"MOBILE PHONES AND OTHER DISTURBING OBJECTS…"

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ABSTRACT

The impact of mobile learning on education is dependent not only on educational understanding but also on opinions of the public and policymakers. The debate in media reflects opinions and aims in different levels of the society. In order to enrich the view on what mobile learning has to battle in order to reach its full potentials I have studied news articles in order to capture some common conceptions of mobile phones in school settings. In the debate the mobile IT of mobile phones has been grouped with what is often referred to as "other disturbing objects", and has been regarded as self evident not being used in class. Mobile phones have been used as anecdotic evidence for accentuating political messages from both the right and the left wing.

KEYWORDS

Mobile phones, policy, newspapers, debate, conceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of how to embrace the students own learning in a democratic way that keep it independent from, yet close to the curriculum is an ongoing discussion between progressivists and traditionalists (Säljö, Jakobsson et al. 2011). It is also an issue of process or product, actualized and relevant to approach in the light of the last years instrumental view on school in the political debate (Säljö 2010).

There is a gap between what students experience inside and outside of the classroom and between what they learn in school and what skills they need in life. "It is an increasingly accepted truth that education systems must evolve to meet the needs of the students and societies they serve, changing their mission from knowledge transmission to preparation for future learning" (Shear, Gallagher et al. 2011). This is an approach embracing the process of learning over result. Even though ICT is common in teaching in the schools, it is still an exception that students actually use ICT in education. This gap between teacher and learner as recognized users of ICT in school is yet to be bridged (Shear, Gallagher et al. 2011).

The evolution of new technologies can help learners in the process, opening up the classroom, enabling new ways of communication and cooperation (Säljö, Jakobsson et al. 2011). Mobile phones could be one these technologies. The use of them for learning; formal, informal and non-formal, is often referred to as mobile learning or m-learning.

In this paper I present and discuss some particularly relevant issues for understanding of the preconditions for m-learning in the Swedish school system. It is important to examine the interrelationships between formal and informal learning in a wider context. Considering empowerment and oppression this is particularly important (Malcolm, Hodkinson et al. 2003).

The technology making the m-learning possible is not brought into the existing context of the classroom without conflict. The matter is multilayered and can be addressed from different perspectives – educational, technological and, not least, political (Traxler 2007; Kukulska-Hulme, Sharples et al. 2009). I have focused on the intersection between the educational and political aspects. By studying news articles from the Swedish daily press I have sought to illumine how the mobile phones in the public debate have been presented and conceptualized in relation to the traditional arena of schooling – the classroom.

A newspapers article treated as a primary historical source captures and reflect the influential opinions and debate, both political and public in the past (Tosh 2000). They tell us of the ambition of politics and

reacts to the consequences of it. Since school is governed by politics, federal laws and curriculums, these are powerful factors. And as Gerber, Karlan et al. (2006) points out "[…] even a short exposure to a daily newspaper influences voting behaviour as well as some public opinions." That said, Gerber, Karlan et al. (2006) are not sure whether it is the content of articles or the political angle that matters. The articles presented from the Swedish press help us understand how the clash between the mobile phone technology and the governed traditional classroom context has been. From those results some conclusions can be drawn on the preconditions for innovative teaching through m-learning in Swedish schools.

In the Swedish school law from 2010 the Ministry of Education and Research states that: "The education shall rely upon scientific principles and proven experience" (Ubildningsdepartementet 2010). But which are the scientific principles on the innovative teaching and learning regarding mobile phones and m-learning?

2. MOBILE LEARNING

There are different ways of conceptualizing m-learning (Traxler 2007). I shall not more than briefly sketch some principles of the field. Among the different ways of addressing it some focus more on the mobility aspect than on the learner aspect of it, and some seek to develop more educational approaches (Laouris and Eteokleous 2005). Others promote it as being driven by technology or devices, some put the mobility of the learner in centre (Traxler 2009).

That it reaches outside of the formal classroom have been seen as one of the major benefits pointing to learning taking place whenever a person has to overcome a problem, making use of all available resources; teachers, affordances in the environment, technologies etc.. The context is dynamically constructed by the learner interacting with the environment (Sharples, Taylor et al. 2005; Kukulska-Hulme, Sharples et al. 2009). But the formal education and m-learning are not joining without friction. According to Sharples (2006) trying to incorporate mobile technology into the traditional classroom teaching might not be to do enough and could run into problems. Sharples identify two systems in school; one is the youth culture, impenetrable to adults and the other is the school with its curriculum and teachers, deciding the acceptable discourse. Mobile IT and the possibilities it creates with social networking and collaboration is part of the youths' system. In the classroom it clashes with the formal system. The confrontational approach is also shared by Traxler (2009) recognizing technology changing the nature of knowledge work, and m-learning are not learning that is mobile, m-learning is m-learning, something entirely new. Traxler (2009) states that maybe the formal education is especially challenged with the dynamics of society and technology.

Kukulska-Hulme (2006) and Thomas and Brown (2011) see possibilities for a new culture of learning, but mean that the new culture and the traditional formal classroom education can coexist and complement each other.

New technologies generate changes that both motivate and challenge. If the twentieth century was about creating a sense of stability, the twenty-first will be about embracing change (Thomas and Brown 2011).

Thomas and Brown (2011) also states that understanding it as if school has a structure too fixed for successful coping with new technologies, or on the contrary; that school has a structure too weak to harness new technology and media, is not enough. Solving problems on these premises can be successful in a short perspective, but does not create any possibilities for long-term fruitful development. The challenge must be to seek to combine structure and freedom in order to create something new, they say.

The technology of interest in my study is the mobile phone. A technology that has come in conflict with the formal and established opinion of what learning and school is about, the teacher's agenda and the curriculum (Sharples, Taylor et al. 2005; Traxler 2007). The mobile phone networks its user being a key to the virtual society and the new media. Without it we are almost alone, on the verge to being nobody nowhere (Bjärvall 2011). As students bring their own technology into the classroom they want to stay in control of the technology that they possess. This is also tangent to how the technology is recognized, is mobile IT only amusement or something else? How to handle this in school without loosing the benefits of m-learning is a challenge (Kukulska-Hulme, 2006).

Analysing the rhetoric surrounding the introduction of ICT in schools during mainly the 1990's Karlsohn (2009) bases his analysis on articles from the Swedish teachers' union press. As a consequence of the IT-friendly climate in the society at the time, almost no critical voices opposing IT were given any room. The

IT-companies were booming and all voices heard said that ICT was the future. With the burst of the so-called Swedish IT-bubble in the year 2000, the rhetoric got more nuanced.

Karlsohn focused on the ICT of the 1990's mainly computers: my study focuses on how mobile phones in a school context were described in the Swedish daily press. The material examined was mainly from the time after the IT-boom. Only the content of the articles were investigated, not the actual effects of the daily press on the opinion. Which conflicts could be traced in the material? How does the approach to the technology in the material meet the scientific approach to m-learning? Investigating those questions could lead to a better understanding of the difficulties of realizing m-learning.

Liedman (2011) describes the contemporary rhetoric surrounding the school in Sweden as a situation where the debate regarding the school system is primarily speaking in anecdotic evidence. Satisfying and agreeable as it can be to address problems this way, it is worrying when the anecdotic evidence characterise the political debate (Liedman 2011).

Liedman also describes how the present secretary of education Jan Björklund of the Liberal Party, build his career on criticising school. The other strong political power on politics regarding school in Sweden the Social Democratic party initially opposed Björklund but over time they, with some differences, joined with Björklund on criticising school. However the initiative is with Björklund, and every opponent must motivate his or her anomaly (Liedman 2011).

But is Liedman right? A scientific study with 166 participants at a college in the USA showed that most of them were negative to mobile phones in their college classrooms. The mobile phones were mainly seen as a device for cheating (Campbell 2006). The result should not be overestimated and needs to be discussed further not to be just a poll. Campbell does this by focusing on the special affordances of the classroom, but the empiric material is still very limited.

The classroom is an environment with a heightened sense of normative expectations making the mobile phones more problematic than in other contexts (Ling 2004). E.g. the expected silence of the setting makes disturbances more noticeable (Campbell 2006).

There are also other factors that might have effect on the opinions on topics regarding school, e.g. rumour and reputation (Liedman 2011).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Internet database Mediearkivet provides texts from Swedish newspapers. The newspapers analysed in the study were Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Aftonbladet (AB), selected on the basis of being two of the newspapers with greatest editions in Sweden, both being centred in Stockholm but covering the whole country, but also on political belonging and tendency. DN is unaffiliated liberal, and AB is unaffiliated Social Democratic. The material presented in a news article is always judged on what is suitable for official consumption, so I do not seek to recreate a course of events, only the debate it self. The material only tells us what was written, not what actually happened (Tosh 2000). The criterion of time is not a problem since the articles are primary sources, and the object of interest. So, to capture opinions and conceptions in the debate the material is suitable.

Using only two newspapers raises doubts of the investigation's relevance and the representativeness of the material. Hultén (2006) in her thesis, relying on several researchers, points to that even a fairly limited selection or samples of articles have a high representativeness.

Approaching the material critical, it could have shortages in that it might not be complete. The material was selected from two searches in the database. The first one conducted on the mentioned keywords "mobile phones" and "school" the second on the keywords "mobiles" and "school". Doubts could also be raised regarding the articles' originality, but the material is judged as authentic. Used by universities Mediearkivet is on a constant examination and several of the texts were presented with a viewable digital copy of the original.

The method was both qualitative and quantitative, what were examined were both patterns in the rhetoric and in the chronology of the debate. Searching the database resulted in 174 hits from DN and 271 from AB of which 55 articles from DN and 54 from AB were considered of relevance. These were articles reporting directly about school or learning and mobile phones.

The articles were read and analysed regarding the rhetoric and the contexts; educational, pedagogical, political or other, surrounding the mobile phone in the texts.

Keywords often occurring were sought out. Then a grading and classification into genres were done based on the nature of the texts; news articles, reportages, debate articles, political editorial articles, columns and comments and letters to the editorials all regarding mobile phones in class. Finally notice was taken on what the author of the article written.

4. A QUANTITIVE APPROACH

The material revealed some trends as shown in figure 1. When there are elections coming up in 2002 and 2006, mobile phone and school are more frequent in the newspapers.
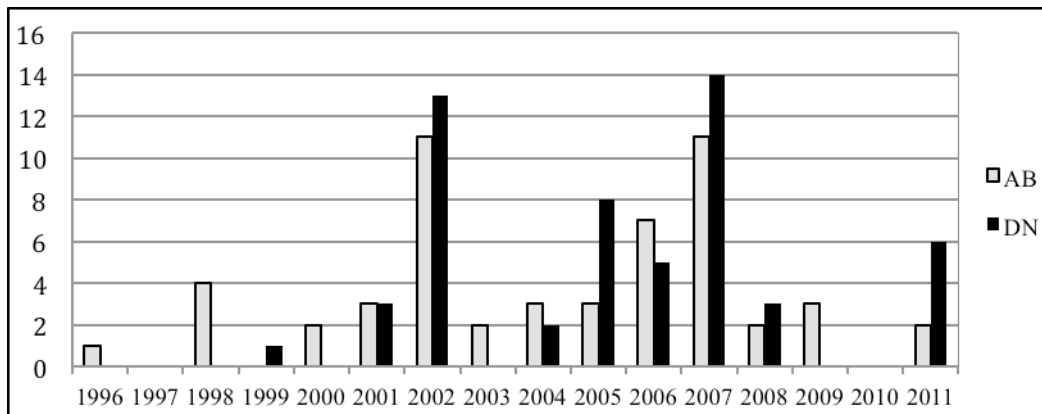

Figure 1. Number of articles published per year

The other height of articles on the topic is the year 2007. In the election in 2006 the left wing Social Democratic government was replaced by the right wing coalition "The Alliance"[1]. In 2007 the first laws the new government passed concerned school. The law gave the teachers a clearer mandate on seizure of mobile phones. Later less material from the newspapers is to be found.

5. A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The first article of interest published by AB in May 1996 describes a school in Stockholm where pupils from first class use mobile phones as a modem to connect to the Internet when they are not in the classroom. This article is rare being early in time and positive towards mobile phones. With Karlsohns (2009) analysis in mind, this can be understood as an expression of the ICT-friendly climate in the society as a whole. But mobile phones were not that common in 1996, only 50% of the Swedish households owned one in 1996 (NORDICOM n.d.). It is not likely to believe that the children of the families, who had one mobile phone in 1996, were allowed to bring it to school. In January 1998 AB reports from a secondary school having problems with rude behaviour and bad language in the classrooms. The school has decided to ban scruff, caps and mobile phones. The connection between the problems is not further explained. From this article and on, the debate is with a few exceptions rather similar. In 1999 DN publishes an article insistent of that quarrel over mobile phones, walkmans and outer garments cannot be part of a peaceful environment for learning. Rules are needed. Björklund is given credit for having raised funds for new schoolbooks Stockholm's schools. Books create structure and must once again be part of the learning, explains the author.

In the AB articles found from 2000, one school in Norway is reported calling the mobile phone a nuisance in school, the other is reporting of the dangers of radiation. It does not address disturbance in the

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[1] The Alliance (Alliansen) is the name of the political coalition consisting of the Centre party (Centern), the Cristian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna), the Liberal Party (Folkpartiet) and the Moderate Party (Moderaterna).

classrooms, but it focus on the disadvantages of the technology, who wants their child to be exposed to radiation in school?

In 2001 85% of the Swedish households possessed a mobile phone (NORDICOM n.d.). As the development of new models evolved the old were laid of or passed on from the parents to their children (Bjärvall 2011). As the number of mobile phones increased, so did the number of articles on mobile phones in school. From 2001, the articles in AB all report on cheating by sending sms. The latest of them, strengthen the message, explaining how much better things have become since prohibiting mobile phones in a school.

The DN articles on the topic were addressing mobile phones as becoming more and more of a problem, not only with ringing but also used for gaming and cheating. But from one school another opinion is heard. A headmaster is quoted saying that a ban is the wrong way to go. The school should rather teach the students how to handle their mobile phones. That could have been an advance for realizing m-learning, but in the year of 2002 there was an election for parliament coming up.

In the debate prior to the election school and education were heavily debated. The Liberal Party was profiling itself on school questions. Their spokesmen Lars Leijonborg and Björklund plead for order and discipline in the classrooms. School was mainly described as a place where chaos rule. One of the chaos creating objects is the mobile phone. In the two months before the election there were fifteen articles portraying the mobile phones as a technology not belonging in the classrooms. Björklund was supported by Bo Lundgren of the Moderate Party saying that mobile phones were a disturbance in the work environment in schools. In DN on the 1:st of September 2002 Leijonborg in an interview say that he believe that people appreciate the Liberal Party for their plain language on *self evident* topics like not using mobile phones during class. The different actors in the debate are supporting Leijonborg's rhetorical statement of the issue being *self evident*. No other points of view were found in the pre election debate. The Social Democratic Secretary of Education Thomas Östros wrote a debate article in AB saying that, it is not *self evident* questions like mobile phones being turned of in class that determines the future of Sweden, not saying what is. Basically both political sides regard the mobile phone as a piece of disturbance grouped together with what is often spoken of as "other disturbing objects". Those objects vary, but a package of disturbance can be identified, the mobile phone is in the centre flanked with various objects of distortion, such as narcotics, sticks, videogames, fire works, knifes, mp3-players, caps, chewing gums etc..

Some keywords that can be noticed frequently occurring in the debate, for example "atmosphere of work", mainly focusing on the environment in the classroom, and how the environment is ruined by lack of order and discipline. This is endangering the keen students results. Those who do not want to study constantly disrupt those who wish to study. Mobile phones are used for ringing, gaming, filming and loud talking.

But in AB there are two articles found from the post 2002 election time that differ a bit. The Social Democrats won the election, even in Stockholm Björklund had to resign from the municipal governing. But in the whole of Sweden the Liberal Party did well, increasing their votes from 4,6% to 13,3% (Valmyndigheten n.d.) Which role the *self evident* questions played in this inconsistent result of the election is hard to say, but in the 2003 articles, both from AB, one analyses Leijonborgs success as leader of his party. The strife for a ban of mobile phones is regarded an important part of their package of political matters that concern school and therefor many people. But, no politician found in the debate was opposing the opinion. The deviant articles in AB were from November 2002 and January 2003, reporting from the same school in Stockholm. The headmaster says that mobile phones are a necessary tool in their education. The students use them for ringing when they do fieldwork. Björklund is quoted saying, that one may use mobile phones in the teaching but during class they shall be turned of. The two articles are though exceptions. In the bigger picture, mobile phones are not seen as a technology that could be of use in a pedagogical context. Rather the voices in the debate race on how to be most against them. Even the news articles have a clearly negative angel to them.

As the technology evolves there are new problems reflected in the debate. As the devices' functions evolve new problems are portrayed. At the start of the examined period the problems are not described at all and later it is the ringing and sending of sms that is disturbing. In 2004 problems with pictures taken with the mobile phones' cameras is reported of. AB is reporting on the dangers of radiation on children, and in an article DN Secretary of School, Social Democratic Ibrahim Baylan is quoted saying it is self evident that the teachers must confiscate disturbing objects like mobile phones. Sten Tolgfors of the Moderate Party is quoted saying that it is important to have a school that drives towards knowledge rather than process.

In 2005 new technologies occur again and there were eight articles from DN and three from AB. Reports of disturbing mp3 players arise in the material. In AB in February 2005 the chairman of Lärarförbundet Eva-Lis Preisz is quoted saying that the mobile phone has become a symbolic question of importance. Four students are also interviewed, being negative to a proposal on banning mobile phones and other beeping devices. They are afraid that the teachers will not conduct the assessment of what is disturbing in a fair manner. An AB editorial in July stakes that banning the mobile phones is not a dangerous proposal. What is dangerous is that it is that question dominating the debate.

From the election year of 2006 the question is not as frequently debated as in 2002. Most articles are critical towards mobile phones, but opinions are heard saying that mobile phones might not be the biggest issue with school, teachers can already handle the problems they cause and that the debate is mislead.

But mobile phones are yet, a symbolic question. One article published in AB in September is interesting in that matter. The article is about a man who has been severely beaten up by a group of youngsters. Hospitalized and injured for life his solution to get rid of this kind of violent assaults is; more discipline in school. Ban caps, mobile phones and Mp3-players!

2007 was a rather hectic year in the debate, and most articles are against mobile phones in class. Opposing the Björklund policy pupils in a primary-middle school is reported to want to allow mobile phones and mp3-players. One pupil also wants the school to get a swimming pool. They are being ridiculed.

In two articles in April 2007 the Social Democratic Party leader Mona Sahlin criticise the Liberal Party and their struggle on mobile phones in school as them being stuck with questions of the little. The schools' problem is more, she says, than whether mobile phones should be banned or not.

On June the second AB reports of the new law, giving teachers the right to confiscate disturbing objects in the classroom, objects such as mobile phones and fireworks. Most articles this year are published before 1:st of July when the law went into effect. There is also a small change in the theme of the articles. With the new law coming up most articles is about the chaotic schools and disturbance of the mobile phones. After the bill was passed, the focus shift to successful school environments, where the mobile phones have been banned in local regulations since long time. Other articles also further expresses that banning mobile phones might not be the solution to a bigger problem.

Under the period from 2007 to the fall of 2011 a small but noticeable change in the pattern of the debate occur, after 2007 when the law giving the teachers a clearer mandate to confiscate the mobile phones, the debate cools of. From 2008 there are only five articles in the material one describing a possible disciplinary use of the mobile phones in a school context. Parents could get a sms from the school when their child is skipping class.

The articles from DN is mainly similar to before but in February a reportage from a school reports of pupils being allowed to use their mobile phones for calculating and listening to music if it does not disrupt the order in the classroom.

From the year 2009 there are three articles and in December 2009 a change in the debate can be noticed. It is reported that Member of Parliament for the Moderate Party Oskar Öholm, say that since mobile phones are a part of our society they should be used in school too. On the other hand the other articles from this year are one on brain tumours caused by radiation and one on the success of the mobile phone confiscating law generating peace and a good environment in school. From 2010 there were no articles.

In January 2011, in a debate article Erik Bengtzboe of the Moderate Party's youth argues that the debate should not be about seizure mobile phones, but rather how to learn from them and what to learn from them. The school must be better in using the modern technologies. But the debate on mobile phones is not over. In the last article in the material from November 2011 the Minister of Health and Social Affairs and leader of the right wing party the Christian Democrats Göran Hägglund had an article of debate published in DN in which he called for more authoritarian teachers seizing mobile phones in class.

6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Drawn up on the material presented above the conclusion could be that the conceptions that effect the preconditions for m-learning in Swedish school are characterized by mistrust in the technology making it possible, but that maybe the tide is turning.

The pattern visible from the material is in short that overall the reports on mobile phones in school have been on the negative effects. The technology is regarded as an object of disturbance. Rather than bridging the gap between school and the students' life, it opens up the classroom to nuisances. The technology has been used for politicians' purposes, evident both from the dates of the published material, the stakeholders and their opinions. After the law is passed clarifying allowance for teachers to confiscate mobile phones from students the subject loses some of its attraction for politicians. The debate is more nuanced and the number of articles opposing the technology being in school is not as overwhelming as earlier.

What the debate and the different voices heard can tell us is really that mobile phones in school are a controversial question. The problem of integrating the technology into the traditional classroom context is not solved with ease. There is a clash.

In the Swedish political debate concerning school the mobile phone has been well used as an argument. Even though the department of education and the Swedish School law passed by Björklund, is clear on that the education shall rely on scientific principles, the material and the debate have been focused on banning the mobile phones in school. But the law is complex to understand. It also states that education shall rely on proven experience. How is this to be interpreted?

Banning the mobile phones was one of the Liberal Party main questions in 2002. The Social Democrats did not oppose it, attacking Björklund without any ideas of an own policy on the topic. The technology is as a journalist in DN in August 2002 states, used to score votes in the coming election. Mobile phones not being in the classroom are by most opinions regarded self evident. Björklund is, as Liedman (2011) writes, the conductor of the debate. Prior to the elections of 2006 and 2010 it is not as much focus on mobile phones.

In the articles where the politicians are either writing the text or being the subject of the texts, they are describing a school where the mobile phone is the main problem. Interviewing teachers other problems surface. Teachers are not calling for a ban of the mobile phones, but not for a use of it either. Mobile phones is not the big issue, pupils know that they should turn it of. This is worth noticing since those who have the proven experience expressed in the school law must be the teachers.

What differs between the pundits in the beginning of the debate is that the Social Democrats want further investigation done by the National board of education (Skolverket). Björklund on the other hand say that it typically for them to investigate; now it is time for action. After the election 2006 there is a shift of government. The Liberal Party pass their law giving teachers a clearer mandate to confiscate mobile phones, reflected in the newspapers by an increasing number of articles on the topic during 2007. Confiscating disturbing objects has probably been allowed all the time, but based on the articles the rules have not been clear enough.

Even though they could not see what affordances the mobile technology would bring, what most of the other spokesmen in the debate miss, contradict those urging for a focus on result over process, might be the coming of a new culture of learning, where students are connected and learn together and from each other in various networks, communities and collectives (Brown & Thomas, 2011). Mobile phones might not be a question of the little, but something huge being the doors to a virtual room.

The publishing dates of the articles, both at the height in election years 2002 and 2006, indicate that the technology mobile phone was used as a rhetorical instrument for political purposes. It can be regarded as an anecdotic evidence, since many voices are being heard in material that witness on the disturbance of mobile phones ringing, in the classroom, in cinemas etc. lacked connection to education. Consequently the message carried out does not, as the school law demand, rely upon scientific principles or the complex proven experience. This is a Paradox, since the Alliance and Björklund are responsible for the school law.

It is not until 2009 that some politicians heard in the debate say that mobile phones can be of use in school. Even though the politicians or pundits do not mention it, the debate on mobile phones in the material have been behaviouristic seeking to eliminate technology regarded as creating disturbing behaviour in class. With the technology gone, disrupting behaviour will cease and the results rise. Disciplining the students with rules, restricting them from using new technology, is regarded doing this.

Obviously the ideas and consequences of m-learning is not corresponding with the political idea of what school is about. There has been a clash.

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