (1998) *Background Document*, Dublin: Government Publications Office
- Coolahan, J. (Ed.) (1994) *Report on National Education Convention*, Dublin: Government Publications Office
- Department of Education (1995) *Charting Our Education Future, White Paper on Education*, Dublin: Government Publications Office
- Department of Education (1998) *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning, Green Paper on Adult Education*, Dublin: Government Publications Office
- Department of Education (2000) *Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education*. Dublin, Government Publications Office
- European Commission (1995) *Teaching and Learning: Towards a Learning Society*, Brussels: European Commission
- Higher Education Authority (1995) *Report of the Steering Committee on the Future of Higher Education*, Dublin: Higher Education Authority
- Hyland, A. (1998) *Challenges and Opportunities in Higher Education*, in Access and Diversity, Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Conference of the Confederation of Student Services in Ireland, Tuffery, A. (Ed.), Dublin, C.S.S.I.
- I.N.T.O. (1994) *Where Are They Now? I.N.T.O. Follow Up Study on Pupils Who Left Primary Schools Designated as Disadvantaged in June 1982*, Dublin: Irish National Teachers Organisation
- Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association:
Number 20, October 2002

- Kehoe, B. (1998) *Let's Have a Grant, Not a Supplement*, Dublin City University
- Kelleghan, T. et al. (1995) *Educational Disadvantage in Ireland*, Dublin: Department of Education and Combat Poverty Agency
- Kennedy, O. & Fleming, B. (1999) *Young People, Living in a Severely Disadvantaged Area, and Their Experience of Third Level Education*, Dublin (Unpublished)
- Lynch, K. (1999) Equality in Education. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan
- Lynch, K. & O'Riordan, C. (1996) *Social Class, Inequality and Higher Education: Barriers to Equality of Access and Participation Among School Leavers*, Dublin: Higher Education Authority
- Lynch, K. & O' Riordan, C. (1998) *Inequality in Higher Education: A Study of Class Barriers*, Dublin: Equality Studies Centre, University College Dublin
- OECD (2000) *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, Paris: OECD: Centre for Educational Research
- Osborne, R. D. and Leith, H. (2000) *Evaluation of Targeted Initiatives on Widening Access for Young People from Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Backgrounds*. Dublin, Higher Education Authority
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (1999) "On Oppositional Postmodernism" in Munck, R. and O'Hearn, D. (editors) Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a New Paradigm. London: Zed (pp29-43).
- Skilbeck, M. (2001) *The University Challenged: A Review of International Trends and Issues with Particular Reference to Ireland*. Dublin, Higher Education Authority
- Wagner, A (1999) "Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning: Trends, Developments and Issues from an OECD-wide Perspective". Unpublished paper delivered at the National Adult Education Forum, Dublin 22 September 1999.

The authors may be contacted:

Ann O'Brien Access Officer, National University of
Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

Tel: 353 1 7084519 email
ann.obrien@may.ie

Maeve O'Byrne Access Officer, Dublin City University, Dublin 9,
Ireland.

Tel: 353 1 7005493 email
maeve.obyrne@dcu.ie

Anne Ryan

Lecturer, Department of Adult and
Community Education, National University
of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland

Tel: 353 1 7083683 email
anne.ryan@may.ie