Neoliberal gremlins? How a scheme to help disadvantaged young people thrive online fell short of its ambitions

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Literacy and skills
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities

## Sample

83 individual consultations in schools with students aged 13 who were offered skills-training, 19 interviews with students and parents at home, and 4 interviews with leader teacher(s).

## Implications For Educators About

School innovation

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

Numerous academic studies highlight the significant differences in
the ways that young people access, use and engage with the
Internet and the implications it has in their lives. Trying to address
such inequalities is complex, and the outcomes of digital inclusion
schemes are rarely uniformly positive or transformative for the
people involved. Therefore the hope of such schemes that if
sufficiently empowered, incentivised and aspirational, the
disadvantaged can use access to technology to transform or
transcend what Bourdieu [1992. The logic of practice. Studies in
philosophy and education. Cambridge: Polity Press; New Ed
edition] calls their ‘class of conditions’ (p. 53) is largely misplaced.
This gap between expectation and reality demands theoretical
attention. Focusing on a two-year digital inclusion scheme for 30
teenagers and their families in one area of England, this
qualitative study analyses why, despite the good intentions of the
scheme’s stakeholders, it fell short of its ambitions. Instead, our
theoretical analysis explains how the neoliberalist systems of
governance that are increasingly shaping the cultures and
behaviours of our Internet service providers and schools cannot
solve the problems they create.

# Outcome

"Because the families on the scheme had very few of sources of economic, cultural and
social capital, they lacked the power of choice. They were unable to choose a different service
provider for their Internet connection. They were unaware that they could bring regulatory
pressure to bear on Trojan by, for example, complaining to Ofcom (the U.K.’s
Internet service regulator) to demand a better service. Consequently, choices were
imposed on them by systems of neoliberal governance. Similarly, the schools had often
narrowed-down their investment in the scheme’s young people to just getting a C grade
in Maths. The schools chose the students’ priorities for them. But these parents were
unable to choose a different school for their child. We said in our introduction the global
network society is ‘a choice, a choice made by some and working in the interest of some’
(Biesta, 2013, p. 734). Many of the families on this scheme were barely participating in this
global network society – using pay-as-go phones to just go on Facebook for example.
However, this scheme did not fall short owing to ‘the some’ who were ‘working in the
interest of the some’. It was unable to deliver its early promise because Trojan and the
schools were governed by neoliberalist systems that only really work for individuals
who have the power and privilege to exercise their choice." (Davies, Eynon and Wilkin, 2017: 973).