ABSTRACT

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Reflections on the rhetoric of learning and technology in Sweden

During the last decades, ideas concerning new technology and how it may facilitate and improve learning have played a considerable role in the debate on school and education. Not least during the nineteen nineties, digital technology emerged as an essential component in the discussion. Educational ideas and educational systems suddenly became important locations for different notions and practices related to information technology. For some intense years opinions and attitudes among teachers and pupils, political strategies and decisions, along with commercial interests, interacted in the formation of most predominant discourse on technology. At the same time—during the years now often referred to as the Internet bubble—the computerisation of the Swedish school gained considerable speed.

The presentation takes its starting point in a specific aspect of this discursive launch of new technology, namely the rhetorical aspect. An extensive material dating from the nineties—comprising newspaper articles, commercial ads and political documents—have been analyzed with respect to the different rhetorical strategies used in the area of learning and information technology. The main features in this analysis will be clarified in the presentation. Special attention is drawn to the fact that so much of the rhetoric around digital technology and the Internet was constructed with historical temporality as central device. With different means a situation was conjured up in which the current historical moment was construed as totally unique. At the same time, a number of different pictures of a radically different future became prevalent. According to these conceptions of the historical time to come, pedagogical practices faced a fundamental renewal, and the old, inefficient and obsolete educational system was on the eve of destruction under the increasing pressure from digital technology. The presentation concludes with some critical remarks on the absence of critical perspectives in the school debate during the years of the so called Internet bubble.