

Mobile phones in school
From disturbing objects
To infrastructure for learning

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Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Information Technology
Towards Educational Science to be defended in public on Friday the 29th of
September, 2017 at 13:00 in Torg Grön (4th floor) Patricia building, Department of
Applied Information Technology, Forskningsgången 6, Göteborg.

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Technology, The Open University, UK.

Abstract

Title: Mobile phones in school: from disturbing objects to infrastructure for learning

Language: English with a Swedish summary

Number of pages: 224

Keywords: mobile phone, upper-secondary school, teachers, students, public debate, infrastructure for learning

ISBN: 978-91-88254-01-4

URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/53361>

Amid digitalisation, the mobile phone has pervaded society and become one of the most widespread digital technologies. In school, the mobile phone has stirred up conflicts and tensions visible in public debate as well as classrooms. Teachers and students have struggled to manage mobile phones within the boundaries of school practice. This thesis explores these conflicts and tensions surrounding mobile phones in upper-secondary school. Theoretically, the analysis is based on the sociocultural perspective and views school as a social practice that builds on the installed base of infrastructure compiled from material and social resources and on institutional arrangements assigned or designed to support learning.

The empirical foundation of this thesis comprises four separate studies. Together, they present a mixed-methods approach to address the tensions surrounding mobile phones in school as they have arisen in public debate and in teachers and students' viewpoints. The results show that banning the use of mobile phones in school is an issue that politicians have used in the debate. Teachers have been equipped with legislation allowing them to ban the use of mobile phones when they are disruptive or threaten education. Nevertheless, many teachers permit students to use their mobile phones when the use is compatible with schoolwork. Students often use their mobile phones for school-related activities but struggle to balance their use with the conventions of school practice.

The mobile phone challenges school practice and education in many ways, for example, in classroom roles, curriculum implementation and control over education. Despite these challenges to school practice from mobile phones, the results show that both teachers and students use many features of the devices to support schoolwork. Thus, despite these challenges and tensions, the mobile phone has become part of schools' infrastructure for learning.