Is digital upskilling the next generation our ‘pipeline to prosperity’?

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## Sample

50 young people aged 13 to 16 years from communities in South Wales (including a former mining town and a deprived inner city area)

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Digital citizenship

# Abstract

The British government is claiming digital skills will deliver economic growth to the country and social mobility to young people: its ministers call it ‘a pipeline to prosperity’. While declaring this pipeline, the government assumes the needs of the economy and young people’s needs are (or should be) synchronised. We challenge this assumption and the policy it sustains with data from questionnaires, workshops and interviews with 50 young people from communities in South Wales (including a former mining town and a deprived inner city area) about digital technology’s role in their everyday life. We use a new typography to compare the reality of their socially and economically structured lives to the governmental policy discourse that makes them responsible for their country’s future economic success. To explain these young people’s creative and transgressive use of technology, we also make an empirically grounded contribution to the ongoing theoretical debates about structure and agency.

# Outcome

Davies and Eynon (2018) identify five groups (non-conformists, pc gamers, academic conservatives,
pragmatists and leisurists) based on young people's dominant orientation to digital technology. "young people mobilised digital technologies in a variety of contrasting ways
that, because they defy discursive construction, require a sociological explanation. While
it is important to draw attention to the student’s own choices and behaviours, their
agency, it is essential to simultaneously account for patterns in the data that suggest this
agency had limits." (Davies and Eynon, 2018: 3973). "As can be seen from the typology, there are some individuals who go with flow and
use technology in practical or habitual ways that suits their needs but with relatively little
evidence of critical reflection. There are some who adjusted to ‘newness of the games’
by taking pleasure from more traditional embodied skills and practice like going off to
play football in a park. Some were more defined by the constraints on their choices,
while others, the data show, were more able to reflexively engage with their socio-technical
class of conditions. Whether it was to reflexively strategise, or to habitually adjust
to aspects of their lives they are relatively powerless to change, each group’s response is
accommodated in the concept of reflexive habitus." (Davies and Eynon, 2018: 3974).