

Problematizing engagement with technologies in transitions of young people identified as 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) in Scotland

Dorota Szpakowicz

School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

ABSTRACT

Dominant debates and digital upskilling strategies in Scotland have been long underpinned by the notion that engagement with technologies can transform young people's lives. This paper offers a critique of such dominant understandings and contributes to the scarce research on the impact of technologies on disadvantaged young people's life chances. It reports on qualitative fieldwork exploring everyday lives, transitions and technology use amongst 22 NEET-identified Scottish young people aged 16–24, drawing on thinking tools from Bourdieu. Findings show that participants followed 'accelerated' transitions towards vocational pathways, whilst technologies played a liminal role in making occupational choices. Furthermore, processes underpinning the post-16 transitions policy field were found to strongly shape the young people's trajectories, directing them towards the least valuable options in terms of work and training. Concurrently, uncertainties about how to navigate the realm of work and perform the self in relation to the labour force constituted a common feature of participants labouring subjectivities and these were reflected in the ways they used technologies while looking for opportunities. However, even when the young people acquired digital employability skills, these had little impact on their transitions as the old social divisions were a much stronger influence.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 July 2021
Accepted 17 May 2022

KEYWORDS

NEET; young people; digital employability skills; technologies; youth transitions; theory of practice

Introduction

Dominant debates and key digital inclusion strategies in Scotland and the rest of the UK have been long underpinned by the notions that engagement with technologies can improve young people's lives and raise their attainment and career prospects (Davies, Eynon, and Wilkin 2017). One of the groups regularly targeted with interventions for digital upskilling is that of young people described as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). NEETness has long been a great concern for the state and its dominant institutions across Europe. Undoubtedly, focus on supporting disadvantaged and often vulnerable young people during their transitions is extremely important. However,

CONTACT Dorota Szpakowicz  szpakowiczd@yahoo.com

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

solutions proposed have been based on allocating the causes of non-participation to deficits and personal attributes within young people and their families, whilst ignoring the structural inequalities in society (Colley and Hodkinson 2001; Thompson, Russell, and Simmons 2014). Consequently, the approaches to tackling NEETness have for decades focused on the supply side of the labour market through offering numerous 'skills initiatives' (MacDonald and Shildrick 2018) directed at young people following non-academic routes.

More recently, technological transformations have resulted in the proliferation of renewed approaches to tackling NEETness. Equipping disadvantaged young people with digital employability skills (such as writing CVs and personal statements, filling in job applications and searching for vacancies online) quickly became an integral part of the existing (or promoted) skills initiatives (BT Skills for Tomorrow, 2021¹; Bussi 2014; Matli and Ngoepe 2021). Governed by technological determinism (Selwyn 2012) – the simplistic techno-solutions to complex structural issues (Greene 2021) – and neoliberal logic of responsibilising youth (Thompson 2011; Davies, Eynon, and Wilkin 2017), yet another 'magic bullet' has been uncritically adopted in response to NEETness. Little attention, however, has been paid to the importance of one's habitus (rather than simply one's information habitus that depends upon the quality of the Internet exposure or one's ability to use search engines effectively; see Matli and Ngoepe 2021; Robinson 2011), whilst also ignoring the impact of multiple influences on young people's lives/transitions (Selwyn 2012; Davies 2015).

This paper aims to bring together the scholarship on youth transitions with the work on the digital to provide a critique to existing debates and policy initiatives that frame technology as panaceas for socio-economic inequality. It will first problematise dominant understandings of digital technologies and (stark) digital inequalities and will offer a more holistic alternative. The second part will present findings from the empirical research exploring everyday lives, transitions and technology use amongst the NEET-identified Scottish young people aged 16–24. The roles technologies played in how participants searched for and accessed learning and work opportunities will be critically examined due to scarce research produced in this area. The overall analysis will be governed by Bourdieu's theoretical framework as this accounts for both subjective and objective dimensions to young people's transitions and everyday practice. This paper will conclude with a critical discussion on NEETness, youth transitions and technologies.

Young people, technologies and dominant discourses

Technological transformations have resulted in the proliferation of optimistic claims presenting young people as 'digital natives' leading 'digital lives' (Prensky 2001). In response, a large body of scholarship has emerged showing that young people's usage has been less empowering and sophisticated than generally believed (Selwyn 2009). Young people have been further categorised into multiple typological models of internet users. Depending on the type of activities undertaken, the perceived beneficial and capital enhancing practices such as knowledge and information seeking have been contrasted with the consumptive ones, such as entertainment, leisure and gaming and attributed to one's background (van Deursen and van Dijk 2014).

These findings have become a basis for claims that rather than 'born digital', inequalities in access to information have resulted in a digitally divided generation, understood in terms of differences in access, patterns and the outcomes of Internet use (Ignatow and Robinson 2017). A range of conceptualisations has been further developed to understand and measure these three levels of the digital divide, with access, attitudes, motivation and skills identified as the most common factors influencing digital inequalities (Ignatow and Robinson 2017). Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds were identified as the least technology 'savvy' (Davies 2015) and at the highest risk of 'not achieving positive outcomes online, in particular when it comes to education or employment' (Prince's Trust 2016, 5; see also Matli and Ngoepe 2021 for similar claims).

Significant shortcomings, however, have been underpinning this still dominant body of scholarship. Critical scholars have noted that the debates on the digital and digital divide have been often underpinned by stark binaries; technologies have been either understood as empowering or harmful; types of engagement – as either beneficial or consumptive; and young people – as either savvy or unsavvy (Selwyn 2012; Davies 2015). These conceptualisations have been further linked with negative assumptions in relation to how young people use technologies (Davies 2015). For example, many (usually disadvantaged) young people have been accused of failing to skilfully engage with technologies for 'so-called' beneficial purposes to advance their futures. However, as Davies (2015, 119) observed, the dominance of practice tests measuring young people's digital skills has reduced them to a 'neat' category and failed to capture the impact of their social environment that 'incentivises, affords or limits certain practices on the Web and beyond'. Such dominant approaches were thus argued to derive from technological determinism and neoliberal logic, a belief that technologies and the 'proper' ways of engagement have the power to change young people's lives and help them transcend structural inequalities (Thornham and Gómez Cruz 2017; Davies, Eynon, and Wilkin 2017; Greene 2021).

More recent studies have further challenged dominant understandings of the stark digital divide amongst young people. For example, Greene's (2021) ethnographic research demonstrated how homeless young people living in gentrified Washington's district skilfully used technologies to look for work, to study or to pursue personal interests. In most cases, it was not young people's digital skills, but 'daily distractions of homelessness [that] interrupted [their] education and job search' (p. 12). Similar conclusions were reached by Thornham and Gómez Cruz (2017) in their ethnographic study with NEET-identified young people in England. They demonstrated that 'digital mobility' has been wrongly framed as equating to social mobility, with little regard to the impact of existing inequalities. Despite young people's digital practices being creative and more complex than allowed by the Job Centre (for example searching for jobs through mobile apps was forbidden and threatened with sanctions), their digital mobility was 'forged in and articulated as part of an everyday life that is dominated by the social and economic horizons that are set by the group's status as NEET' (1805).

Finally, a relatively small body of research has examined the impact of technologies on young people's transitions, specifically, on their social mobility, career choices and life chances. Lee's (2008) school-based, mixed methods study examined how 13–19 years old pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds used the internet and what impact it had on their trajectories. She demonstrated that:

[b]lurring boundaries between socio-economic groups, especially in relation to some young people's online activities or perceptions of the internet, are clearly limited in their impact. [...] The result is a temporary and very limited flexibility in the class membership of young people (150).

In this case, the impact of one's engagement with technologies, even when similar between young people from different classes, did not affect their educational attainment and choices regarding their transitions, which continued to be influenced mainly by class. Lee (2008) concluded that despite complex patterns of engagement, technologies alone had a low impact on life trajectories and did not help challenge class reproduction and social immobility. However, a more recent longitudinal study by Eynon, Deetjen, and Malmberg (2018), which examined relationship between the Internet use and class mobility in the UK, has reached slightly different conclusions. Their analysis provided evidence that 'Internet use has an effect on [absolute] social class mobility, [while] controlling for age, gender, education, health, and previous social class membership' (p. 324). Nevertheless, class origins remained the strongest predictor of participants' class membership over the 12-year period of the study. Consequently, based on the issues addressed in this section, the research presented here further contributes to the debates problematising the role of technologies in young people's transitions.

Making sense of technologies and young people

In her influential ethnographic work, Turkle (2012) showed that boundaries between online and offline, real and virtual, private and public have become overlapping, rather than clear-cut. Resultantly, new understandings have emerged, whereby the online and the offline cannot be treated as 'mutually exclusive' spaces but rather as 'a continuum based in everyday life' (Gajjala, Rybas, and Altman 2007, 210). Moreover, as Hine (2015) further asserts, technologies have not only become a part of the everyday but have also been embedded in 'various contextualising frameworks, institutions and devices' (32), and embodied, as technologies are used 'by socially situated bodies, and various aspects of social positioning and material circumstances shape the Internet experience' (44).

This, in turn, allows us to conceptualise young people's practices away from online/offline dichotomies and as being mediated by technologies instead. As Livingstone (2009, 6) points out:

First, the media mediate, entering into and shaping the mundane but ubiquitous relations among individuals and between individuals and society; and second, as a result, the media mediate, for better or for worse, more than ever before.

The concept of mediation suggests that rather than talking about 'digital' youth, we can describe them as 'mediated' youth (Livingstone 2009). Such an understanding allows us to escape technological determinism and to avoid replacing it with social determinism (Davies 2018b). Instead, social practices are understood as in a dialectical relationship with technologies rather than being a product of technologies/algorithms (Gangneux 2018) or technologies being 'open completely to interpretation and capable of determining nothing' (Selwyn 2012, 86). Young people's engagement, in turn, can be better understood as 'at the intersection' of technologies, society and their (classed, gendered and

ethnic) social identities (Davies 2018b, 639). This further allows us to capture the elements of historical change, brought by the proliferation and appropriation of technologies, intertwined with the continuity in young people's lives, as they together encompass the increasing mediation of the old social relations (Livingstone 2009) and persistently unequal patterns of youth transitions.

Bourdieu's theory of practice as a lens for understanding young people's transitions and technology use

Following Davies (2018a, 2765), it is thus argued that 'technology and users co-produce digital practice', while the 'multiple potential uses are influenced by the technical and social conditions of practice'. These can be effectively conceptualised with help of Bourdieu's theory of practice, as it accounts for both objective (field and access to resources) and subjective (one's habitus) dimensions to young people's lives. While many digital scholars have adopted and modified some of Bourdieu's concepts (such as information capital alone or in combination with the information habitus and/or field), most often, however, the focus has been on the digital divide, evident in multiple studies on deficits in skills, motivations, types of usage and outcomes among disadvantaged groups (Ignatow and Robinson 2017). Not enough attention has been paid to situating young people's technology use at the intersection of their lifeworlds and their subjectivities/social identities (forms of personhoods structured by one's class, gender and ethnicity; Skeggs 2011; Selwyn 2012; Davies, Eynon, and Wilkin 2017). My research addressed these limitations with help of Bourdieu's theory of practice, acting as a lens to aid in understanding young people's transitions in a holistic and multi-layered way, instead of focusing solely on their technology use. To achieve such a goal the concepts of habitus, capital and field are adopted as they allow to explore young people's experiences, subjectivities and choices made, as well as how these are structured by social structures.

This paper adopts Bourdieu's (1977, 82) definition of *habitus* understood as

a [subjective, but not individual] system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating all past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions (...) common to all members of the same group or class.

As habitus is a relational concept, it always remains in a dialectical relationship with field (social and multidimensional space where practices take place according to the norms, rules and hierarchies of the fields) and capital (the status and resources individuals possess, and the position they occupy in a particular field; Bourdieu 1984; France and Haddon 2014). Together, they not only produce one's practices but also reinforce, restrict or modify one's set of dispositions in and through an agent's actions (Wacquant 2016). Resultantly, focusing on the interplay between one's dispositions (habitus as a subjective element of practice) and the external influences (fields and access to capital as the objective elements of practice) is crucial for understanding how young people perceive and utilise technologies, while for example making career choices or looking for Education, Employment or Training (EET). The concept of field, in turn, suggests an approach whereby technologies are not value free, but embedded within neoliberal and unequal power relations (Gangneux 2018). In this sense, technologies are located at the

intersection of multiple fields, of which some are Internet based, while others are embedded within and mediate multidimensional and overlapping social spaces (Hine 2015; Davies and Eynon 2018). Consequently, conceptualising technologies in this way allows us to also capture the impact of the key fields, their rules and logic (policy and labour market fields in particular), on youth transitions and technology use outcomes.

Research design

This paper draws on qualitative research conducted for a PhD project that examined everyday lives, transitions and technologies use of NEET-identified Scottish young people. Narrative methodology was adopted because it is particularly interested in capturing the lived experiences of the group under study (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), while also revealing truths about the social structures of which these experiences are part of (Dwyer 2017). A narrative approach was thus further linked with critical theory that positioned young people within unequal power structures and the broader socio-economic context of neoliberal capitalism. The city of Glasgow was selected due to its history being shaped by the processes of deindustrialisation and neoliberalisation which brought significant changes to the local labour market and led to the significant loss of industrial jobs and a rise in employment in the service sector (Fraser et al. 2017). Such processes further contributed to increasing spatial concentration of socio-economic disadvantage that has continued to impact ‘over decades on the life opportunities of different generations’ living in the city (MacDonald, Shildrick, and Furlong 2014, 202).

Permission for the study was secured from the Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde. Gatekeepers across six different locations facilitated recruitment and fieldwork, and included careers services, training providers and youth organisations. Using formal channels of recruitment, however, meant that young people who do not use any supporting services were not included in the study.

Methods of data collection comprised face-to-face, open-ended and semi-structured biographical interviews as conversations with 22 Scottish young people, 15 men and 7 young women,² who were predominantly white.³ A purposive (non-probability) sampling strategy was employed, as its main aim is to generate rich understandings of the phenomenon under study rather than statistical patterns (Creswell 2013). The purposeful sampling was combined with criterion sampling – types of criteria that specified whom to select as participants (Creswell 2013). Young people aged 16–24, who were NEET at the point of recruitment and who had been seeking to access EET opportunities were specified as research participants. However, there was no requirement for young people to be actively using technologies to take part, as the project intended to explore whether/how this population employs technologies during their transitions.

The data from interviews provided rich accounts of participants’ daily routines, school and post-school experiences, as well as perceptions and meanings across these aspects of their lives and transitions. Moreover, the second part of the interviews was predominantly focused on capturing young people’s technologically mediated practices of looking for, and accessing, EET opportunities. This additional dimension to youth transitions was of particular interest because it has been so far underresearched about this group, while policy responses continue to uncritically frame technologies as a panacea for erasing socio-economic inequalities.

The interviews with the young people lasted between 30 and 120 min, with an average of 75 min. They were transcribed verbatim and anonymised, then coded and analysed abductively and thematically with the help of tools to organise qualitative data (Attride-Stirling 2001; Braun and Clarke 2013). I started with careful reading and re-reading of the dataset and its inductive analysis. Apart from the general themes relating to the research questions, at this initial stage, I was particularly committed to treating young people as the first narrators and interpreters of their experiences (Barkhuizen 2008). Following this step, I developed approximately 50 codes that allowed me to 'condense' my data into the meaningful units of information to which relevant segments of texts were assigned and stored in the NVivo database (Creswell 2013). The next step involved organising these codes into 'themes and patterns of meaning across dataset in relation to a research question', a process known as Thematic Analysis (TA; Braun and Clarke 2013, 175). To do so, Attride-Stirling's (2001) tools for organising qualitative data were employed and included the development of:

- a) Global Themes – engagement with technologies
- b) Organising Themes – in youth transitions
- c) Basic Themes – technologies as the source of information; for making occupational choices; technologies and performance of the self; acquiring digital employability skills; impact on trajectories; other influences on transitions.

At this point, theorising became an integral part of the analytical process (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Doing so means the researcher thinks with the data, yet goes beyond them, to develop ideas and concepts not only on the substantive level (local and individual) but also on a more generic theoretical level that transcends the original setting of the study (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Resultantly, I used a range of intellectual resources, theoretical perspectives and concepts, and brought together scholarship on youth transitions with the work on the digital to this stage of analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). For example, I employed the Bourdieusian thinking tools to capture the existence of unequal structures or how they impact upon transitions of the NEET-identified young people. Moreover, while analysing and making sense of the data, I tried to grasp my participants' *habitus*, and its interplay with their access to social networks, information and resources, or the broader processes of the *fields* they occupied. *Habitus* was thus adopted as theory method, becoming an additional method of working with the data (Costa, Burke, and Murphy 2019). To make robust claims about individual and class *habitus(es)*, multiple strategies discussed by Costa, Burke, and Murphy (2019) were adopted and focused on identifying and theorising participants': (a) habitual and repetitive practices; (b) internalised and repetitive perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, and set of expectations and (c) tensions and uneasiness in the narratives of experience, especially when they enter unfamiliar field(s).

Demographic profiles indicated that the young people and their families who resided in the most deprived areas of Glasgow were from the lower socio-economic backgrounds and experienced multiple forms of disadvantage. Participants' entrance to the labour market had been 'accelerated', as on average they all had left school early, with little qualifications and followed non-academic pathways. The vast majority experienced school as a bad place, often left with scarred learning identities and with no clear plans of what they

would do. This was akin to extensive scholarship evidencing continuous patterns of educational inequalities affecting disadvantaged youth (Simmons and Thompson 2011; Shildrick et al. 2012; McPherson 2021).

Crucially, this shared 'class of conditions of existence' (Bourdieu 1990, 53) among my participants can be considered as a finding in itself, which demonstrates the systematic links between socio-economic inequalities and unequal patterns of youth transitions (see Shildrick et al. 2012). It also reveals fallacious neoliberal discourses, which allocate the causes of non-participation to personal deficits rather than the dynamic processes and structural inequalities underpinning contemporary society (Colley and Hodgkinson 2001; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; McPherson 2021). Finally, it constitutes a significant backdrop to understanding the impact of technologies on transitions of NEET-identified young people, whilst technology use is positioned amongst multiple influences.

Findings

This section is divided into three parts. The first theme that was identified through the process of TA discusses the occupational choices made by participants, including problematising the role technologies played in these. The second theme examines how young people engage with technologies while looking for opportunities. The final theme explores the process and impact of acquiring digital employability skills on participants' transitions.

Technologies and occupational choices

Most young men in the study identified employment in construction, retail, warehousing, etc. as their preferred work. Young women, in turn, expressed interest in employment in childcare/social care, customer services, retail and/or sport, fitness and beauty; sectors traditionally dominated by women. There were some exceptions to this gendered divide, for example Christopher (17) was interested in working in childcare and Emma (18) enjoyed her placement in a warehouse and accepted a job offer with them at the time of her study.

Participants' narratives revealed that the vast majority, despite using technologies regularly, did not employ them whilst making their occupational choices. Instead, such preferences had been deriving from what they experienced – either while at school/training, via their social networks or through other aspects of their classed and gendered everyday lives. For example, Ron (16) reflected on what drove him into seeking opportunities in joinery:

My uncle, he was always doing lots of homemade stuff, like building cabinets, things like that. And I'd always pretend that I was doing that. I've always been interested in it.

Martin (23), who said 'if I got a bricklaying job, I'd love it, so I would', linked his interest with his experience of working alongside his grandfather:

See when I was like younger, I used to help my grandad and that to do this stuff. Like, they've taught us stuff like, so I'm not like complete daft in the heid man, like I know what I'm doing.

Direct experiences not only helped to define what the young people wanted to do but also what they did not. Claire (16), for example, chose her preferred type of work and

rejected others based on her experiences from work placements accessed via school and college:

I've tried college courses, I've done hospitality, but it wasn't really my thing. I didn't really like being in college, I actually wanted to go out and work with the public instead of being inside of a kitchen.

Only two participants mentioned using technologies to explore occupational opportunities they could pursue. Christopher (17) worked in his father's maintenance company after leaving school, but he found the work 'too intensive' and harmful. While on an employability course, he was encouraged to use 'My World of Work'⁴ to seek other options:

Well before I came to careers services, I was with a company, they were training providers. And then when I went there they'd kind of, you'd give them your qualifications and what you were interested in and then they'd give you back a couple of job sectors [through My World of Work]. Like, 'Oh with your qualifications, what you're interested in, this would be good,' and they said to me childcare. (...) As soon as they said it, it just sparked. I was like, 'I'd probably enjoy doing childcare'.

This extract demonstrates how the histories of one's dispositions and positions meet when young people engage with technologies. Christopher's inclination for drama, combined with enjoyable experiences of caring for his little cousins and his position in the social fields, allowed him to perceive childcare as an option that was both worthy and possible to pursue. In his case, engagement with (embodied and embedded) technologies was a source of information that influenced his occupational choices, which nevertheless remained classed.

However, technologies are 'not free from sociocultural, political and economic power structures and any mobility or agency they may offer the user is momentary, contentious, negotiated and ambivalent' (Thornham and Gómez Cruz 2017, 1805). For example, if young people found opportunities that were perceived as worthy, but not accessible, technologies only served as a painful reminder of the position they occupied in the social structures. This held true for Anne (17), whose narrative demonstrated how engagement with technologies can be far from empowering when considered in the context of individuals' lifeworlds. Anne disengaged with school very early, with no plan for what she would like to do and with a scarred learner identity. She had a passion for music and had been exploring musical career options:

I always wanted, well not always, but I found out [online] about this thing called Music Therapy. And it's so cool, I was reading all about it. (...) And I'm like, I'd love to do that kind of stuff. But then after I read it all, it was getting me into it, I was like, 'this looks good,' and then, right at the bottom, it said you need a qualifications. (...) It was the one that I know I would never be able to get.

Despite Anne's disposition towards music, her passion alone was not enough to overcome the objective barriers to opportunities, such as her disadvantaged position in the fields. Access to technologies and any 'horizons' it opens could not obliterate her negative school experiences and being denied access to college towards National 4 qualifications after her tutor told her the course was 'too academically challenging'. Thus she acknowledged a rather strong possibility of being compelled to settle for a job she would dislike, as she subjectively felt this was the only type of work she could access:

I've been, just looking at any kind of music thing. I know I should be kind of looking for other ones [jobs], because I can't just rely on music. I know I'll need to start looking [at] all the other ones I don't really like, but they're the ones that I can get into.

Given the widely held belief that technologies play a central role in young people's lives, this study found that the NEET-identified young people's occupational choices in most cases were not technologically mediated. On the contrary, participants referred to direct experiences and dispositions deriving from their lifeworlds and relations as the key sources for their choices. These findings resonate with existing scholarship highlighting the crucial role of inequality on young people's occupational choices (Connolly and Healy 2004), as these structures what they are 'allowed' to experience and think of 'as possible' (Bourdieu 1990). The limited presence of opportunity, capitals and choice (Connolly and Healy 2004) in the lives of my participants further transferred into their engagement with technologies, which were not perceived as offering freedom of choice or social mobility nor were they used as such. On rare occasions, when technologies did inform vocational choices, socio-economic positioning of this segment of youth population was far more influential and restraining than any possibilities – 'new technological, socio-technological, geographical–technological horizons' (Thornham and Gómez Cruz 2017, 1796) – technologies could open.

These conclusions pose somewhat of a challenge to a dominant body of scholarship that tends to focus on deficits in digital skills and information seeking or on poor quality exposure to technologies resulting in developing a task-oriented information habitus while online (see Robinson 2011; Matli and Ngoepe 2021). Instead, understanding disadvantaged young people in the context of their lifeworlds offers a more plausible explanation to why technologies were not utilised while making occupational choices. Moreover, based on the above analysis, digital upskilling alone seems very unlikely to challenge what is subjectively felt and understood as possible (or impossible) for the 'likes of us' (Bourdieu 1990, 56). Such dispositions continue to derive from deep-rooted inequalities many young people grow up internalising and developing their sense of position within social structures (France and Haddon 2014).

Technologies in searching for and accessing opportunities

Despite the limitations of technologies on occupational choices discussed above, the importance of using technologies for transitions was strongly emphasised by all participants. As, for example, Alan (20) and Claire (16) explained:

Alan: Oh [technologies mean] everything 'cause if I didn't have my phone I wouldn't be able to look for jobs!

Claire: Aye, that's a good thing for looking for jobs and applications and applying for college and that, for creating CV.

Technologies were thus perceived and employed as an everyday tool that mediates the activity of looking for opportunities. This demonstrates the change technologies brought into how work, learning and training are nowadays accessed. These technologically mediated practices have proliferated because the fields' rules have changed and such processes have been dialectical. Many employers run recruitment online; job centres require an online proof their claimants actively look for jobs; policy makers, schools,

training providers and careers services emphasise digital employability skills which in turn reinforce young people's practices.

Concurrently, however, uncertainties about how to access opportunities and particularly how to judge their value, constituted strong features of participants' narratives. As the review of the existing research demonstrated, such uncertainties tend to be understood in terms of young people's limited digital skills and often evaluated according to their (in)ability to use search engines and/or perform certain tasks online (Prince's Trust 2016; Matli and Ngoepe 2021). Nevertheless, the reality is far more complex. A significant body of scholarship has demonstrated that vocational pathways remain undervalued and underfunded within a highly unequal, stratified and fragmented education system (Raffe 2011; Simmons and Thompson 2011; Valiente, Lowden, and Capsada-Munsech 2020). Young people who follow these pathways, such as participants in this study, receive limited support from schools to help them navigate their transitions (Scottish Government 2017). Moreover, unlike middle-class youth, participants often mentioned their parents' limited ability to help with their transitions (see Treanor 2017). This can be linked with the precarious labour market position their families often occupied (see MacDonald and Shildrick 2018) and in many cases also parents' reported inability/very limited ability to use technologies. It thus becomes clear that participants' uncertainties about how to navigate their transitions or judge the symbolic value of opportunities available continue to derive from traditional social divisions rather than solely from lack of digital skills or possessing 'task-oriented' information habitus (see Robinson 2011).

At the same time, participants continued to actively operate within such constraints. To start with, they were actively using their social networks, including peers and siblings, and turned towards professional services to learn the rules of the game. Tasks such as CV and personal statement writing, online job search and filling in applications, which participants struggled with at the beginning, became part of their everyday routine. The quote from Martin (23) is representative in this sense:

Researcher: Anything else that has made it difficult to look for opportunities?
Martin: Ah no, it used to be, but no like now, I know how to do that with application forms, I've got my CV up to date and that all the time now.

Moreover, participants' CVs and application forms had been often improved by numerous service providers, as for example Alan (20) reported:

Like I went on My World of Work 'cause you get a template for that and just put like a few things, like my qualifications and a couple of things in, like about you and that; I gave it to careers services to fix it for me and then when I went to Chances [training provider], they fixed it for me. And obviously my support worker helped update it.

However, despite engaging in an extensive process of searching for jobs, having their digital employability skills improved, online profiles on work websites, job alerts received daily and having up-to-date CVs polished by employability experts, the vast majority did not manage to access employment. Alan's (20) account illustrates this point:

I've been declined for at least one job a day for the last two months or something (...). Sometimes it tells you people viewed your application or profile and then they don't get back to you.

Impact of acquiring digital employability skills on youth transitions

To understand why acquiring digital employability skills did little to improve the young people's chances of accessing employment, their practices need to be understood as technologically mediated (Livingstone 2009), whilst seeing technologies as one among many contextual influences on youth transitions (Davies 2015).

Bonding social networks and service providers were the main sources of information regarding opportunities available and these had a significant influence on participants' transitions. This research, akin to other studies (Shildrick et al. 2012), found that service providers operate within a certain neoliberal logic that aims to discipline disadvantaged youth into low-paid, low-value roles in the labour market. This was done by directing participants towards short-term training and courses with little symbolic value and no clear pathways for progression (see also Thompson 2011; Scottish Government 2017). These were the opportunities the young people were 'put on', 'helped to get on' (James, 19), 'picked on' (Alan, 20) or even, as described by Joe (24), 'tossed on'. Narratives like Hannah's (17) were very common among the participants:

[I was advised by] My career advisor, Adele. I come down here [careers services] and see her. I may be starting a course [4 weeks training in childcare] on the 20th. I will go and find more information there on Wednesday.

As such, the young people's agency remained constrained by the logic of practice of the post-16 transitions policy field, upon which information and opportunities available to this group were based. Participants were in and out of 'NEET' numerous times, punctuated by engagement with yet another training and/or course (see Simmons and Thompson 2011 for similar findings). Older participants reported experiencing long-term unemployment after going through training programmes. Employment, if accessed at all, was temporary and low level. Consequently, (re)engagement with skills initiatives offered my participants little advantage in the labour market, a result also observed in the Teeside Studies (MacDonald and Shildrick 2018), as field's influences continued to reinforce low qualifications as one of the main barriers to employment and career progression in later life (Shildrick et al. 2012).

It also needs to be noted that the informal class-based methods to finding work which working-class youth used in the past appeared to be in decline. This may be a result of the very narrow social networks some of the participants and their families had access to. Indeed, there is emerging evidence that the worsening position of some of the working-class families in the labour market has been accompanied by a deterioration of parental networks that in the past had 'power to assist their children in the search for jobs' (MacDonald and Shildrick 2018, 81). My findings thus differ from the earlier studies in which informal networks were a route to employment, even if often low level and temporary (Shildrick et al. 2012). It may be argued, therefore, that a shift has taken place in how disadvantaged young people look for opportunities nowadays, with significant implications for their transitions.

Specifically, such a shift means that once valuable resources available to the working-class youth in the past, such as localised reputation – 'knowing and being known' (MacDonald and Shildrick 2018) – are barely drawn upon. Instead, disadvantaged young people have become anonymous applicants far behind in the employment queue,

where 'objective' criteria, such as qualifications, work experience and age, are used to assess candidates and may lead to their further disadvantage in the labour market (Wolf 2011). This point was made by the majority of participants, with an insightful quote from Hannah (17) serving as an example:

I think going out and handing in CVs and speaking to employers is much better than applying online because they just see you. 'Cause like [online] they just see your qualifications, they just don't see you as a person (...). So I think people just need to give young people a chance and realise that we did make mistakes at school, but it doesn't mean we are like stupid and can't do a job.

Participants thus called on employers to give them trials rather than judge them by their school performance and young age, which they thought offered a distorted picture of their qualities and abilities. On the contrary, the young people identified themselves as reliable, hard-working, motivated and eager to learn. On the other hand, however, they also talked extensively about how having low confidence, reinforced throughout their lives and by negative educational experiences, had been a significant barrier to opportunities. To understand what this means for their transitions, it is crucial to turn towards the concept of habitus.

Tensions in the young people's accounts between lack of confidence and their self-identification as hard workers and quick learners are understood as deriving from their classed habitus and its orientation towards the labour market, perceived as an unfamiliar environment with unclear rules and presuppositions (Farrugia 2019). The excerpt from Declan (16), echoed by all of the younger participants, serves to illustrate this point:

I don't know, I just, I don't know what to do next [after completing employability training], that's the thing, that's why I came here [careers services].

Uncertainties about the 'proper' forms of conduct in relation to the labour force also constituted a strong feature of participants' habitus. Such uncertainties materialised in their digital practices. The majority found it very difficult not only to explain why they wanted a specific job or learning course, but even to talk about themselves. Extracts from Daniel (17) and Alison (16) serve to illustrate this point:

Daniel: The one question that I hate is, 'What do you do in your spare time'. Cause like I could do anything. But like I do it, I do a lot stuff. Well not a lot of stuff, but I do stuff. And if somebody is after that, I'd be like, 'I don't know. I'd do anything'. But like I find that hard and then like when people say like, 'What would you hope to get out of the job, of this'. I don't really know what to say about that.

Alison: But then see when it comes to, like, I don't know, see when it comes to 'about me' message bit, it's just so hard, like, I just don't know what to write, I don't know, 'cause I'm dead chatty as well, I don't know if I'm going to over-do it or not.

These accounts showed that participants' class rather than information habitus was brought up to the surface while they were trying to access opportunities and revealed that they felt like a 'fish out of water' in an unfamiliar context. They also revealed that their habitus remained excluded from the modes of subjectivities that are rewarded by the contemporary labour force, namely that of a confident, entitled and flexible subject of value (Skeggs 2011; Farrugia 2019). On the contrary, the young people were aware of their social awkwardness in this unfamiliar field and knew they had to learn to 'fit in'

(Bourdieu 2004). Similar to Farrugia's study (2019, 56), participants had to work hard to acquire 'qualities that subjects of passion [middle-class youth] took for granted, such as confidence, relational competence and a demeanour'. Such learning often took place through employability training, for example Daniel (17) explained:

This course helped me with confidence. When I came, they helped me a lot. I'm more confident with [interview] stuff, like I can talk other than just sit there blank.

However, participants' accounts also revealed that learning the rules of the game resembled learning a script of how to perform the self to get it right, as one's habitus encompasses the system of long-lasting dispositions that, even though transposable, tend to be relatively stable (Bourdieu 1990). The extract from Daniel (17) illustrates how, instead of an 'authentic self-expression' (Farrugia 2019, 52), he learned to re-enact what was desirable to tell potential employers:

During the course they taught me, they would talk me through things that I could say. Then I could say something. (...) They would tell me to be like, 'In your spare time you would just say you like hang out with friends'. That's what I do, but like I wouldn't be able to answer it before.

Despite his passion for drawing and interest in space exploration, Daniel did not mobilise this aspect of the self in relation to labour, or in the past, in relation to education. Like the majority of participants, he kept his interests in the private sphere. More broadly, the young people's class habitus of being hard-working and motivated labouring subjects proved to be in a disjuncture with the requirements of the labour market that rewards qualities constituting the middle-class habitus (Skeggs 2011; Farrugia 2019). For example, middle-class youth do not omit any aspect of the self to present themselves as valuable workers (Farrugia 2019). For disadvantaged young people, however, such practices remain foreign to the self. Moreover, even when learnt, a degree of uncertainty and unease remains, even for older participants who routinely apply for jobs and learnt digital employability skills. An excerpt from Martin (23) serves to illustrate this point:

If I'm applying for something and I don't know what to do and that, I do get a bit scared and that man, I do sit back sometimes and like just look about and that man, hoping to see what other people are doing. And like, but I willnae say anything, I keep it in. It's not all the time, that's what I'm saying, it's sometimes, I just get the feelings like I'm like that, 'Aw no, I don't know what to do'.

Crucially, it is important to say that not all participants felt like 'fish out of water' to the same extent. Claire (16), for example, reported that being 'really talkative' and outgoing helped her to secure a place in college and a job in the call centre. Christopher (17) recognised that while he struggled to write about himself, he felt confident in an interview setting, due to his extensive experience in drama:

Like, everybody finds it dead hard to do interviews, I don't mind doing them (...). Cause in drama you do a lot of hot-seat stuff which was kind of like interviews. So I was fine with it [interview for a placement in a nursery], when people ask you a question you respond.

The above examples demonstrate how these participants succeeded in accessing opportunities due to possessing the 'right' qualities and perhaps also embodied characteristics, as these 'are crucial in gaining employment, especially in the forms of low-waged inter-active employment open to young people with few skills or little educational capital'

(McDowell 2012, 573). Claire (16), for example, easily fitted a description of the 'idealised white, slim, young, unwrinkled' body, prioritised in service work (McDowell 2009, 63). The majority, however, especially young men, lacked such desirable characteristics required by employment in service economy. For example, the extract from Liam (23) illustrates how he was denied a job at McDonald's:

They [interviewers] didn't like, like cause my customer services wasn't good, they said, they'll get back to me, but they didn't get back.

Consequently, a lack of soft skills, encompassing 'particular forms of aesthetic and performative embodiment that reflect the image or the brand of the employer' (Farrugia, Threadgold, and Coffey 2017, 274), leaves many young people, especially low skilled working-class young men, at a significant disadvantage in the labour market. At the same time, however, the majority of the young men in this study sought and preferred work that did not require an affective/interactive labour and they did not reconstruct their identity to do so. Rather, they prioritised 'hands-on' jobs outside of the service sector. Yet, as this kind of work has been diminishing, young men widened their options by looking for any kind of low-level work, including service jobs, which only meant they faced yet another barrier to employment (McDowell 2009, 2012).

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has examined and problematised the impact of technologies on transitions of NEET-identified young people in Scotland. It found that engagement with technologies and acquiring digital employability skills did little to improve participants' life chances and social mobility. The reason behind such limited success was further explained with help of Bourdieu's thinking tools, as it was proposed technologies continue to be one of many contextual influences on young people's transitions, while the limited presence of opportunity, capitals and choice in their everyday lives, alongside the forces of the *fields*, strongly overshadowed any horizons technologies could potentially open. For example, young people's occupational choices derived from what they had known and experienced in the context of their classed and gendered lifeworlds. Moreover, difficulties with navigating the realm of work and performing the self in relation to the labour market were derived from participants (classed) labouring subjectivities and these were merely reflected in the ways they used technologies while looking for opportunities. In other words, traditional social divisions, rather than lack of digital skills and limited exposure to technologies, seemed to shape the young people's choices and trajectories.

Furthermore, learning digital employability skills did little to improve the young people's chances of accessing employment as social dimension of practice proved to have a much stronger influence upon their transitions. Specifically, learning digital skills did not transcend the objective barriers to employment, such as little qualifications, lack of work experience, and young age. It also did not transcend 'the ontological reality' of a poorly designed post-16 transitions system. The vocational pathways, promoted as the best option available to disadvantaged youth, have continued to offer very little symbolic value in the labour market (Simmons and Thompson 2011; McPherson 2021). Skills initiatives in particular have been long argued to resemble the initiatives of the 1980s, which aimed to reduce youth unemployment with help of similar short-term

solutions focused on fixing the individual, instead of tackling the complex structural factors leading to unequal transitions (MacDonald and Shildrick 2018). I also found that supporting agencies were often directing young people towards courses of little symbolic value that further contributed to reinforcing participants' disadvantaged position in the labour market. Consequently, they were churning between unemployment, low-level training courses and temporary low-quality work (if they managed to access it at all), as extensive research on youth transitions has demonstrated for decades (Simmons and Thompson 2011; Shildrick et al. 2012; McPherson 2021).

Moreover, learning digital employability skills does not necessarily mean that disadvantaged young people would develop the 'right' personality, attitudes or styles of self-presentation expected by contemporary labour market (McDowell 2009, 2012). Rather, as they belong to one's habitus, they are long lasting, especially if social agents continue to live in circumstances like those experienced during early socialisation (Bourdieu 1977). While this is not to say that change cannot take place, it requires time and reflexivity, for example through one's awkwardness, encountering new circumstances that would allow for such change but also a desire on the side of social agents. Continuous experiences of deprivation, marginalisation and educational inequality significantly limit disadvantaged young people's ability to develop new and transformed practices and modes of self-presentation (Wacquant 2016) and this held true for the majority of participants in this study, especially young men. Lacking the 'right' form of personhood acted as yet another barrier to employment in the service sector.

Support for disadvantaged youth with developing digital skills they may need help with is important (Eynon and Geniets 2016; Matli and Ngoepe 2021). However, dominant debates and scholarship tend to overly focus on the issues of unequal access, motivation, skills and outcomes online. By doing so, the potential for success of such approaches is rather limited, simply because technologies alone cannot transcend unequal patterns of social life. Neither can they transform disadvantaged young people into a middle-class subject of value equipped with a privileged form of subjectivity (Skeggs 2011), which corresponds well with the requirements of the neoliberal labour market (Farrugia 2019). Given the last decade of recession and austerity measures, and in the context of increased inequalities during a global Covid-19 pandemic, prioritising issues such as reducing poverty, deprivation, educational inequality and significantly improving post-16 pathways and labour market conditions would better facilitate positive and more equal youth transitions. It would also establish the foundation from which disadvantaged young people, also through engagement with technologies, could develop the new practices and new definitions of what is 'possible' (Bourdieu 1977).

Notes

1. BT Stand Out Skills has what jobseekers need for every stage of their search. It has ways to help you discover your potential, make you own luck, write job applications that can stand out from the crowd and advice on how to interview with confidence and stay resilient through it all.(28 days campaign/initiative to support job seekers launched in Scotland on the 19th of January 2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.bt.com/standoutskills> (Accessed 30 June 2021).
2. The unequal gender composition of the sample was partially driven by the overall NEET statistical evidence, which shows that young men are more likely to be 'unemployed seeking'

(work/education) and young women – ‘unemployed not seeking’ (SDS 2017). However, the nature of gatekeepers facilitating fieldwork also contributed to my inability to recruit more young women, as the service users in two organisations were predominantly male. Additionally, two young women recruited for the study decided to withdraw their consent.

3. 21 participants self-identified as white Scottish or white British; only one participant self-identified as Black British. My limited ability to engage with young people from ethnic minority backgrounds meant that this social category has been omitted from the analysis.
4. My World of Work is an online careers guidance website complementing Career Management Skills Framework for Scotland; see <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/> (Accessed 30 June 2021).

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank participants and the three organisations and their dedicated teams for making this fieldwork possible. The author would also like to thank Daniela Sime and Claire Lightowler, for their ongoing support and invaluable feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by University of Strathclyde partnership with Capita PhD Scholarship.

References

- Attride-Stirling, J. 2001. "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research* 1 (3): 385–405.
- Barkhuizen, G. 2008. "A Narrative Approach to Exploring Context in Language Teaching." *ELT Journal* 62 (3): 231–239.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Vol. 16. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 2004. "The Peasant and His Body." *Ethnography* 5 (4): 579–599.
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2013. *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London: Sage.
- Bussi, M. 2014. "Going Beyond Work-First and Human Capital Approaches to Employability: The Added-Value of the Capability Approach." *Social Work & Society* 12 (2): 1–15.
- BT Skills for Tomorrow. (2021). Standout skills. Retrieved from: <https://www.bt.com/standoutskills>
- Clandinin, D. J., and F. M. Connelly. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Coffey, A., and P. Atkinson. 1996. *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies*. London: Sage.
- Colley, H., and P. Hodkinson. 2001. "Problems with Bridging the Gap: The Reversal of Structure and Agency in Addressing Social Exclusion." *Critical Social Policy* 21 (3): 335–359.
- Connolly, P., and J. Healy. 2004. "Symbolic Violence, Locality and Social Class: The Educational and Career Aspirations of 10–11-Year-Old Boys in Belfast." *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 12 (1): 15–33.
- Costa, C., C. Burke, and M. Murphy. 2019. "Capturing Habitus: Theory, Method and Reflexivity." *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 42 (1): 19–32.
- Creswell, J. W. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. London: Sage.

- Davies, H. 2015. "Challenging Orthodoxies in Digital Literacy: Young People's Practices Online." PhD Thesis, University of Southampton.
- Davies, H. C. 2018a. "Learning to Google: Understanding Classed and Gendered Practices When Young People use the Internet for Research." *New Media & Society* 20 (8): 2764–2780.
- Davies, H. C. 2018b. "Redefining Filter Bubbles as (Escapable) Socio-Technical Recursion." *Sociological Research Online* 23 (3): 637–654.
- Davies, H. C., and R. Eynon. 2018. "Is Digital Upskilling the Next Generation Our 'Pipeline to Prosperity'?" *New Media & Society* 20 (11): 3961–3979.
- Davies, H. C., R. Eynon, and S. Wilkin. 2017. "Neoliberal Gremlins? How a Scheme to Help Disadvantaged Young People Thrive Online Fell Short of its Ambitions." *Information, Communication & Society* 20 (6): 860–875.
- Dwyer, R. 2017. "Narrative Research in Practice: Navigating the Terrain." In *Narrative Research in Practice. Stories from the Field*, edited by R. Dwyer, I. Davis, and E. Emerald, 1–25. Singapore: Springer.
- Eynon, R., U. Deetjen, and L.-E. Malmberg. 2018. "Moving on up in the Information Society? A Longitudinal Analysis of the Relationship Between Internet Use and Social Class Mobility in Britain." *The Information Society* 34 (5): 316–327.
- Eynon, R., and A. Geniets. 2016. "The Digital Skills Paradox: How Do Digitally Excluded Youth Develop Skills to Use the Internet?" *Learning, Media and Technology* 41 (3): 463–479.
- Farrugia, D. 2019. "The Formation of Young Workers: The Cultivation of the Self as a Subject of Value to the Contemporary Labour Force." *Current Sociology* 67 (1): 47–63.
- Farrugia, D., S. Threadgold, and J. Coffey. 2017. "Young Subjectivities and Affective Labour in the Service Economy." *Journal of Youth Studies* 21 (3): 272–287.
- France, A., and E. Haddon. 2014. "Exploring the Epistemological Fallacy, Subjectivity and Class in the Lives of Young People." *Young* 22 (4): 305–321.
- Fraser, A., S. Batchelor, L. N. L. Li, and L. Whittaker. 2017. "City as Lens: (Re) Imagining Youth in Glasgow and Hong Kong." *Young* 25 (3): 235–251.
- Furlong, A., and F. Cartmel. 2007. *Young People and Social Change: New Perspectives*. 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Gajjala, R., N. Rybas, and M. Altman. 2007. "Epistemologies of Doing: E-Merging Selves Online." *Feminist Media Studies* 7 (2): 209–213.
- Gangneux, J. 2018. "Mediated Young Adulthood: Social Network Sites in the Neoliberal era." PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow.
- Greene, D. 2021. *The Promise of Access. Technology, Inequality and the Political Economy of Hope*. London: The MIT Press.
- Hine, C. 2015. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Ignatow, G., and L. Robinson. 2017. "Pierre Bourdieu: Theorizing the Digital." *Information, Communication & Society* 20 (7): 950–966.
- Lee, L. 2008. "The Impact of Young People's Internet Use on Class Boundaries and Life Trajectories." *Sociology* 42 (1): 137–153.
- Livingstone, S. 2009. "On the Mediation of Everything: Ica presidential Address 2008." *Journal of Communication* 59 (1): 1–18.
- MacDonald, R., and T. Shildrick. 2018. "Biography, History and Place: Understanding Youth Transitions in Teesside." In *Transitions to Adulthood Through Recession: Youth and Inequality in a European Comparative Perspective*, edited by S. Irwin, and A. Nilsen, 74–96. Abingdon: Routledge.
- MacDonald, R., T. Shildrick, and A. Furlong. 2014. "In Search of 'Intergenerational Cultures of Worklessness': Hunting the Yeti and Shooting Zombies." *Critical Social Policy* 34 (2): 199–220.
- Matli, W., and M. Ngoepe. 2021. "Extending the Unified Theory of Acceptance and use of Technology with the Problems of Digital Access to (re)Connect the Disconnected NEETs." *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 1–20. doi:10.1080/13511610.2021.1978281.
- McDowell, L. 2009. *Working Bodies: Interactive Service Employment and Workplace Identities*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.

- McDowell, L. 2012. "Post-Crisis, Post-Ford and Post-Gender? Youth Identities in an Era of Austerity." *Journal of Youth Studies* 15 (5): 573–590.
- McPherson, C. 2021. "Between the Rhetoric of Employability and the Reality of Youth (Under)Employment: NEET Policy Rhetoric in the UK and Scotland." *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4: 135–152.
- Prensky, M. 2001. "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part 1." *On the Horizon* 9 (5): 1–6.
- Prince's Trust. 2016. *Slipping Through the Net: Are Disadvantaged Young People Being Left Further Behind in the Digital era?* London: Prince's Trust.
- Raffe, D. 2011. "Participation in Post-Compulsory Learning in Scotland." In *School Dropout and Completion: International Comparative Studies in Theory and Policy*, edited by S. Lamb, E. Markussen, R. Teese, J. Polesel, and N. Sandberg, 137–154. London: Springer Netherlands.
- Robinson, L. 2011. "Information Channel Preferences and Information Opportunity Structures." *Information, Communication & Society* 14 (4): 472–494.
- Scottish Government. 2017. *The Life Chances of Young People in Scotland: An Evidence Review for the First Minister's Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Selwyn, N. 2009. "The Digital Native – Myth and Reality." *Aslib Proceedings* 61 (4): 364–379.
- Selwyn, N. 2012. "Making Sense of Young People, Education and Digital Technology: The Role of Sociological Theory." *Oxford Review of Education* 38 (1): 81–96.
- Shildrick, T., R. MacDonald, C. Webster, and K. Garthwaite. 2012. *Poverty and Insecurity: Life in Low-Pay, No-Pay Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Simmons, R., and R. Thompson. 2011. *NEET Young People and Training for Work: Learning on the Margins*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Skeggs, B. 2011. "Imagining Personhood Differently: Person Value and Autonomist Working-Class Value Practices." *The Sociological Review* 59 (3): 496–513.
- Skills Development Scotland. 2017. *Annual Participation Measure for 16–19 Year Olds in Scotland*. Accessed January 6 2021. <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/43580/annual-participation-measure-report-29th-august-2017.pdf>.
- Thompson, R. 2011. "Reclaiming the Disengaged? A Bourdieusian Analysis of Work-Based Learning for Young People in England." *Critical Studies in Education* 52 (1): 15–28.
- Thompson, R., L. Russell, and R. Simmons. 2014. "Space, Place and Social Exclusion: An Ethnographic Study of Young People Outside Education and Employment." *Journal of Youth Studies* 17 (1): 63–78.
- Thornham, H., and E. Gómez Cruz. 2017. "[Im] Mobility in the Age of [im] Mobile Phones: Young NEETs and Digital Practices." *New Media & Society* 19 (11): 1794–809.
- Treanor, M. 2017. *Can We Put the 'Poverty of Aspiration' Myth to Bed Now?* Edinburgh: Centre for Research on Families and Relationships.
- Turkle, S. 2012. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books.
- Valiente, O., K. Lowden, and Q. Capsada-Munsech. 2020. "Lifelong Learning Policies for Vulnerable Young Adults in Post-Recession Scotland." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 41 (2): 218–233.
- van Deursen, A. J., and J. A. van Dijk. 2014. "The Digital Divide Shifts to Differences in Usage." *New Media & Society* 16 (3): 507–526.
- Wacquant, L. 2016. "A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus." *The Sociological Review* 64 (1): 64–72.
- Wolf, A. 2011. *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*. London: Department for Education.