Student-initiated use of technology – Friend and foe

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## Sample

14 different schools in Sweden, five of which were at the upper secondary level (age range 15–19) and nine at the compulsory level (age range 6–15). A total of 36 classroom observations were conducted and 2509 minutes of field notes were documented. A total of 650 students were observed (some were observed several times, which made the total count 832). The observations covered classes taught in arts, chemistry, English, geography, history, natural science, maths, social science and Swedish (native language).

## Implications For Educators About

# Abstract

A multitude of different technologies are used in school today. Some are provided by the school and others are brought by the individual teacher or student. In addition, different applications are available. In this study the focus is on student-initiated uses of technology and how it conditions learning. Based on a case study with surveys, interviews and an observational time study, it is shown that students appear to be the most frequent users of technology in the classroom and for the most part initiate its use. We also show that they often initiate uses directed towards communication and inquiry. Against the prevailing understanding that students mainly use technology for extra-curricular activities, we found that most of the student-initiated technology and applications related to the task in hand and were therefore not regarded as problematic by teachers or students. However, with regard to student-initiated uses of social media, games and communicative applications the picture is more diverse. In this context, teachers and students complain that such use may distract students, although some regard it as rewarding, for example due to the informal learning or time for contemplation and relaxation that results. We conclude by questioning the dichotomies of curricular–non-curricular and intended–unintended learning and we argue for the need to add contemplation to the taxonomy used for understanding the educational use of information technologies as conditions for learning.

# Outcome

"[S]tudents initiate uses of technologies and applications that are (mostly) curricular and task related. We have also shown that they are mainly communicative in nature or directed towards inquiry. This indicates that conditions for learning as investigative and social are shaped.... [T]he educational needs that technology makes possible are not just related to curricular aspects. The student initiated uses of technology in the classroom is shown to distract AND relax and we argue that both aspects can be understood as conditions for unintended learning, in that they lead students away from that which is pre-planned and ordered. Following Biesta (2001), we question the curricular–non-curricular dichotomy, and claim our results to indicate that technology use may pose possibilities in these terms." (Authors, 13-14)