



Prohibiting technology in a digital context. Mobiles in the classroom



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The mobile phone, as a technological tool, appeared in 1973, but it was not until 1983 that devices that could be called mobile phones and that could be carried in one's pocket began to be marketed. Currently, we can consider that this device is no longer used only to communicate with each other remotely, but they are minicomputers connected to a global network that allow us to carry out all kinds of activities and transactions that have made our daily lives much easier, but that from an educational point of view they have also complicated our lives. Currently, the mobile phone is present in 99.5% of households where at least one member between 16 and 74 years of age has one (INE, 2023).

If we think of when they appeared, we can see that, in 40 years, mobile phones have gone from having an occasional use –only a small part of the population accessed them– to being a necessary tool for everyone from the age of 10 or 12. With these little machines in our hands we can solve daily problems in addition to being part of a permanently connected global community with which we can communicate, learn, share, collaborate... in a context in which the expression that became fashionable "any time, when needed" has become a reality. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the usefulness of these devices. We were lucky to have one and be able to virtually access the world from each of our homes. This luck, in recent times, and from an educational perspective, seems to have turned into misfortune, though.

The debate about mobile phones and education fills pages and pages of newspapers, hours of audiovisual media programming, educational gatherings, social gatherings, as well as family gatherings, but is the mobile phone really to blame for all the educational problems attributed to it?

Let's look at the current situation of the use of digital technology and, specifically, that of mobile phones in education. We could start by reflecting on whose responsibility it is that the mobile phone is used properly, improperly, or even overused. We tend to blame the





artifact for everything, when indeed schools receive the consequences of a lack of regulation of their use and a lack of limits that should be established especially by families and by the social environment where students live.

Regulating and even prohibiting its use and application in classrooms (below tertiary education) without control outside the classroom is a great effort with little progress in terms of improvement. For example, we ban mobile phones on the entire premises of a school, but when children or young people leave the school and come home for 2 or 3 hours there is no parental control. If they don't have guidelines, tools, or have learned to manage information well as all the permanent *inputs* offered by the device, its prohibition becomes an even greater danger than having it at hand all day. The instructions for the use of mobile phones in schools issued by the Department of Education of the Generalitat of Catalonia in January 2024 (as did other Autonomous Communities) are a response to pressure from families and society, but they contribute very little in terms of finding solutions beyond the short term.

The Young Children and Digital Technology study, carried out in 2017 in 21 countries of the European Union, concludes that, overall, children aged 0 to 8 in Europe learn to use technologies by watching their family members use them (Chaudron et al., 2018). It is therefore important to create a conceptual space to discuss the drawbacks of the use of technology that does not resort to *pathologizing*. The concept of habit must thus replace moral panic with a more grounded discourse on the collective use of technology, not just mobile phones (Aagaard, 2021).

The evidence that children learn, to a large extent, by imitation is not new, but regarding the importance of the use they give to technology, it is interesting the study that was carried out from primary to higher education where students were asked the importance they give to the mobile phone (on a scale of none, a little, quite, and a lot). In primary education, more than 60% gave it between little or none, and in baccalaureate there were still 26% who gave it little or no importance (Ruiz de Miguel et al., 2021). Taking into account these data, it can be expected that, with good joint guidance between families and schools, this problem associated with the misuse and overuse of mobile phones could be reversed, to a large extent.

To conclude, we would like to refer to a series of misunderstandings that are often used to demonstrate the harmful effects of the use of mobile phones in education in general, and in the classroom in particular. There is a whole critical current that relates the application of this technology with visual problems, sleep disorders, decreased attention span or even addictions. In general, the main conclusions that have been reached from the educational perspective refer rather to misuse or overuse, to the lack of habits and control, and to effects that directly threaten the health of the individual. Often, the negative influence of technology has to do with problems that go beyond the technology itself. An inappropriate application or use brings them to the surface or accentuates them if action is not taken in time, and in no case do we think that we can talk about addiction in terms of proposing a "detoxification" or a medication.

The most efficient antidote to overexposure to screens is, without a doubt, a 360° look at this educational problem with the convergence of the same objectives by all the agents involved.



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