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Eduverse
NEWSLETTER

25
THEN
NOW
NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF
EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

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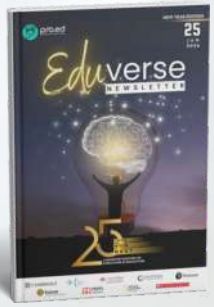
With a dedicated focus on the needs and aspirations of educators, we curate a diverse range of best practices to support your teaching journey. From cutting-edge pedagogical strategies to engaging classroom activities, we are here to equip you with the tools and inspiration you need to ignite curiosity, foster creativity, and cultivate lifelong learners.



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- *Designed by EduVerse Design team*

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear EduVerse and University Grapevine Readers,

Happy New Year, and welcome to 2026.

The start of a new year invites reflection – on where we have been, what we have learned, and how those lessons shape what comes next. For educators, this moment is especially meaningful. As we look back on the first 25 years of the 21st century, we are reminded that education has never stood still. The past has shaped our present in profound ways, and the choices we make now will define the future of learning.

This joint edition of EduVerse and The University Grapevineinvites us to pause and reflect – on **where education has come from, how it is unfolding today, and what it must become in the years ahead.** The changes we see around us did not appear overnight. They are the result of decades of decisions, innovations, and adaptations made by educators responding to shifting technologies, social realities, and learner needs. Understanding this trajectory matters, because the choices we make now will shape the next chapter of learning.

Today's learners are growing up in a world defined by rapid technological shifts, global interconnection, environmental pressures, and social complexity. They need more than information or tools. They deserve learning experiences that help them navigate these realities with confidence, empathy, and agency. Technology – AI included – can support this work, but only when guided by thoughtful educators who use it to deepen understanding rather than distract from it.

The difference, as always, lies in us.

In this issue, we highlight educators who are keeping thinking at the center of learning. You will find stories and strategies from teachers who are:

- Using technology to enrich – not replace – human thought
- Designing learning that sparks curiosity and sustained exploration
- Encouraging students to create, question, and challenge assumptions
- Building classrooms where ideas move freely and innovation feels natural
- Ensuring that progress – technological, social, or environmental – remains grounded in human values

What inspires us most is that these insights do not come from abstract theory or distant policy discussions. They come from YOU. From classrooms where teachers are adapting to the world as it is, while preparing students for the world as it could be. From educators who refuse to let learning become passive or predictable. From the front lines of teaching, where the future is shaped one idea at a time.

As we look toward what comes next, let us remember that **sustainable progress – technological, social, or educational – depends on our ability to learn from the past, act thoughtfully in the present, and remain open to change without losing our values.** When we cultivate minds that imagine, analyze, and innovate, we build a future that moves forward with intention rather than drifting backward through habit.

Thank you for the ideas you generate, the risks you take, and the belief you hold that education can shape a better tomorrow. As we welcome the new year, Year of the Horse in some Asian countries, we wish you strength, clarity, and the courage to move forward with purpose. May this new year bring renewed energy, meaningful journeys, and steady progress – for you, your learners, and the communities you serve.

Dr. Robert Stroud - Special Guest Editor
The University Grapevine

Dr. Le Dinh Bao Quoc - Editor-in-Chief
EduVerse Editorial Board

IN THIS NEW YEAR EDITION

EDUVERSE EDITORIAL BOARD

HAPPY NEW YEAR

May this new year bring renewed energy, meaningful journeys, and steady progress – for you, your learners, and the communities you serve.

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Eduverse PD NETWORK

THE UNIVERSITY GRAPEVINE

As we welcome 2026, **EduVerse** and **The University Grapevine** invited educators, researchers, and changemakers to reflect on the first 25 years of the 21st century — and to imagine what comes next.

From the rise of digital learning and global connectivity, to the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergence of AI in classrooms, and a growing focus on inclusion, sustainability, and well-being, this special edition explores how education has evolved in a time of constant change.

Turn the page to reflect, question, and explore the future of learning — together.

Co-Publication note
This special reflection is co-published by

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25
THEN
NOW
NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

In this special edition, **EduVerse** and **The University Grapevine** invited educators from around the world to share their voices, with the theme:

Then. Now. NEXT. – A Quarter Century of Evolution in Education

This collection captures the heart of education through the eyes of those who live it every day — teachers, mentors, and changemakers who have witnessed how learning has transformed over the past 25 years, and who continue to shape what comes next.

VOICES OF CHANGE

Looking back 25 years, what do you think has been the most significant change in education since the early 2000s?

1

Dr. Gavin Bui

The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong, HK SAR, China

The most significant change in education since 2000 is probably digitisation of education at all levels. More recently, Generative AI is accelerating this revolution, fundamentally forcing a re-evaluation of the roles of the learner, teacher, and the core purpose of education itself in an information-abundant world.

Prof. Angélica Isaza

Universidad del Cauca Colombia

Looking back 25 years, the most significant change in education has been the shift driven by new generations shaped by immediacy and global connectivity. Students today have different needs and aspirations: they value mobility, experiences, and exploration over traditional notions of stability. This transformation forces educators to rethink teaching approaches, incorporating flexibility, digital literacies, and more meaningful, student-centered learning to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

Volkan İNER

Metu Ulkem Private Middle School, Türkiye

Perhaps the most significant change since the early 2000s is the integration of technology into everyday learning. Where teaching in classrooms was once strictly centered on textbooks, it has given way to digital platforms, online resources, and interactive tools. Such exposure has fostered wider access to information, personalization of learning, and global connections for students, reordering the way teachers teach and learners learn.

The most significant shift since the early 2000s is the transition from technology as a peripheral tool to a fundamental environment. In 2000, "ICT" was a scheduled weekly lesson in a computer lab. Today, ubiquitous connectivity and AI have personalized learning, dismantled geographical barriers, and shifted the educator's role from "source of knowledge" to facilitator of critical thinking in an information-saturated world.

Shahida Rehman

Skilling Future Pakistan

Big number of youth get education that change their life and the country, understanding about their growth, environment, laws, health, reproductive health, production and economic activities.

Antipasi Kimario Erick

Nelson Mandela Secondary school, Tanzania

Catherine James Njau

Mboni Secondary School Tanzania

The great changes is rapidly using of technology and great awareness in teaching by using student centers approach. In previous years a teacher was a center key in the classroom but now student is the center key while a teacher remain as facilitor.

Annie Altamirano

Independent teacher trainer and author

The most significant change has undoubtedly been the integration of technology. Digital tools have transformed the way we teach and learn, breaking down barriers and making education more accessible and engaging. Classrooms have become global, collaborative spaces, and information is now at our fingertips, empowering both teachers and students in ways I couldn't have imagined when I started teaching.

Alitiru Harriet

Mvara Secondary School
Uganda

Over the past 25 years, the most significant change in education has been the integration of digital technology into teaching and learning. From interactive whiteboards to online platforms, technology has transformed access to knowledge, collaboration, and assessment. It has enabled more inclusive and flexible learning environments, bridging geographical gaps and supporting diverse learners. This shift has redefined classrooms, making education more global, personalized, and learner-centered.

To be honest, it is quite esy to answer. I believe TEXTBOOKS were suffering more changes during the years, at least in Romania. The so called old textbooks, before 2000, were having very few exercises, not so much literary text, and even fewer listening tasks.

After 2000, I noticed some changes in the textbooks school may ask for the Romanian Printing House

Prof. Sanziana Nesiu

Colegiul National
Iosif Vulcan, Oradea
Romania

The most significant change is the pervasive integration of digital technology. This shifted the teacher's role from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side," enabling mass adoption of online learning, personalized instruction, and making 21st-century digital literacy skills essential for all students.

Profl. Marina Falasca

INSPT UTN/ I.E.S. en
Lenguas Vivas J.R.F.
Argentina

Prof. Jozef Colpaert

University of Antwerp
Belgium

Over the past 25 years, education has been dominated by technology-driven “hype waves” and ill-grounded pedagogical experiments, often ignoring real needs. Teachers, unfairly portrayed as resistant, have shown resilience and creativity, especially during the pandemic. Yet quality has declined, prompting calls for a pendulum swing back toward knowledge and intelligence-based approaches. True progress requires listening deeply to learners and teachers, guided by cognitive psychology rather than persuasive trends.

The most significant change has been the shift from content-centered education to learner-centered and technology-mediated learning. Since the early 2000s, digital tools, online platforms, and artificial intelligence have transformed access, pace, and personalization of learning. Education is no longer confined to classrooms; it has become continuous, networked, and increasingly data-informed.

Dr. Serap Ugur

Anadolu University,
Türkiye

Fati Abubakar Siddique

Africa Dyslexia Organisation (ADO),
Ghana

Looking back over the past 25 years, the most significant change in education has been the shift toward inclusive education. Students with additional learning needs have historically often been stigmatised, misunderstood, or excluded. Today, increased awareness, advocacy, teacher training and policy reforms—particularly around dyslexia, autism, and intellectual disabilities—is helping reduce stigma and promote inclusion, transforming mindsets within communities and schools.This gives hope for the future and moving towards a more inclusive educational system in Ghana.

Since the early 2000s, the most significant change in education has been the transition from traditional content delivery to learner-centered, technology-enabled instruction. Digital platforms, data-driven decision-making, and AI-supported tools have enhanced access, personalization, and flexibility. This transformation has redefined the educator’s role from a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator, mentor, and architect of meaningful learning experiences.

Dr. Lakshmi Chaitanya Datti

The American University
of Science
India

THE ADAPTIVE EDUCATOR:

NURTURING A DEVELOPMENTAL MINDSET FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS

Prof. Marina Falasca

As we stand on the threshold of 2026, marking a quarter century since the dawn of the new millennium, it is evident that education has undergone a profound and sustained transformation. Over the last 25 years, teachers have navigated the expansion of digital learning, intensified global interconnectedness, shifting conceptions of knowledge, and, most recently, the disruptive acceleration triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergence of AI in educational contexts. Change is no longer episodic; it is structural. Consequently, the defining feature of contemporary education is not stability, but constant adaptation.

In this environment, the role of the teacher can no longer be reduced to that of a content expert or curriculum deliverer. Instead, educators are increasingly required to function as reflective practitioners, ethical decision-makers, designers of learning experiences, and resilient professionals capable of responding to uncertainty. This next phase of professional evolution depends not solely on acquiring new technical skills or mastering emerging technologies, but on cultivating a core internal disposition: a Developmental Mindset. Preparing educators for the next 25 years therefore requires sustained attention not only to what teachers do, but to how they understand learning, failure, growth, and professional identity itself.

THEN AND NOW:
THE EVOLUTION OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Looking back across the last quarter century – and the decades preceding it – reveals a clear shift in how teacher development has been conceptualized and enacted. These changes reflect broader social, political, and epistemological transformations, as well as evolving understandings of teaching as a profession. Teacher professional development has moved through several overlapping eras, each shaping expectations of what it means to be an effective educator.

1980's–1990's

THE AGE OF TECHNIQUE AND CONTROL

During this period, teacher development emphasized control, predictability, and efficiency. Effective teaching was equated with orderly classrooms, faithful curriculum delivery, and adherence to prescribed methodologies. Teacher education programs foregrounded discrete methods courses, classroom management strategies, and mastery of subject content. Professional growth was largely externally driven, delivered through workshops or in-service sessions designed to transmit standardized techniques deemed universally effective.

Essential forms of development in this era included mentorship focused on replication of established practices, training in classroom management to ensure compliance, deepening subject-matter knowledge, preparation for standardized assessments, and reliance on approved textbooks and coursebooks. While this approach supported consistency and clarity, it often left little room for teacher agency, contextual adaptation, or reflective inquiry.

2000's

THE AGE OF STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The early 2000s marked a turn toward accountability, data, and measurable outcomes. Teacher development became increasingly aligned with professional standards frameworks, performance indicators, and assessment literacy. Educators were expected to demonstrate impact through student results, and professional learning was often justified through its capacity to produce quantifiable gains.

At the same time, this era introduced early conversations around reflective practice, signaling a gradual shift toward internal professional processing. Teachers began to be recognized as decision-makers whose actions could be examined, justified, and refined. However, reflection was frequently constrained by external accountability pressures, limiting its transformative potential.

The most critical competence for the next 25 years is not mastery of any single method or technology, but the ability to grow, adapt, and learn continuously.

2010's

THE AGE OF REFLECTION AND LEARNER-CENTERED PEDAGOGY

By the 2010s, the focus of teacher development had begun to shift decisively. Learner-centered pedagogy, differentiation, and inclusive practices gained prominence, repositioning the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than a sole authority. Professional development increasingly emphasized collaboration, peer observation, action research, and reflective dialogue.

Technology further reshaped teaching practices through blended, online, and hybrid models, while global mobility and intercultural exchange highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and communicative competence. Teacher autonomy expanded, and development was increasingly understood as a continuous, self-directed process rather than a finite sequence of training events.

2020's – Present

THE AGE OF GROWTH MINDSET AND HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

In the current decade, the limitations of purely technical or performance-based models of development have become increasingly evident. The emotional labor of teaching, exacerbated by pandemic-related disruptions and ongoing systemic pressures, has brought teacher wellbeing to the forefront. Professional competence is now understood as inseparable from emotional resilience, ethical judgment, and adaptability.

Contemporary teacher development prioritizes work-life balance, social-emotional learning, diversity, equity, and inclusion, collaborative professionalism, and the cultivation of resilience and growth-oriented dispositions. At the same time, global competence and the pedagogically grounded integration of AI have become central concerns. Fixed notions of "best practice" have given way to contextualized, reflective praxis shaped by local needs and global realities.

This historical trajectory leads to a defining conclusion: the most critical competence for the next 25 years is not mastery of any single method or technology, but the ability to grow, adapt, and learn continuously. Central to this adaptive capacity is the Developmental Mindset, which shapes how educators interpret challenge and change.

THE CORE OF ADAPTABILITY:

UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENTAL MINDSET

A Developmental Mindset in education draws directly on Carol Dweck's research on Growth Mindset, but extends it beyond individual learning into professional identity, judgement, and practice over time. It is not a strategy or technique, but an orientation toward challenges, learning, and change.

A Growth Mindset rests on the belief that abilities and competencies develop through sustained effort, effective strategies, and reflective practice. As Dweck (2006) explains, individuals with a growth mindset perceive challenges as opportunities for learning rather than threats to competence. When applied to educators, this belief becomes developmental in nature: it governs how teachers interpret professional experiences such as difficult lessons, unsuccessful innovations, critical feedback, or systemic change. Conversely, a Fixed Mindset assumes that ability is static, leading to avoidance of challenge, fear of failure, and defensiveness in response to feedback.

For educators, adopting a Developmental Mindset reshapes how professional experiences are interpreted. In practice, it is expressed through how educators respond to challenge in their daily work. Difficult lessons, unsuccessful innovations, or critical feedback are no longer seen as evidence of inadequacy, but as essential information for growth. This mindset supports three interconnected professional capacities that underpin lifelong learning.

- First, **resilience** enables teachers to navigate inevitable setbacks without internalizing them as personal failures. Classrooms are complex, relational spaces, and no lesson unfolds exactly as planned. Resilient educators recover, reflect, and re-engage, recognizing that difficulty is an inherent feature of meaningful teaching.
- Second, **experimentation** reflects a willingness to try new pedagogical approaches, technologies, and assessment practices without fear of imperfection. Innovation depends on uncertainty, and a developmental mindset legitimizes trial, revision, and iteration as professional norms rather than risks to credibility. In this sense, experimentation is not recklessness, but a professional responsibility in a changing educational landscape.
- Third, **openness to feedback** allows educators to engage constructively with critique. Feedback is reframed as data rather than judgment, supporting refinement of practice and professional evolution over time. Instead of reducing professional authority, this approach strengthens it by supporting decisions with evidence and reflection.

Identifying one's mindset is the foundational step that makes these capacities possible. As Dweck (2023) notes, becoming aware of fixed-mindset thoughts, such as believing one is "not good at" something, creates space for change. Using "not yet" language acknowledges current challenges while affirming the possibility for growth. This kind of reflection builds resilience, normalizes experimentation, and helps teachers view feedback as a natural part of professional learning.

TEACHING IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY:
AI, ETHICS, AND PROFESSIONAL AGENCY

The rapid emergence of AI in education makes the cultivation of a Developmental Mindset not optional, but essential. AI tools introduce both opportunities and ethical dilemmas, requiring educators to make informed, context-sensitive decisions rather than follow prescriptive rules. No fixed body of knowledge can fully prepare teachers for technologies that evolve faster than curricular frameworks.

A developmental mindset supports ethical agency by enabling educators to learn alongside their students, critically evaluate tools, and revise practices as understanding deepens. Rather than positioning AI as a threat to professional expertise, adaptive educators approach it as a domain for inquiry, experimentation, and collaborative learning. This stance reinforces professional relevance while modeling lifelong learning for students.

> *No fixed body of knowledge can fully prepare teachers for technologies that evolve faster than curricular frameworks.*

STRATEGIES TO FOSTER A DEVELOPMENTAL MINDSET IN FUTURE EDUCATORS

If adaptability is the goal, teacher education must move beyond transmission models of professional learning. Programs must intentionally cultivate psychological safety, reflection, and growth-oriented discourse.

Modeling vulnerability is a powerful starting point. When mentors openly discuss their own teaching missteps and learning processes, they dismantle myths of perfection and normalize growth. Simple practices, such as brief "teaching mistake" narratives, signal that error is not only acceptable but instructive.

Reflective practices further deepen learning. Structured journaling, narrative reframing, peer observation, and shared reflection spaces transform experience into insight. Reflection acts as the bridge between action and growth, enabling educators to examine assumptions, emotions, and outcomes with professional curiosity rather than self-judgment (Díaz Maggioli & Painter-Farrell, 2016).

Feedback practices must also shift toward process-oriented language. Evaluative comments focused on effort, strategy, and improvement pathways reinforce growth-oriented thinking, while person-centered judgments reinforce fixed beliefs. Explicit attention to language helps future educators internalize developmental discourse and apply it in their own classrooms.

SUSTAINING GROWTH
FOR THE NEXT 25 YEARS

As education continues to evolve, the sustainability of the profession depends on educators' capacity to adapt without losing purpose or wellbeing. A Developmental Mindset strengthens resilience, reduces fear of failure, and fosters professional community through shared reflection and vulnerability.

Ultimately, the most valuable lesson educators can model is not mastery, but learning itself. A Developmental Mindset is not about constant change for its own sake, but about professional continuity through growth. It allows educators to remain grounded in purpose while adapting in practice, to hold both confidence and humility, and to engage with uncertainty without losing identity.

As education moves into its next chapter, methods will change, technologies will advance, and systems will be redesigned. What will endure is the need for educators who see learning not as something they deliver, but as something they continuously live. In a future defined by uncertainty, growth becomes not a temporary response to change, but the most reliable form of professional stability.

> *In a future defined by uncertainty, growth becomes not a temporary response to change, but the most reliable form of professional stability.*

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THE THIRD WAVE OF AI

EDUCATION IN 2026 AND BEYOND

Dr. Robert Stroud

A few years ago, artificial intelligence was a novelty. Something to marvel at, toy with, and cautiously admire. Then, almost overnight, it became embedded in our classrooms. ChatGPT, DeepL, Grammarly, and countless other tools began shaping how students write, read, translate, and even think.

The shift was swift, and for many educators, disorienting.

But if we step back, we can see a pattern. A rhythm. A kind of evolution in how we've responded to AI's growing presence in education. I call it the "three waves."

The first wave was wonder. The second was fear. And now, we're entering the third—a phase defined not by novelty or panic, but by intentionality. This is the moment where we stop asking what AI can do and start asking what it should do. It's a shift from reaction to reflection, and it's reshaping how we think about pedagogy, student agency, and the future of learning.

First Wave:

"WHAT IS THIS AMAZING THING?!"

When generative AI first entered the classroom, it felt like magic. Teachers were discovering new ways to automate tasks, personalize feedback, and generate materials. Students were using AI to brainstorm essays, translate texts, and summarize readings. The energy was palpable. It felt like we had unlocked a new superpower.

The strengths and opportunities this offered students and teachers alike were quickly building up to support a strong case for AI's integration (see Mai, Da, & Hanh, 2024, for a summary using SWOT analysis).

This phase was driven by possibility. Educators were asking: *Can AI help me differentiate instruction? Can it reduce my workload? Can it make learning more accessible?* The answers were often yes. AI could generate rubrics, rewrite instructions for clarity, and even simulate Socratic dialogue. It was a tool for efficiency, creativity, and inclusion.

But beneath the excitement, there was a lack of structure. Few schools had policies in place. Fewer still had frameworks for ethical use. The tools were evolving faster than our pedagogies, and the gap between potential and practice began to widen. Early studies of classroom reactions (Xiaoyu, Zainuddin, & Hai, 2025) found that while AI improved instructional efficiency in terms of knowledge delivery and speed, it also introduced challenges around bias, academic integrity, and over-reliance on automation.

In hindsight, the first wave was a necessary spark. It opened doors. It got us talking. But it also set the stage for a more complicated reckoning.

Second Wave:

"AI WILL MAKE OUR STUDENTS LAZY!"

After the initial excitement came the backlash. Teachers began noticing students submitting AI-generated work without reading it. Essays lacked voice. Reflections felt hollow. Critical thinking seemed to evaporate.

This wave was driven by fear. Educators worried that AI was undermining effort, originality, and intellectual struggle. Headlines warned of "AI cheating epidemics" and "the death of student writing." Some institutions banned AI tools outright. Others scrambled to create guidelines. The tone shifted from excitement to alarm.

And the concerns were valid. Studies began to show that over-reliance on AI could lead to cognitive passivity—where students outsource not just writing, but thinking itself. Stroud and Du (2025) found that by late 2024, students were openly reporting fears of growing too dependent on AI, and of it replacing their thinking if they weren't careful.

This wasn't just a technological issue. It was a pedagogical one. AI was exposing the fragility of our assessment systems and the need for deeper, more authentic learning experiences.

But the second wave also brought clarity. It forced educators to ask harder questions: What do we value in learning? What does original thought look like in an AI-enhanced world? How do we design tasks that require human judgment, nuance, and creativity?

Today's Third Wave:

"HOW DO WE USE AI THOUGHTFULLY?"

Today's third wave is quieter than the first two. Less dramatic. But more profound. This is the moment where educators are beginning to integrate AI with purpose, not panic.

And at the heart of this wave are four essential practices that we now need to focus on in our courses to protect student growth: Connect, Guide, Reflect, and Assess.

1 CONNECT:
UNDERSTANDING OUR STUDENTS MORE

We cannot meaningfully integrate AI without first understanding how students are using it. Too often, decisions about AI in education have been made without consulting the very people most affected by it. Connecting means observing, asking, and listening.

Surveys like Stroud's (2024) AI Engagement Checklist for Instructors give us ways to track when students use AI, how they feel during those interactions, and what role it plays in their learning process. But formal instruments aren't the only option. Simply sitting with students, asking them to show their AI workflow, or inviting them to reflect in journals can provide invaluable insights.

This phase is about empathy. Instead of projecting fears or assumptions, we must ground our teaching strategies in real student experiences. If the first wave was about experimentation and the second about restriction, the third begins with connection—taking time to understand before we prescribe.

2 GUIDE:
CLARITY, TRUST, AND BOUNDARIES

Once we know how students are using AI, the next step is guidance. Students crave clarity. Without it, they are left guessing what counts as "helpful use" and what crosses into "cheating."

One promising model comes from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2024), which outlines levels of AI use—from Level 1 (no AI use) to Level 5 (AI as a co-creator). A framework like this doesn't just create rules—it builds trust. Students know what is allowed, teachers know how to assess, and both sides avoid the uncertainty that breeds fear.

No guidance system will be perfect, but the third wave asks us to create context-specific rules rather than blanket bans or blind acceptance. Guidance is about shared understanding. It reassures students that they won't be punished for exploring, and it reassures teachers that they won't be undermined by the invisible hand of the algorithm.

3 REFLECT:
KEEPING STUDENT THINKING AT THE FOREFRONT

Fear from the second wave centered on one concern: Will students stop thinking for themselves? Reflection is the antidote. The third wave insists that we design activities where students actively critique, compare, and analyze AI outputs rather than passively consume them. **Some effective classroom strategies include:**

- **AI vs human:** Students compare AI-generated work with human work, sharpening their ability to detect nuance.
- **The turing test:** Students interact in dialogues and guess which responses come from AI.
- **AI tool audit:** Learners test different AI systems with the same prompt and critique their differences.
- **Prompt challenge:** Students share and defend the prompts that produced the best results.
- **Fact checker:** Learners verify AI answers against external sources.
- **Ethics debate:** Students debate "When is AI cheating?" to wrestle with moral gray areas.

Each activity reinforces metacognition. Students are not just producing content—they are interrogating it, questioning its validity, and understanding its limits. Reflection ensures that thinking, not output, remains the core of learning.

4 ASSESS:
SHIFTING FROM PRODUCT TO PROCESS

Perhaps the hardest but most necessary change is assessment. If AI can generate flawless essays, then evaluating the final product tells us very little about student growth. The third wave challenges us to rethink what we measure and how.

Promising approaches include:

- **Process portfolios:** Students document when, why, and how they used AI, revealing their decision-making.
- **Reflection logs:** Learners record their thoughts at key stages of a project.
- Interviews: Oral defenses allow students to explain and justify their work in their own words.
- **AI-free checkpoints:** Parallel tasks without AI show what students can do independently, making visible the role AI plays in their learning.

In this new framing, the process becomes as important as the product. We are no longer just asking, What did you make? but How did you make it, and what did you learn along the way?

By centering the third wave on **Connect, Guide, Reflect, and Assess**, we reorient AI from being a source of disruption to being a catalyst for deeper pedagogy. Instead of fear or blind enthusiasm, this wave is about balance—using AI to amplify human judgment, creativity, and growth.

Fourth Wave:

"WHAT'S NEXT?"

If the third wave is about thoughtful integration, the fourth wave may be about transformation. We are only beginning to glimpse what education could look like when AI is not just a tool within existing systems but a force reshaping the systems themselves.

This fourth wave will ask bigger questions: What is the purpose of education in an AI-saturated world? If machines can produce flawless essays and solve complex problems instantly, what uniquely human skills should schools emphasize?

The fourth wave may bring:

- **Curriculum reimagined.** Subjects themselves could be reshaped. Instead of siloed disciplines, we may see more interdisciplinary learning where AI handles routine knowledge and students focus on creativity, collaboration, and problem framing.
- **Personalized learning at scale.** AI tutors that adapt in real time could provide individualized pathways for every student, challenging our traditional "one-size-fits-all" classroom model.
- **Ethical stewardship.** As AI becomes an invisible infrastructure in society, schools may evolve into places where students learn not just how to use AI, but how to shape and govern it responsibly.
- **Redefining success.** Grades and exams may give way to lifelong portfolios, showcasing how learners adapt, create, and collaborate alongside intelligent systems.

The fourth wave will not be smooth. It will raise questions about equity, privacy, and power. It will challenge the very structures—curricula, timetables, assessment systems—that schools have relied on for over a century. But it also offers a profound opportunity: to build an education system aligned not with the industrial past, but with the human future.

If the first three waves were about reacting to AI, the fourth wave will be about reimagining education itself. The question will no longer be, *How do we teach with AI?* Instead, it will be, *What kind of society do we want to build with it, and how must education evolve to get us there?*

Final Thoughts:

LET'S THINK MORE ABOUT THINKING

AI is here to stay. That much is clear. But how we use it—and how we teach students to use it—will shape the future of education. The third wave invites us to move beyond hype and fear. It asks us to think deeply about pedagogy, purpose, and possibility. It challenges us to design classrooms where AI supports—not supplants—human growth.

So let's ride this third wave with intention. Let's use AI to foster curiosity, creativity, and connection. **And let's keep asking the most important question of all:**

"Is this helping our students grow?"

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Dr. Robert Stroud, a professor at Hosei University, Japan, specializes in classroom engagement and integrating technology into English language teaching. His recent research explores AI's impact on student interactions and foreign language anxiety. As editor of The University Grapevine, organizer of the Culture Club exchange program, and co-author of the SMART Communication textbook series, he connects educators worldwide about practical teaching ideas.

How has the role of teachers evolved over the last 25 years — and what values have remained timeless?

2

The role of the good teacher has always been the same: the good shepherd able to keep the group together in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect, optimism and lead them towards the discovery of new linguistic and cultural riches, and towards the development of new skills and critical awareness of the self and the world.

Prof. Jean-Marc Dewaele

VIZJA University
United Kingdom

Robert Martinez

Lacunza IH
Spain

Teachers have moved from being the main source of information for learners to being learning designers, facilitators and guides for learners by helping them navigate the cyber landscape. I think there is a stronger focus on mentoring and developing critical thinking so that we all can make appropriate use of AI output. I believe what has not changed is our curiosity, professionalism, resilience and desire to see our students learn - those are human qualities AI cannot replicate.

I think teaching has evolved towards a more coaching model, something that is a flatter hierarchy between learners and the educator. I think the human element of teaching has not changed, though many other aspects have.

James Papple

Centennial College
Canada

Prof. Graceful O. Ofodu

Ekiti State University
Nigeria

The professional development of teachers' capacity has improved significantly. Continuous professional development has remained timeless.

Stacy Kratochvil

Capuchino High School
San Mateo Union HS District
USA

Gülbin Özdemir

Serik Bilim ve Sanat Merkezi
Türkiye

Over the last 25 years, the role of teachers has grown beyond teaching content to helping students learn how to think, reflect, and navigate a world of constant information. Teachers now juggle instruction, technology, and care. What has stayed the same is the heart of the work: relationships, trust, high expectations, and the steady presence of an adult who believes in students and shows up for them every day.

Over the last 25 years in Turkey, the role of teachers has changed dramatically in practice, yet the core values attached to teaching have remained strikingly stable. The tension between those two realities defines the profession today.

I think the role of the teacher has shifted dramatically in that teachers don't need to be the ones to bring knowledge to the classroom on content. What is timeless is that teachers need to work with people and know how humans learn.

Michael Griffin

Freelance Trainer
USA

Teachers have shifted from pouring Knowledge to learners into sharing the ideas.

Hadija Shabani

Dundani Secondary School
Tanzania

Ellishama Therese Dunton
Vietnam Australia Int'l School
Vietnam

Over the past 25 years, teachers have shifted from being primary sources of knowledge to facilitators, mentors, and designers of learning experiences. While pedagogy and tools have evolved, core values remain timeless: care for students, commitment to equity, professional integrity, and belief in every learner's potential. These values continue to anchor teaching, even as classrooms and expectations change.

Over the past 25 years, I can see a seismic shift: the role of teachers has moved from being the primary source of knowledge to becoming facilitators, coaches, and advocates for learners. Then, teachers delivered content. Now, they design learning experiences, personalise instruction, support wellbeing, and integrate technology thoughtfully. The next step then is for teachers to lead with empathy, innovation, and professional voice, shaping learning that is human-centred, inclusive, and future-ready. Enduring ethics and responsibility with the platforms.

Judy-Ann Denton-Green
Education Consultant
United Kingdom

Instead of the focus being teacher centered as it was 25 years ago, the focus is now student centered. The idea is to create more autonomy for the students to put them in the driver's seat and take control of their learning.

Hillary Huyghue
Education First
USA

Prof. Nhlanhla Mpofu
Crtown Institute of Higher Education, Australia

In the Global South, teachers have evolved from knowledge transmitters to facilitators of critical thinking and digital literacy, often in severe resource constraints. Despite this shift, their role as community anchors and moral guides remains timeless. The core values of perseverance, cultural respect, and a deep belief in every learner's potential have endured, sustaining education through immense challenges.

Although some of the things have changed like globalization, technology and teaching methods, but still teachers have the same passion and good hearted to their learners. They are still inspiring and nurturing minds of their learners.They always happy when they see how their learners grows and become what they are dreaming.

Joan Yasini Msangi
Kazima Secondary Schools
Tanzania

Harry Essang
Beautiful Beginning Academy
Nigeria

There has been increased focus on professionalism in the teaching profession such that teachers are expected to produce their teaching licence. Also, emphasis has moved from transmission to facilitstion of knowledge. What has endured is that teachers continue to emphasize respect for individuals, and promote empathy and inclusiveness

Impact quality knowledge for more production of skilled labor at the future. The use of content based curriculum which it doesn't helps in the current situation in production labor who can suit in the world market instead they need to use more practical learning to capture the competent based curriculum learning

Esupat Lekishaan Mollel
East China Normal University
Tanzania

Dr. Ana Jovic
ThinkLink
Serbia

The role of a teacher has become more complex: a teacher had to learn to navigate new learning and teaching space in the virtual world not only from a technical standpoint but also as moderator of virtual events, which asks for a completely new set of skills from skills necessary in a physical classroom.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Welcome to **Ask the Experts**, the ultimate column dedicated to professional development in the field of education. In this dynamic and ever-evolving field, continuous growth and learning are paramount. In each issue, we explore the most commonly asked topic by interviewing invited experts for their insights, experiences, and strategies.

EduVerse: Welcome to **Ask the Expert**, EduVerse's signature interview series highlighting voices that shape how education evolves — in classrooms, institutions, and communities around the world.

In this New Year Special Edition, ***Then. Now. NEXT. – A Quarter Century of Evolution in Education***, we feature two influential educators, **Dr. Robert Stroud** and **Dr. Le Dinh Bao Quoc,** reflecting on how education has changed over the past 25 years — and where it must go next.

Dr. Stroud, a professor at Hosei University in Japan, brings a classroom-centered perspective through his research on engagement, language learning, and AI. Dr. Quoc, founder of Pro.Ed Education Solutions and EduVerse, offers a system-level view shaped by over two decades of leadership in curriculum and teacher development.

Together, they invite us to look back with clarity, engage the present with purpose, and imagine a future of learning that is not only more advanced — but more humane, connected, and deeply teacher-centered.

A QUARTER CENTURY OF LEARNING

WHERE EDUCATION HAS BEEN AND WHERE IT'S GOING

With DR. ROBERT STROUD & DR. LE DINH BAO QUOC

EXCLUSIVE

Dr. Robert Stroud, a professor at Hosei University, Japan, specializes in classroom engagement and integrating technology into English language teaching. His recent research explores AI's impact on student interactions and foreign language anxiety. As founding editor of The University Grapevine, creator of Culture Club, and co-author of the SMART Communication series, he promotes inclusive pedagogy, digital innovation, and affective support for EFL learners in global, virtual learning spaces.

Dr. Le Dinh Bao Quoc (EdD) is an author and educator with over 20 years of experience in English language teaching and educational leadership across Vietnam and the region. He is the Founder & CEO of Pro.Ed Education Solutions, Academic Director at VIA English Academy, and Head of EduVerse, a global professional development network. He also created EDU361 Expo, the world's first 48-hour non-stop 3D virtual education conference with 120+ global speakers. His book The Art and Science of ChatGPT in Education explores AI's impact on learning, and in 2024 he was recognized by LinkedIn as a Top Voice in Educational Leadership.

THEN

LOOKING BACK TO UNDERSTAND CHANGE

1 Welcome, Robert and Quoc! To kick off, let's look back over the past 25 years. What do you see as the most significant shift in education since the early 2000s?

If I had to choose one big change, it would be how technology – especially smartphones – has moved from being the enemy in classrooms to something we actively use. In the early 2000s, phones were seen as pure distractions. Teachers spent a lot of energy policing them. If a phone came out, it was trouble.

Now, those same devices sit at the center of learning. Students research, collaborate, film projects, check ideas, and connect with people around the world. That shift alone says a lot about how education has changed.

But it's not a simple success story.

Technology has brought incredible advantages. Lessons can be more interactive. Information is instantly available. Learning can feel more personal and creative. At the same time, it's changed what students expect. Many want things fast. They want stimulation. If something doesn't grab them quickly, they switch off.

That puts pressure on teachers. Classrooms move faster now. When this works well, learning feels alive and energetic. When it doesn't, everyone feels exhausted. Technology itself isn't good or bad – it's powerful. The real challenge is making sure we use it to support learning, not let it control the pace or purpose of what we do.

Quoc, what are your thoughts on this?

For me, the biggest shift sits with the teacher's role. Twenty-five years ago, teachers were often seen as the main source of knowledge. Students came to class to receive information.

Today, knowledge is everywhere. Students can access information instantly, anytime, anywhere. So the real question becomes: where do teachers fit in now?

Our role has shifted from giving answers to helping students make sense of what they find. We've become guides, mentors, and designers of learning experiences – helping learners navigate not only information, but overload. That includes supporting their emotional well-being, because constant exposure to content can be distracting, overwhelming, and even anxiety-inducing.

What hasn't changed – and may matter more than ever – is the human side of teaching. Empathy, presence, and genuine care build trust. When students feel seen and supported, they're far more willing to take risks, ask questions, and grow. The challenge is that while expectations of teachers have expanded, the systems supporting them haven't always evolved at the same pace. That tension defines much of education today.

2 If the teacher's role has evolved so dramatically, it raises an important question. What beliefs or practices from earlier decades do you think education should have let go of – and which ones still deserve to be protected?

One idea we really should have moved past is the belief that teachers should do all the talking while students quietly receive knowledge. That model doesn't fit today's world. Students need structure, yes – but they also need chances to make decisions, explore interests, and take responsibility.

Outside school, learning is everywhere. If we don't help students practice independence in classrooms, we're not preparing them for reality. Student-centered learning isn't just a trend. It's a response to the world students already live in.

At the same time, there's something important we risk losing: struggle. Modern education often tries to make learning too comfortable. We want everything to be smooth, efficient, and stress-free. But real learning isn't like that. Growth comes from confusion, mistakes, and effort. Struggle teaches patience. It builds resilience. It helps students understand that progress takes time. That doesn't mean making learning painful or unfair. It means respecting the fact that effort matters. When students work through something difficult and finally get it, that experience stays with them. That's worth protecting.

I really connect with Robert's point about independence. One belief we need to let go of is students' dependence on teachers as the sole source of answers. In a world where information is instantly accessible, this kind of dependence limits learners rather than empowers them.

For example, instead of waiting for the "correct answer," students should be encouraged to explore multiple perspectives, evaluate sources, and explain their own thinking – with teachers guiding the process rather than directing every step.

At the same time, what absolutely deserves protection is human interaction. Learning is deeply relational. It happens through dialogue, shared struggle, encouragement, and trust. A thoughtful classroom discussion, a teacher's timely reassurance, or students working through a challenge together often leaves a deeper impact than any digital tool ever could.

3 Robert, from a classroom and language-learning perspective, how have student engagement and communication changed over time, particularly with the rise of digital tools?

Keeping students engaged has become much harder. Twenty-five years ago, classrooms had fewer competitors for attention. Now students live in a world of constant stimulation – social media, videos, games, notifications. Everything is designed to grab attention instantly. That mindset shows up in class. If something doesn't feel interesting right away, students disengage. We see it everywhere – not just in education. People abandon TV shows, apps, and even conversations much faster than they used to.

The answer isn't flashy tricks. It's thoughtful design. Lessons need variety. Students need choice. When learners can follow interests, create something, or make decisions, engagement lasts longer. And honestly, fun matters. We don't talk about that enough.

NOW
TEACHING, LEARNING, AND HUMANITY TODAY

4 **Thank you Robert. Looking at the present, in today's context of rapid change and uncertainty, what do you believe truly defines good education — beyond technology and trends? Let's start with you, Quoc.**

This is a great question!! For me, good education today is education that helps learners navigate uncertainty. We're no longer preparing students for a predictable future, but for one that keeps changing – sometimes faster than we expect.

That means helping learners develop adaptability, resilience, critical thinking, and a strong sense of self. For example, when students reflect on how they learn, set personal goals, and see mistakes as part of growth, they gain confidence to face unfamiliar challenges.

Beyond skills, good education also creates belonging. Students need to feel that learning matters to their lives and that they have a place in the world they're entering. When education helps learners understand themselves and stay open to growth, it fulfills its deepest purpose.

Good education helps students learn how to learn. Facts change. Jobs change. Even entire industries disappear. What lasts is the ability to stay curious, adapt, and keep going when things get hard.

A big part of my job now isn't just teaching content. It's helping students build habits. Can they ask good questions? Can they judge whether information is reliable? Can they look back at their work and see how they've grown? Those skills matter more than memorizing answers. When students understand how they learn, they gain confidence. They stop waiting for instructions and start taking initiative.

At the end of the day, education should prepare people for life, not just tests. If students leave school able to think, reflect, and keep learning, then we've done something right.

5 Many educators describe feeling overwhelmed by constant innovation and rising expectations. What do you see as the biggest challenge teachers face today?

Honestly, it's the feeling that we're always behind. New tools appear constantly. New expectations follow. Teachers feel pressure to keep up with everything – and that's impossible. When you can't, it's easy to feel like you're failing.

But teachers still offer something no technology can replace: being human. AI can give answers, but it can't truly care. It can't notice when a student is discouraged or quietly proud. A teacher's encouragement at the right moment can change a student's path. That means our role has shifted. We're no longer the person who knows everything. We're guides. We learn with students. For some teachers, that feels uncomfortable, like losing status.

I see it differently. It's a deeper role. Teaching today is about walking alongside learners, supporting them, and helping them grow. That's not less important – it's more meaningful than ever.

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>
> **Dr. Robert Stroud**

You can say it again Robert!! One of the biggest challenges teachers face today is finding a healthy balance – between innovation and overload, between technology and humanity, and between rising expectations and their own well-being. We are constantly encouraged to adopt new tools, platforms, and approaches, often without enough time or support to reflect on why and how they should be used. This can leave teachers feeling overwhelmed, pressured, and unsure of their place in a rapidly changing landscape.

As Robert said, we embrace our evolving role as guides rather than sole knowledge providers, we must also acknowledge the growing presence of technology in education. AI, digital platforms, and online resources are now integral to learning, but they are not – and should never be – replacements for the human element of teaching. Technology can support learning, personalize practice, and expand access, but it cannot replicate the moments that truly define great teaching.

Ultimately, the challenge – and responsibility – lies in holding this balance. We must embrace innovation to enhance learning and expand opportunities, while remaining grounded in the human qualities that define education at its core.

6 **Robert, your research explores AI's impact on student interaction and foreign language anxiety. How is AI currently shaping classroom communication, and what should teachers be most mindful of?**

AI has real benefits. It gives quick feedback. It helps students practice. For language learners, it can lower anxiety. Students can rehearse privately before speaking in front of others. That builds confidence.

But there's a risk. AI can become addictive. It's always available. It always responds. Students can fall into the habit of relying on it instead of thinking or talking things through themselves. Over time, that leads to overload and fatigue. That's why I strongly believe in AI-free moments. Phones away. Screens off. Just people talking. Listening. Responding.

These moments remind students that real conversation matters. After that, AI can come back in as a support tool – but not a replacement. Human communication should always come first.

I love that, human communication should always come first. Now on another aspect, Quoc, from a leadership and system perspective, how can schools support teachers in embracing innovation while protecting their professional dignity and well-being? **7**

I really believe that supporting teachers through change requires a whole-system approach. Policymakers, school leaders, and institutions must move beyond top-down mandates and actively include teachers' voices in decision-making processes. Teachers are not simply implementers of reform – they are experts in learning, classroom dynamics, and student needs, and their lived experience should shape how innovation is designed and introduced.

At a practical level, support means building policies and school cultures grounded in professional trust. This includes realistic workloads, protected time for reflection and collaboration, and professional development that responds to teachers' actual challenges rather than abstract trends. Too often, innovation is added on top of existing responsibilities, leading to fatigue rather than growth.

When teachers are respected, listened to, and supported as both professionals and human beings, innovation becomes a shared endeavor rather than an imposed burden. In such environments, teachers feel safe to experiment, reflect, and adapt – not because they are required to, but because they believe in the purpose behind the change. This sense of dignity and partnership is essential if schools want innovation to be sustainable and truly meaningful.

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> Dr. Le Dinh Bao Quoc

NEXT
IMAGINING THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

8 **Looking ahead, both of you point to a future that's less about mastering tools – and more about mastering ourselves. As we look ahead to the next 25 years, what skills, mindsets, or values will matter most for learners?**

Organization will be huge. Students face endless choices and information. Without the ability to prioritize, everything becomes overwhelming. They need to learn how to manage time, focus attention, and decide what really matters.

Emotional intelligence will matter just as much. As technology becomes more advanced, human skills become more valuable. Empathy, awareness, and connection can't be automated. They're the foundation of strong relationships and teamwork.

And of course, students must learn to use AI wisely. Not blindly. Not dependently. They need to know when AI helps and when it gets in the way. Using technology without losing independence will be one of education's biggest challenges.

How about you Quoc? What kind of mindsets or skills do you think future learners need?

I strongly agree with Robert. In addition, learners must be prepared not only for AI, but for technologies we cannot yet imagine. Over the next 25 years, specific tools will come and go, often faster than schools can respond. What will matter most is not technical mastery of any single platform, but the ability to adapt thoughtfully, learn continuously, and make ethical choices in unfamiliar contexts.

This places human qualities at the center of future readiness. Across all forms of innovation, empathy, collaboration, self-awareness, and responsibility will shape how technology is used and understood. These qualities help learners ask not only *what* technology can do, but *why* and *for whom* it should be used.

When education prioritizes these human factors, technology becomes a means rather than a driver. In this way, the future of learning is not defined by machines, but by how thoughtfully humans choose to work alongside them.

9 Robert, what must change – at the classroom, school, or system level – for education to truly evolve in a meaningful and human-centered way?

Right now, we're still figuring things out. AI is everywhere, but clear rules and shared understanding are missing. Teachers feel unsure. Students don't know where the boundaries are. Systems are struggling to keep up. We need balance.

I think of the classroom as a triangle: teacher, student, and technology. Teachers bring care, experience, and perspective. Students bring curiosity and energy. Technology brings speed and access. When those three support each other, learning works. This balance takes reflection. Classrooms will keep changing. What works today might not work tomorrow. That's not failure – it's reality. Teaching has always required learning. If we stay open and adaptable, education can grow in a way that stays human.

10 And Quoc, drawing on your experience in educational leadership and innovation, what systemic shifts are most urgently needed to build future-ready education ecosystems?

The most urgent shift is rethinking teacher education and professional learning from the teacher's perspective. Too often, professional development is designed far from classrooms, offering one-size-fits-all workshops that feel disconnected from daily teaching realities. Future-ready systems must move toward ongoing, reflective, and practice-centered professional learning that respects teachers as active learners, not passive recipients.

For example, instead of short, isolated training sessions on new technologies or methodologies, schools can create professional learning communities where teachers regularly observe one another's classes, reflect on challenges, and test new ideas together in a low-risk environment. When teachers are given space to learn collaboratively, experiment safely, and grow professionally over time, innovation becomes sustainable. Teacher education grounded in trust, relevance, and real classroom practice does more than improve instruction – it strengthens professional identity and builds the foundation for long-term educational change.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Finally, if you could describe the future of education in three words, what would they be – and why?

- **Reflection** – If we stop reflecting, we fall behind our students. Reflection keeps teaching responsive and real.
- **Excitement** – Change doesn't have to be scary. It can be energizing. Excitement reminds us why we teach.
- **Emotion** – Education is about people. Students want to feel seen. Teachers want to feel their work matters. Emotion is what makes learning stick. Without it, education becomes empty. With it, it changes lives.
- **Humanity** – Education is ultimately about people, relationships, and meaning and learning only flourishes when students and teachers feel respected, understood, and emotionally safe.
- **Sustainability** – Meaningful change requires systems that support long-term growth, balance innovation with well-being, and allow educators to thrive without constant burnout.
- **Personalization** – Every learner and every teacher deserves to be seen, valued, and supported in ways that recognize their unique contexts, strengths, and pathways for growth.

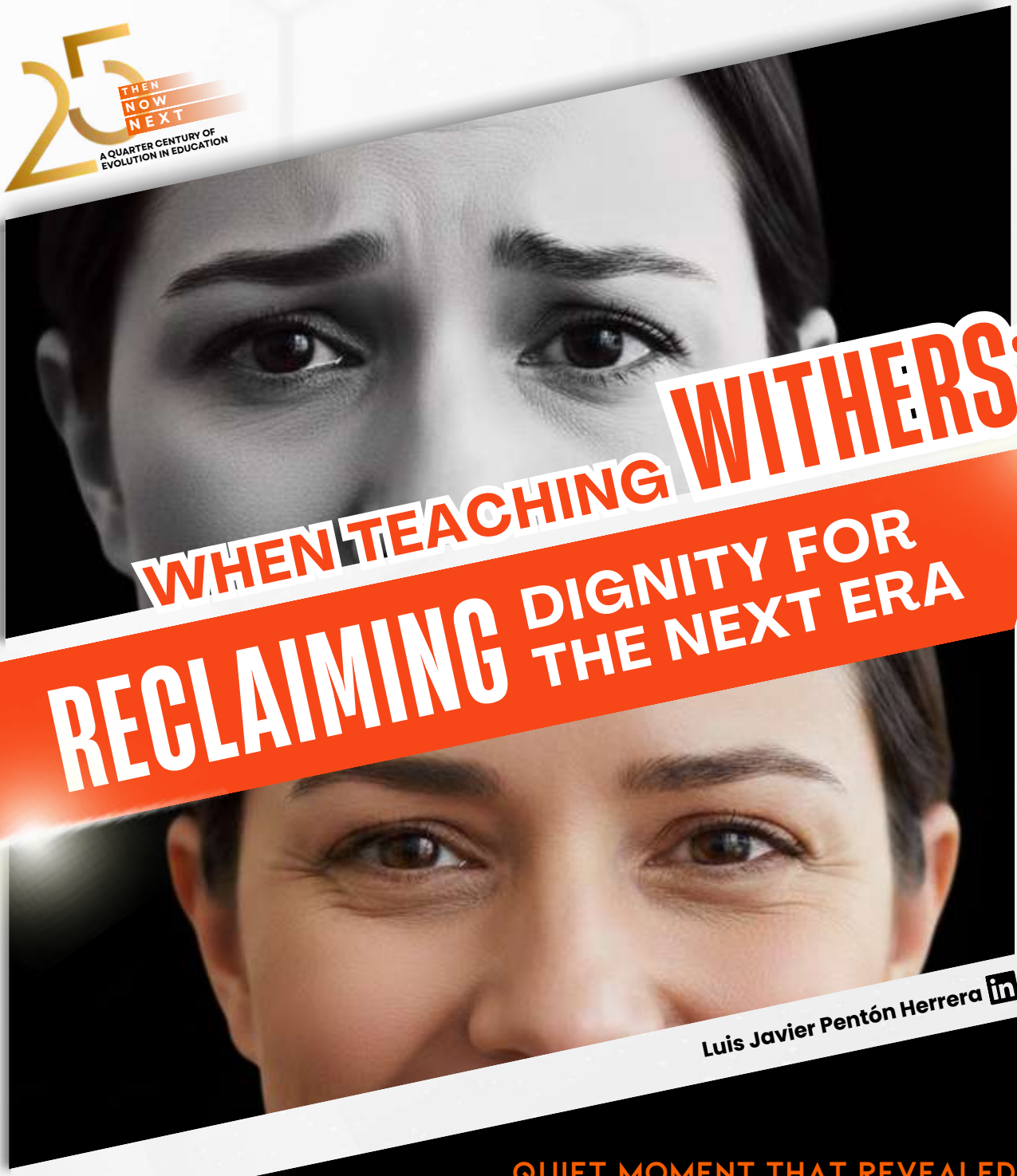
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The role of the teacher has shifted from knowledge provider to learning guide.** Teachers now design experiences, support well-being, and mentor learners in navigating an information-rich world – even as systems struggle to keep pace.
- **Technology is a tool, not the purpose of education.** When used thoughtfully, it enhances learning; when it leads, it risks distraction, fatigue, and loss of depth.
- **Human connection remains education's strongest force.** Trust, empathy, and meaningful relationships are what turn information into understanding and learning into growth.
- **Good education prepares learners for uncertainty, not certainty**. Adaptability, resilience, and self-awareness matter more than mastering any single body of content.
- **Student agency must replace dependence.** Learners thrive when they are encouraged to question, explore, and take ownership of their learning journeys.
- **Teacher overload is a systemic issue, not a personal failure.** Sustainable change requires balance, clarity, and respect for teachers' time and well-being.
- **Innovation works best when teachers co-create it.** Professional trust, teacher voice, and practice-centered development make change meaningful and lasting.

Good education helps students learn how to learn,
preparing them to navigate uncertainty.

- Dr. Robert Stroud & Dr. Le Dinh Bao Quoc -

25 THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION



WHEN TEACHING WITHERS: RECLAIMING DIGNITY FOR THE NEXT ERA

Luis Javier Pentón Herrera

QUIET MOMENT THAT REVEALED A DEEPER TRUTH

Years ago, when I was working as a Spanish teacher in a K–8 school, I attended a school-wide meeting that has stayed with me. During the discussion, Ms. Rose (a pseudonym), a thoughtful and experienced teacher, suggested giving students a few minutes each morning to ease into the day. She had noticed their rising anxiety and believed that a brief settling-in routine would help them learn with greater calm and connection. Her idea was grounded in observation and care; after all, she was a veteran teacher and a mentor, whom everyone in the school knew and respected.

While listening to Ms. Rose, many of us nodded in agreement, but the Principal, who had a Business Administration degree and did not receive formal teaching training, immediately rejected this idea because "did not match the official school schedule." After the meeting, Ms. Rose, who was sitting next to me, gathered her papers and whispered to me quietly, "I wish they [referring to the administrative team] could see that we know our students." There was no anger in her voice, just a subdued weariness.

As a fairly new teacher, I could not realize what was happening at that moment. Looking back now, I understand that this moment was revealing something unmistakable: As teachers, we evolve in response to our students every day, but the structures around us often refuse to evolve alongside our or our students' needs. It is in these small but often dismissals of our expertise that our dignity begins to fade.

A PROFESSION CHANGING WITHOUT EVOLVING

The first quarter of the twenty-first century transformed education in profound ways. Digital tools reshaped learning environments, while crises demanded rapid innovation. As teachers, we have adapted with creativity and resilience through global and local events. Yet the profession we inhabit has not kept pace. Instead, a quieter process has been unfolding behind this rapid change, something that resembles a steady wilt, a marchitamiento, as I call it in Spanish, of the teaching profession. Research across decades illustrates a persistent erosion of teacher dignity through loss of autonomy, narrowing of practice, and policy environments that position us, teachers, as implementers rather than professionals (Wronowski & Urick, 2021).

Teachers across the world, with whom I often work, describe working conditions that undermine their judgment and reduce their work to technical tasks, even while the challenges they face require high levels of expertise. When political debates overshadow practical knowledge, our profession begins to dry from within. The seeds of demoralization are planted when we are asked to be adaptive while systems remain rigid.

WHY DIGNITY MATTERS IN TEACHING

Dignity is the foundation of a profession that demands emotional labor, moral judgment, and intellectual flexibility. For teachers, dignity is not simply a matter of respect, nor is it a reward for exceptional performance; it is the basic condition that allows us to feel valued and effective. Without it, our well-being becomes fragile. Research shows that when teachers lose influence over curriculum, instruction, and decisions that affect our students, our sense of professional identity weakens and stress increases (Newkirk, 2009). Santoro and Hazel (2022) describe how demoralization arises when teachers are unable to enact their moral commitments to learners. Dignity shapes the belief that one's work is meaningful and aligned with personal values and, when this belief fractures, the emotional cost is significant.

Many teachers will recognize this feeling, a kind of fatigue that is not just physical tiredness, but a deeper sense of losing purpose. At some point in our careers, we experience a heaviness that comes from not being able to do what we know is best for our students. This burden is not a personal failure, but the result of systems and leaders that do not protect our dignity or value our professional knowledge.

WHEN POLITICS
OVERSHADOW PRACTICE

Education has been discussed for decades as if it were a battlefield of ideologies rather than a space of human learning. Public debates focus on standards, testing, cultural narratives, national identity, and political agendas — in short, politics! The loudest voices are often the farthest from classrooms. This pattern has a global footprint: from Latin America to East Asia, conversations about schooling are shaped by politics rather than practice; by politicians and non-practitioners rather than teachers. As a result, the profession has not evolved, even as teachers ourselves are expected and continue to transform our daily practices to meet the ever-increasing, ever-changing, ever-chaotic realities of our times. The research-practice gap grows larger each year because practitioners, the infantry of education (Pentón Herrera et al., 2025), are rarely positioned or respected as experts. Teachers rarely shape policy decisions, even when those decisions define our work. When societies argue about teachers instead of learning from them, dignity erodes. No profession can renew itself while its deepest knowledge remains unheard. The lack of practice-centered dialogue has left teaching anchored to outdated assumptions about control, standardization, and compliance, even while the world demands relational expertise and adaptive judgment.

THE COST OF
DEMORALIZATION

Studies across contexts show that demoralization rises when teachers feel disconnected from the purpose of their work or constrained by systems that disregard their insights. Wronowski and Urick (2021) found that teacher demoralization increased sharply during eras of heavy accountability and diminished autonomy. Similarly, Carter Andrews et al. (2016) observed that dehumanizing work environments weaken professional self-concept and make it difficult for teachers to sustain high-quality practice.

The emotional toll is not evenly distributed. Schools serving historically marginalized communities often face greater pressure, fewer resources, and more intense scrutiny. Teachers in these settings may experience a compounded loss of dignity because they navigate both systemic inequities and restrictive working conditions. In the face of these enduring and increasing challenges, our profession has lost its vitality over time. The withering becomes visible in rising attrition rates, shortages, and public narratives that treat teaching as less valuable.

RECLAIMING DIGNITY
AS A PROFESSIONAL CONDITION

To reverse this decline, the teaching profession must center the conditions that sustain teacher dignity. Teachers require agency in shaping both what we do (i.e., the curriculum) and how we do it (i.e., instruction). Similarly, we need autonomy to make decisions based on our knowledge about our learners. As human beings and professionals, we benefit from recognition that views our work as expertise rather than a set of instructions to follow.

In my work with educators in different contexts, I have learned that when teachers are given the opportunity to engage in systematic reflection on our practice, we reconnect with the human and intellectual core of our teaching. These elements restore our dignity (and motivation) by returning to us the sense of control, competence, and purpose that our pedagogy so desperately needs. When our judgment about how best to teach and support students is respected, our overall well-being improves, and the profession becomes more resilient.

BEYOND SELF-CARE:
RESPONSIBLE WELL-BEING

In recent years, the idea of self-care has often been presented as the solution to teacher stress. Yet prescribed strategies do little to address systemic conditions that undermine dignity. The concept of responsible well-being (Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024) invites a shift in thinking. This framework reframes teacher well-being as a shared responsibility among individuals, institutions, and society. It calls on educational systems to examine how policies, workloads, leadership practices, and organizational cultures affect teachers' capacity to flourish. It challenges the belief that teachers should navigate emotional strain on their own. When well-being is treated as a collective obligation, the focus shifts to sustainable structures, prompting schools to redesign schedules, reduce administrative burdens, protect planning time, and create professional cultures grounded in trust.

CHOOSING THE
NEXT PATH FOR EDUCATION

As education enters the next phase of the century, the profession faces a choice. It can continue on its current path, where political debates and ideological battles overshadow pedagogical knowledge, and teachers carry the weight of systems that ignore our insights. Or it can evolve into a field that centers dignity, well-being, and professionalism.

This second path requires a shift in narrative. Teachers must be recognized as essential contributors to educational innovation. Their voices must inform decisions about curriculum, assessment, technology, school culture, and absolutely everything that happens in the educational process. Policymakers must invite practice to guide policy rather than expecting policy to dictate practice. Teacher inquiry, collaborative learning, and research partnerships can serve as the foundation for this evolution. In this sense, teacher dignity should be viewed as a form of professional infrastructure, essential to the functioning and success of the system. When such infrastructure is protected, teaching becomes a sustainable career and a respected profession.

As I close, I circle back to that meeting, thinking about the way Ms. Rose gathered her papers, the quiet heaviness in her voice, and the truth she carried: "We know our students." Her experience is not an isolated moment; it is the daily reality of countless teachers whose expertise is softened, sidelined, or unseen. And yet teachers continue to show extraordinary devotion, not only because we are a resilient group of educators, but because we know that our society's success depends on our work. As teachers, we continue to adapt, imagine, nurture, and persist. We keep believing in the possibilities inside every student, but we also need those making the decisions to believe in us. Without a doubt, what must come next is a profession that believes just as strongly in the possibilities inside every teacher. The future of education will not be built by policies alone, but by environments that allow teachers to flourish as whole human beings: respected, trusted, safe, and supported. By protecting teachers' dignity, we protect the heart of learning itself. The next generation of teachers deserves a profession rooted in that truth — that is my biggest wish and hope for all of us.

"No profession can renew itself while its deepest knowledge remains unheard."

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What's one lesson the past 25 years have taught you about what truly matters in education?

3

Richard Chinn

King's College London
United Kingdom

No matter how much experience you have, you must be humble and explore what a learner truly needs when talking to them. We must put our own agendas aside, if we want a learning experience to be genuinely valuable to a learner.

Irene Stephen Chahe

TELTA
Tanzania

The lesson which has taught me about what truly matter in education is professional development. Through professional development I learnt to network ,share experience and adpt new teaching pedagogy which are trending

Prof. Eileen N. Whelan Ariza

Florida Atlantic University
USA

What truly matters is a culturally responsive approach that builds upon students' backgrounds and prior experiences to make challenging content accessible. The consistent, persistent achievement gaps show that general instructional strategies aren't enough; we need intentional, asset-based scaffolding and a shared responsibility among all educators, not just the ML specialists, to ensure MLs thrive academically and socially.

The human heart, teacher and student agency. The past 25 years have taught me that relationships matter more than resources. When learners feel safe, seen, and valued, real learning happens. Curriculum, technology, and methods evolve, but curiosity, belonging, and human connection remain the foundation of meaningful education and long-term growth.

Eyram Fiawoyife

Daley Press and Edu Consortium, Vietnam

I have learned the importance of questioning which knowledge is valued. Michael Apple reminds us that schools legitimize certain forms of knowledge while subordinating others. Teachers could critically reflect, for example, on native English as the only 'correct' English and on whether literacy is merely a set of technical skills or a social practice interconnected with social structures.

Prof. Paul McBride

Tamagawa University
Japan

The most crucial lesson the past 25 years have taught about what truly matters in Liberian education is the absolute necessity of investing in and retaining a sufficient number of trained, qualified, and motivated teachers. Without this foundation, efforts to rebuild infrastructure or develop new curricula will struggle to succeed.

Ibrahim M Donzo

Aalem International School
Liberia

One lesson the past 25 years have taught me is that education works best when the student is truly at the centre of all teaching and learning. As I often say, "I work in a classroom of learners, and one of the learners is me." When learning is mutual, human and reflective, students grow, and so do we.

Rosvinder Kaur

Education Leader
Singapore

Taking the struggle between tradition and innovation into account, what truly matters in education is for teachers to be open to reflect on their own practices in light of their own students' progress – and neither to shy away from innovation nor to assume that the traditions of the past have nothing to do with contemporary practice when seeking to enhance students' learning.

Prof. Martin East
The University of Auckland
New Zealand

Dr. Martha Umana
AIA4Educator
USA

The past 25 years have taught me that coherence comes before capacity. Tools, standards, and initiatives matter only when they protect human dignity, relationships, and teacher time. Children remember if they felt safe, capable, and in partnership with adults. When schools align expectations, family voice, and wellbeing, academic outcomes stop being the goal and become the evidence.

Adam Seex
Interlink Education
England

When I meet students that I used to teach, even after 4 - 5 or even 6 years, they don't talk to me about the games I used to play with them in class, about the fancy power point that I used in their lessons but they smile and enjoy the moment of being together again. Teaching isn't about what you put on your slideshow or a fun game, it's about real human connection.

One lesson the past 25 years have taught me is that what truly matters in education is not the method or the tool, but the connection with learners. Students learn best when they feel seen, respected, and challenged. Technology enhances learning, but human guidance, purpose, and emotional safety are what sustain real educational growth.

Prof. Claudia Verónica Sánchez Díaz
Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, Mexico

It's all about connection. The better we know our learners, the more effective we are in the classroom, whether that's bringing in their interests to the lesson content or spotting in their body language or tone of voice that they're feeling a bit off that day. I wish I'd understood that more from Day One.

Teresa Bestwick
The TEFL Development Hub
Spain

The past 25 years have taught me that being well informed and continuously trained is essential for effective teaching. True impact in education comes from staying updated, refining skills, and adapting to change, ensuring that learners receive quality instruction that empowers them to thrive in a dynamic world.

Elsie Enanga
Lycee de Biyem-Assi, Yaounde
Cameroon

Prof. Joseph Rene Corbeil
The Uni. of Texas Rio Grande Valley
USA

One lesson the past 25 years have taught me is that what truly matters in education is the human connection between students and teachers. When that connection weakens—such as through large classes or asynchronous learning—students can feel isolated, as Moore's transactional distance theory suggests. Strengthening collaboration and communication intentionally helps close that gap and supports deeper engagement and belonging. As new technologies emerge, like generative AI, the challenge will be ensuring these tools support, not replace, meaningful relationships and engagement.

BEYOND TOOLS:

RECLAIMING HUMAN DIRECTION IN EDUCATION

Dr. Le Dinh Bao Quoc

A Question I've Been Sitting With

For a long time now, I've been sitting with a quiet but persistent question: Is technology still serving education — or has education slowly begun serving technology?

This question did not arrive suddenly, nor did it emerge from resistance to change. It grew gradually, through years of working with teachers, designing learning programs, observing classrooms, and listening carefully to educators across different contexts globally. It surfaced in moments of excitement — when a new tool genuinely helped learners — and also in moments of discomfort, when technology seemed to dictate pace, structure, or priorities in ways that felt misaligned with learning itself.

We often speak about educational technology in terms of progress: faster, smarter, more personalized, more scalable. And in many ways, these claims are valid. Technology has expanded access, connected communities, and opened doors that were previously closed. But progress, when left unquestioned, can quietly shift direction. What begins as support can become dependence. What starts as a tool can turn into a driver.

This article is not a rejection of technology. Nor is it a call to return to some idealized pre-digital classroom. It is, instead, a pause — a moment to step back and reflect on direction.

Then
When Technology Entered Education as a Promise

I began my teaching career around early 2000, at a time when technology in classrooms was minimal — almost invisible by today's standards. There were no projectors, no interactive boards, and certainly no personal devices in students' hands. If we wanted to play audio, we relied on a cassette player. If we wanted visuals, we improvised. A television, if available at all, was shared and limited. Videos were rare. Printed photos were precious, often passed from hand to hand, and students at the back of the room struggled to see.

Teaching in that context required creativity, patience, and imagination. Lessons depended heavily on explanation, storytelling, and human interaction. When students finally encountered a visual or heard authentic audio, the impact was powerful — not because it was technologically advanced, but because it was scarce and meaningful.

Then, gradually, technology entered education carrying a strong sense of promise.

This shift was profound. Students gained the ability to investigate topics independently. Teachers could enrich lessons with resources that were previously unavailable or unaffordable. **The internet did not replace teaching; it expanded it.**

The widespread adoption of the internet transformed how knowledge was accessed and shared. Information was no longer locked in textbooks or libraries. Teachers and students could reach beyond classroom walls, exploring perspectives, research, and voices from across the world. Knowledge became open, global, and constantly evolving.

> *"The internet did not replace teaching; it expanded it."*

Soon after, image- and video-based platforms began to reshape learning experiences even further. When platforms like YouTube became popular, learning turned visual, contextual, and closely connected to real life. Abstract concepts could be demonstrated through animations and simulations. Language learners could hear authentic accents and observe real communication. Science students could watch experiments and phenomena that were impossible to recreate in classrooms. History came alive through archival footage and personal narratives.

During this period, technology largely remained in a supporting role. Teachers acted as curators and designers of learning experiences. They selected resources intentionally, aligned materials with learning objectives, and integrated digital content into pedagogical frameworks they already trusted. Decisions about what to teach and why were still driven by educational purpose, not by platform features.

Crucially, pedagogy led and technology followed. Digital tools enhanced explanation, engagement, and access — but they did not yet define the direction or rhythm of learning. There was excitement, experimentation, and a sense that technology could help education become more inclusive and relevant without fundamentally altering its human core.

For many years, this balance felt right. Technology expanded access, enriched lessons, and supported teachers' intentions without demanding center stage. It felt optional, flexible, and largely under human control. We chose when to use it — and when not to.

But somewhere along the way, something changed.

There was no single announcement, no clear moment when technology declared itself the leader of education.

Now

When Technology Quietly Starts Setting the Rules

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a defining turning point for global education. Almost overnight, schools around the world were forced to move online. What had once been optional became essential. Video conferencing platforms like Zoom, learning management systems, and digital assessment tools were no longer experiments — they were lifelines.

In many contexts, this shift demanded not only technical adaptation, but leadership and curation. At the time, I was working as an Academic Manager at an English language school. My role suddenly expanded beyond pedagogy into constant exploration of educational technology. Each week, I curated new tools for teachers to use — tools and platforms like **Bamboozle, Wordwall, Padlet, ClassroomScreen,** and many others. The goal was clear: keep lessons engaging, interactive, and alive in virtual classrooms.

Teachers learned fast. They experimented, shared ideas, and supported one another. In many ways, this period revealed educators at their most creative and resilient. Technology enabled connection when physical proximity was impossible.

Yet, what began as an emergency response gradually solidified into structure.

Schools reorganized schedules, assessments, communication, and even teaching identities around platforms. Decisions were increasingly shaped by what systems could track, automate, or scale. Attendance became log-ins. Participation became clicks. Engagement was measured through dashboards rather than dialogue.

At the same time, expectations intensified. If teaching could happen online, it could happen anytime. If materials were digital, they could be endlessly updated. The boundaries between work and rest blurred — especially for teachers, who were now expected to learn, adapt, and perform continuously in public digital spaces. Availability quietly became a new norm.

Then came the explosion of artificial intelligence.

AI did not arrive quietly. It arrived with extraordinary promises — and unprecedented speed. Suddenly, everything seemed possible. Personalised learning pathways. Automated lesson planning. Instant material creation. AI-generated quizzes, worksheets, feedback, and assessments. Scaling quality education to thousands, even millions, with minimal human intervention.

The excitement was contagious. Conferences, webinars, social media feeds, and professional discussions were flooded with AI tools and use cases. Everyone seemed to be experimenting. Everyone seemed to be "keeping up." The message was implicit but powerful: *if you are not using AI, you are already behind.*

In many cases, these tools delivered impressive results. Teachers saved time. Students received instant feedback. Institutions saw efficiency and scalability. But alongside the enthusiasm came a quieter risk.

When systems prioritize speed, output, and optimization, professional judgment can begin to fade into the background. When lesson planning becomes automated, the reflective process behind it can be lost. When assessment is instant, the space for dialogue, interpretation, and human understanding shrinks.

Technology did not take control loudly. It did not demand authority. It simply became embedded — in workflows, expectations, and definitions of quality.

The concern is not that AI will replace teachers. The deeper concern is that it may redefine what teaching and learning are *for* — subtly shifting values from meaning to measurability, from depth to efficiency.

Technology did not take control loudly. It did not demand authority. It simply became embedded — in workflows, expectations, and definitions of quality.

This is where we are now. Not at the edge of a technological future, but inside it. And the question before us is no longer whether technology belongs in education — but whether we are still consciously deciding how technology shapes learning, and whose values technology ultimately serves.

We are more than "Users"

What We Lose When Metrics Replace Meaning

In the language of technology companies, the word user is neutral — even positive. Users are counted, supported, retained, and celebrated. Growth in users signals success. Engagement rates indicate impact. Time-on-platform becomes proof of value.

But education is not a tech product.

When the language of platforms quietly enters the language of schools, something subtle but significant begins to shift. Teachers and learners are no longer described primarily as people, but as users. And users, by design, are abstracted.

Users are numbers.
Teachers and learners are human beings.

They arrive in classrooms carrying emotions, histories, cultural contexts, energy, fatigue, curiosity, fear, and hope. They need space to hesitate, to struggle, to ask questions without answers. None of this fits neatly into a dashboard.

When teachers are treated as users, their professional judgment is often sidelined. Decisions about pacing, sequencing, or pedagogy begin to bend toward what a tool allows or encourages, rather than what learners genuinely need.

When learners are treated as users, attention becomes currency. Speed replaces depth. Completion replaces understanding. The pressure to remain "engaged" can quietly discourage confusion — even though confusion is often the doorway to real learning.

What becomes invisible in such systems are sometimes the most powerful moments in education:

- the silence after a difficult question
- the waiting before a learner finds the courage to speak
- the confusion that precedes insight
- the struggle that builds resilience
- the deep thinking that produces no immediate output

Metrics can tell us how often students log in, how quickly they complete tasks, and how many activities they finish. They cannot tell us whether a student feels understood, whether a teacher feels trusted, or whether learning has meaning.

When education is shaped primarily by what can be measured, we risk forgetting what matters most. And when we forget that teachers and learners are more than users, we begin to design environments that are technically impressive — but emotionally thin.

This is not a call to reject technology. It is a reminder that education must never forget its human core.

A Human Counterbalance

When Teachers Lead Through Community

While education is at risk when it is reduced to metrics and users, this moment in time also offers a quiet but powerful counterbalance.

Teachers were finding each other.

Across countries and contexts, educators began forming online communities, not as users of a product, but as professionals in conversation. Social media groups, shared resource spaces, informal networks, and later webinars and online professional development sessions became places of dialogue rather than delivery.

These spaces mattered because they were not built around performance metrics. They were built around questions.

Teachers gathered to ask:

- *How are you handling this lesson?*
- *What worked with your students?*
- *How are you coping with this change?*
- *Does anyone else feel overwhelmed?*

In these communities, technology did not dictate the agenda — it enabled connection. Platforms became meeting places rather than measuring tools. Learning happened through shared stories, collective reflection, and professional trust.

This was especially visible during and after the pandemic. As formal systems struggled to keep pace, teachers turned to one another. Webinars replaced one-off workshops. Peer-led sessions replaced top-down training. Experience became currency, not compliance.

In these spaces, teachers reclaimed agency.

They adapted tools rather than obeying them. They shared ways to bend platforms to serve learners, not the other way around. They spoke openly about limits — about screen fatigue, emotional strain, and the need to slow down. Perhaps most importantly, these communities restored something that dashboards cannot capture: dignity.

When teachers are invited to speak, to question, and to contribute, innovation feels different. It becomes something co-created rather than imposed. Technology, in this context, serves humanity. It amplifies professional wisdom instead of replacing it.

This matters deeply for the future of education.

Because when educators lead, learning remains grounded. When teachers learn together, reflection replaces reaction. And when professional communities thrive, technology returns to its rightful place — not as the driver of education, but as a tool in the hands of thoughtful, reflective human beings.

In a world increasingly shaped by systems, teacher communities remind us of something essential: education has always been relational. And whenever that relationship is honored, learning finds its way back to meaning.

NEXT
Reclaiming Direction in a Tech-Rich Future

The question ahead is not whether technology will continue to shape education. It will. The real question is whether we will allow it to lead by default — or whether we will choose to lead with intention.

This is not about going backward or romanticizing a pre-digital past. Few educators would want to return to a time without access, connection, or powerful tools. But moving forward responsibly requires something more demanding than adoption. It requires discernment.

1 From Adoption to Intention

For years, the dominant question in schools has been: *What tool should we use?*

In the next phase of education, the more important question must become: *What kind of learning do we want — and why?*

When purpose comes first, technology follows naturally. When it comes second, it quietly reshapes goals in its own image.

Intentional education starts with clarity about values: depth over speed, understanding over completion, growth over performance. Only then do we ask which tools genuinely support those aims — and which do not.

Not every innovation needs to be adopted. Not every feature needs to be activated. Saying *no* is sometimes the most responsible pedagogical choice.

2 From Efficiency to Meaning

Technology excels at efficiency. Education does not always need it.

Some of the most meaningful learning experiences are slow, messy, and emotionally demanding. Reflection takes time. Dialogue cannot be rushed. Growth often requires repetition, silence, and uncertainty.

Reclaiming direction means protecting space for learning that resists optimization:

- time to think without producing
- conversations without clear outcomes
- struggle without immediate resolution

Efficiency has value. But meaning must lead.

3 From Users to Co-Creators

If teachers and learners are seen only as users, systems will always design *for* them — not *with* them.

A human-centered future requires a different stance.

Teachers are not implementers of someone else's vision. They are designers of learning. Their professional judgment, contextual knowledge, and lived experience are essential forms of expertise.

Learners, too, must move beyond consumption. They are not passive recipients of content, but active participants in meaning-making. When students co-create, question, and reflect, learning becomes personal — not personalized by an algorithm, but humanly owned.

Educational systems must reflect this shift by inviting educators and learners into the design of tools, policies, and practices. Co-creation is slower than rollout — but far more sustainable.

4 Human Values as the North Star

In a landscape filled with powerful technologies, values must become our compass.

Before adopting any tool, approach, or system, we should pause and ask:

- Does this strengthen relationships?
- Does it deepen understanding?
- Does it support well-being — for both learners and teachers?
- Does it help people know themselves, not just access information?

These questions cannot be automated. They require judgment, dialogue, and reflection. When human values lead, technology finds its rightful place — not as an authority, but as an ally.

The future of education will be rich in tools. But it must remain richer in wisdom.

Choosing Who Leads

I return often to the question that has stayed with me for years — not because I doubt the value of technology, but because I care deeply about the direction education is taking.

I have lived through classrooms without projectors, without videos, without instant access. I have also lived through periods of rapid innovation, platform adoption, emergency remote teaching, and now the explosion of AI. I have seen technology open doors — and quietly redraw boundaries.

None of these moments were inherently wrong. Each brought possibilities and solved real problems. But taken together, they ask something of us now: to pause, to reflect, and to choose intentionally.

Education has never been just about tools. It has always been about people — learners trying to understand the world and themselves, and teachers guiding them with care, judgment, and hope. When technology supports that relationship, it becomes powerful. When it replaces reflection with reaction, or humanity with metrics, we risk losing something essential.

As we enter a new year, and a new phase of educational change, the challenge is not to keep up — but to stay grounded. To remember that not everything that can be automated should be. That not everything valuable can be measured. And that progress without purpose is not progress at all.

The future of education will not be decided by how intelligent our technologies become, but by whether we remain wise enough to decide what they are for — and who they are meant to serve.

And that decision, quietly and collectively, is still ours to make.

"Use technology wisely, but do not let technology use you."

Pope Leo XIV

Le Dinh Bao Quoc (EdD) is an author and educator with over 20 years of experience in English language teaching and educational leadership across Vietnam and the region. He is the Founder & CEO of Pro.Ed Education Solutions, Academic Director at VIA English Academy, and Head of EduVerse, a global professional development network. He also created EDU361 Expo, the world's first 48-hour non-stop 3D virtual education conference with 120+ global speakers. His book The Art and Science of ChatGPT in Education explores AI's impact on learning, and in 2024 he was recognized by LinkedIn as a Top Voice in Educational Leadership.

How do you envision your classroom — or education in general — 25 years from now?

4

I envision a classroom where advanced technology is seamlessly integrated by both teachers and students, serving a single purpose: enhancing and expanding human cognitive potential. It would not merely assist learning but actively contribute to making us better learners and more effective educators, fostering a dynamic environment of constant growth and improvement.

George Kokolas
Express Publishing/IPEN
Greece
Greece

I imagine classrooms powered by adaptive AI, immersive simulations, and seamless global collaboration. Learning will be personalized and creative, with teachers curating experiences rather than controlling them. Yet the heart of education will stay the same: human connection and guiding learners to use language with purpose.

Fajarudin Akbar
EnglishTech Solutions
Indonesia

Twenty-five years from today, I imagine vocational classrooms blending advanced technology with real-world practice, allowing learners to "touch" their future professions from multiple angles. Learning spaces will be open, deeply connected to industry and community. I believe these will be places where learners are inspired to build sustainable careers and contribute meaningfully to society.

Nguyen Thu Hien
Hanoi College for Electro-Mechanics
Vietnam

Ladan Kabir Babajide
Model Secondary School KWCOED
Nigeria

Personally, I would prefer a system that identifies talent and passion early enough in students. An education system that builds a solid foundation on existing talent so that at graduation all students are equipped to face any challenge with the confidence that they are among the best in their chosen field.

Aslom Ullah
Gems Wellington School
Qatar

Fully functioning with artificial intelligence acting as a companion to my teaching.

Anna Shildrick
World Education Consulting
United Kingdom

Twenty-five years from now, I imagine learning environments built around inquiry, dialogue, and thoughtful struggle rather than delivery of content. AI will manage routine tasks, but the heart of education will centre on students making sense of the world, exercising judgment, and collaborating on meaningful problems. Classrooms will feel more like studios of thought, where human intelligence is cultivated with intention and depth.

I envision a classroom where technology supports learning, not replaces teachers. Lessons will be more personalised, interactive, and connected to real life, while teachers will continue to guide, motivate, and teach values such as respect, responsibility, and critical thinking.

Kouassi Adjoumani
Lycée Professionnel Commercial de Cocody
Côte d'Ivoire

Nakwa Secondary School
Samwel Ismael Nassary
Tanzania

I envision classrooms that are more flexible, inclusive, and learner-centered, blending technology with human connection. Learning will be personalized, project-based, and globally connected, allowing students to solve real-world problems. Despite advanced tools, teachers will remain essential as mentors who inspire values, creativity, and lifelong learning.

Mike Mayor
Global Scale of English, Pearson
United Kingdom

I think AI is now changing education in ways we had never imagined. I think the future of learning will be more personalized and more targeted at an individual's needs. Assessment may become a thing of the past as digital platforms build up a profile of a learner's proficiency over time - surely more reliable than a one-off test. But I still see a key role for teachers in the learning process to develop the human skills that are critical for a successful life.

Twenty-five years from now, I envision a classroom powered by advanced technology like virtual reality, AI tutors, and personalized learning paths. Education will be more inclusive, global, and student-centered, focusing on creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Physical classrooms may blend with digital environments, allowing students to learn from anywhere while teachers serve as guides, mentors, and facilitators of lifelong learning.

Erick Elias Vahaye
Nelson Mandela Secondary School
Tanzania

Twenty-five years from now, I envision classrooms that are highly flexible, inclusive, and human-centered, where technology supports personalized learning without replacing meaningful relationships. Education will integrate emotional intelligence, ethics, and creativity alongside academic knowledge. Teachers will remain essential as guides who foster critical thinking, empathy, and a strong sense of purpose in students within a rapidly changing world.

Wendy Rodríguez Godínez
Complejo Educativo CIT
Costa Rica

In 25 years, I envision classrooms as nurturing spaces where character is intentionally shaped and curiosity is constantly sparked. Education will balance advanced technology with human connection, encouraging creativity, ethical thinking, and lifelong learning. Teachers will guide students not only to acquire knowledge but to develop values, compassion, and a deep love for learning that prepares them for an ever-changing world.

Opuine Kayode Fowora
Brooke House School
Nigeria

I think classrooms are going virtually run, we have homeschooling and coaching etc now from one language to over 40 other languages simultaneously and growing rapidly, converting and thing on the internet into your chosen language.

Mark Engstar
Strangers Educational Academy
New Zealand

THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

Educators from five continents and over 50 countries were invited to reflect on one simple question:

If you could describe the future of learning in three words, what would they be?

Their responses — shaped by diverse classrooms, cultures, and experiences — come together in the word cloud below. It is not a forecast, but a collective vision of where education is heading, voiced by those who live it every day.

BEYOND METHOD:
COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING AS THE SOIL FOR LEARNING

Mary Scholl

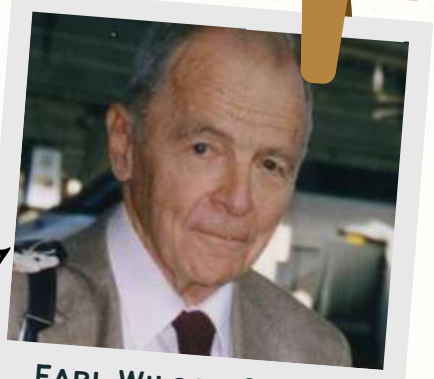
With 2026 on the horizon, the invitation is to reflect on the first 25 years of the 21st century and envision the next chapter of education – what has taken root, what has shifted, and what may be needed now. Rapid technological change, shifting social realities, global disruption, and a growing awareness of mental health, belonging, and equity have reshaped the landscape. In the midst of that, the most compelling questions are not only about what learners know, but about how learning is lived – what it feels like to be a learner, and what it requires of teachers as relational and systemic stewards of learning spaces.

25 THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

> Learner well-being, then, isn't an "add-on" once the "real learning" is done; it is part of the learning itself.

In language education, these questions sit right at the center. Learning a new language asks people to take risks in public: to speak before they feel ready, to tolerate ambiguity, to lose and find themselves in unfamiliar words. Identity, confidence, and vulnerability move through almost every lesson. Learner well-being, then, isn't an "add-on" once the "real learning" is done; it is part of the learning itself.

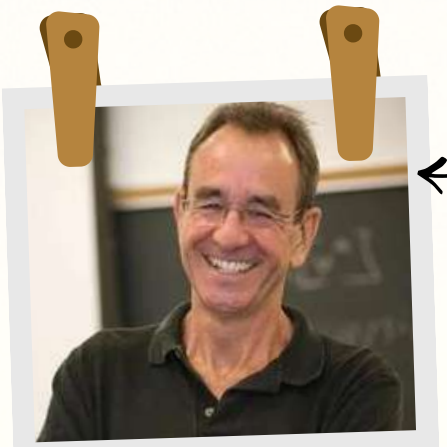
This work does not begin here. Language educators today stand on the shoulders of pedagogical ancestors – teachers and thinkers who insisted that education is never merely technical. Long before "well-being" became common language in schools, humanistic leaders in language learning – voices like Earl Stevick was an expert in language learning and teaching. He was influential in developing the communicative approach to language learning – paid close attention to the inner life of learners and the emotional climate of classrooms. They understood that learning happens inside people and between them, and that the quality of that "between" shapes whether learners can participate fully.



EARL WILSON STEVICK
(OCTOBER 23, 1923 – AUGUST 13, 2013)

Over the past 25 years, language education has moved from method-driven certainty toward principled diversity, communicative purpose, and action-oriented learning. Built on this humanistic legacy, the invitation in this paper is to recognize learner and teacher well-being as a relational, systemic condition – and to treat relational agility as essential infrastructure for learning in the decades ahead.

Relational agility is not a replacement for established approaches; it is a humanistic thread that can be woven into any methodology – whether designing action-oriented tasks, facilitating communicative interaction, or working within structured sequences such as PPP (Presentation – Practice – Production). In that sense, this is less a call for a new methodology and more a call for intentional conditions: learning environments where connection, communication, and repair are consciously cultivated.



SCOTT THORNBURY
(BORN 1950 IN NEW ZEALAND)

This reflection draws on Stevick, the field's shift from unity to diversity described by Larsen-Freeman, and later developments in communicative and action-oriented approaches – supported by voices such as Scott Thornbury is an internationally recognized academic and teacher trainer in the field of English Language Teaching. Thornbury is credited with developing the Dogme language teaching approach, which emphasizes meaningful interaction and emergent language over prepared materials and following an explicit syllabus – that position learners as meaning-makers and social agents. I hold this lineage with gratitude. The field doesn't feel like a straight line of methods replacing one another, but more like an evolving inheritance. Thornbury captures this pattern of continuity and revision: "A quarter of a century later, the answer is still 'yes', and still qualified." (Thornbury, 2017)

MY COMPASS:
What is happening...?

Throughout my 30+ years of teaching, a set of questions has become a compass – helping me notice what matters and respond in ways that support learning:

1. What is happening inside the learner, and how is that shaping learning?
2. What is happening between the people involved, and how is that shaping learning?
3. What is happening within the wider context or system, and how is that shaping learning?
4. What lens are we using to interpret experience, and how is that lens shaping what becomes possible?

These questions support planning, presence, and reflection. Over time, they have also mirrored what the field has come to understand: learning arises through dynamic interactions – within learners, between people, and within the systems that shape belonging and possibility. The learning space is not simply delivered; it is co-created, moment by moment, like weather moving through a shared landscape.

Roles are not as fixed as they often appear on paper. Teacher, supervisor, observer, evaluator, learner – these identities carry different responsibilities, yet they also influence one another. This makes observation especially consequential. Even when accountability is required, observation can still protect dignity and support growth – strengthening conditions where learning can take root rather than intensifying fear.

ROOTS AND SOIL:
The Humanistic Inheritance of Language Education

If we borrow a metaphor from nature, well-being is not the flower – it is the soil. The flower is what is easiest to notice: fluency, participation, confidence, and progress. The soil is what makes any of it possible: safety, dignity, trust, meaning, and permission to be imperfect.

Humanistic approaches to language teaching arose partly as a response to approaches that treated learning as primarily mechanical. They reminded us that learners are whole people. Stevick's work offers an enduring frame: learning happens inside people and between them.

The field's conversation about "method" also matured during these decades. As Larsen-Freeman and Anderson write, "We will use the term 'method' to mean a coherent set of links between the actions of a teacher in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions." (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) Methods and approaches carry principles, and many humanistic principles continue to reappear, reinterpreted for new contexts.

The shift toward methodological diversity can be seen as ecological richness – more nuance, more possibility. At the same time, this shift draws attention to the wider systems and lenses that shape education – what institutions choose to reward, what assessment practices value, and what teachers and learners come to believe truly matters and is recognized as real learning. A classroom may be warm and relational, yet still operate within a system that prioritizes speed, efficiency, and constant evaluation. Stevick points to this permeability: "The 'mask change' links the world inside the classroom with the world outside it" (Stevick, 1980, p. 1). Context enters, shaping what learners and teachers feel is possible, appropriate, or achievable in their teaching and learning.

Communicative and Action-Oriented Approaches:
LEARNING AS MEANING AND SOCIAL ACTION

The communicative approach brought a shift that many language teachers now hold as common sense: language is for communication, and learners learn through using it. Thornbury notes that CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) remains widely accepted and continually renegotiated: "A quarter of a century later, the answer is still 'yes', and still qualified." (Thornbury, 2017)

Learners moved from reciting language to using language to make meaning with other people. That shift has a well-being dimension: meaning-making supports voice and agency. Thornbury highlights the original communicative impulse through Wilkins' framing that "what people want to do through language is more important than the mastery of language as an unapplied system" (Wilkins, 1976, as cited in Thornbury, 2017).

At the same time, interaction alone does not guarantee well-being. A classroom can be "communicative" and still be emotionally unsafe. If participation is demanded, if mistakes are treated as failure, or if learners are pushed into exposure without consent, communicative activities can become another performance stage. This returns us – again – to inside, between, system, and lens.

The action-oriented approach (AOA), often associated with the CEFR, extends communicative thinking further by positioning learners as social agents who use language to act in the world, often with others, for real purposes. Tasks become shared projects: planning, deciding, negotiating roles, collaborating, problem-solving.

AOA also makes systems visible: learning is shaped by time, assessment pressures, institutional norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics, and the emotional weather of the group. When well-being is framed mainly as an individual responsibility, the response often becomes coping strategies. These can be helpful. Yet a systems lens asks a different question: What conditions are being co-created? Learners respond to whether they feel safe, whether their identity is respected, whether mistakes are welcomed, whether time is rushed, and whether evaluation is constant.

Teachers are shaped by these conditions – and they also shape them. Teacher well-being is not separate from learner well-being; it is part of the same ecosystem. Learners often take cues from the teacher's way of being: presence, regulation, respect, and how difficulty is held. Teachers lead by living well-being, and that kind of leadership requires systems that protect time, trust, margin, and support so well-being is not merely encouraged, but made possible.

> ..."what people want to do through language is more important than the mastery of language as an unapplied system."

RELATIONAL AGILITY:
A Humanistic Thread Across Approaches

If the past 25 years have made anything clearer, it is that learning is relational, contextual, and social. The next step is not a new method, but greater intentionality about the "between."

Relational agility names the capacity to navigate relationships with skill and care – especially under stress. It includes self-awareness and regulation, empathic listening, clear boundaries, repair after rupture, collaboration, and the ability to stay connected within complex systems. These capacities can be practiced and strengthened.

This is also where my fourth compass question matters: *What lens are we using to interpret experience?* If the lens is scarcity and performance, mistakes become threats and conflict becomes failure. If the lens is growth and mutuality, mistakes become information and conflict becomes a moment to practice repair. In a time of diversity and complexity, "teaching is a matter of making informed choices" (Larsen-Freeman, 2012, p. 9) – and relational agility helps those choices protect dignity and support learning.

WHAT WEAVING CAN LOOK LIKE:
AOA + PPP with Relational Agility

Relational agility becomes real when it is woven into everyday practice. In action-oriented tasks, it might include teaching the language of collaboration and repair alongside task language: how to negotiate roles, disagree respectfully, ask for clarification, and restart when communication breaks down.

In a PPP sequence, relational agility can be present from the start: co-creating norms for risk during the presentation stage, practicing clarification moves during practice, and using production not only for output but also for reflection on what supported participation. Feedback can protect dignity while still supporting growth.

Relational agility does not compete with methodology. It supports the conditions that allow any methodology to work.

Practices:

WHAT RELATIONAL AGILITY CAN LOOK LIKE IN CLASSROOMS AND LEARNING SYSTEMS

Because communication is the medium of language learning, relational agility can be practiced every day. These eleven practices make it visible and learnable:

1 **Classroom culture as curriculum**

Co-create norms for listening, disagreement, inclusion, and feedback. Community is a well-being condition. When learners help shape the agreements of the space, they experience agency – not just compliance.

2 **A shared language of repair**

Normalize repair: "That didn't come out the way I meant." "Can we start over?" "I see the impact." Repair becomes a communicative skill and a trust-building practice.

3 **Emotional literacy paired with communication**

Help learners name emotions and needs in age-appropriate ways: "I feel nervous because..." "I'm frustrated because..." This supports language development and reduces shame that can quietly shrink participation.

4 **Feedback that strengthens creativity and courage**

Protect dignity. Prioritize meaning before form. Normalize errors as evidence of growth. Feedback becomes an invitation to keep trying, not a verdict.

5 **Action-oriented tasks designed for interdependence**

Scaffold collaboration language: "How will we decide?" "What do we need from each other?" "How will we include everyone?" Make the "between" teachable, not accidental.

6 **The observer/evaluator as nurturer of conditions**

If roles are fixed – teacher performs, evaluator judges – observation becomes a stressor. If roles are dynamic, observation becomes a shared learning space. A relationally agile observer notices strengths, asks reflective questions, holds complexity, and supports teachers to take risks without humiliation.

7 **Compassionate communication as daily practice**

Practice language that supports clarity and care: making requests, naming needs, offering appreciation, and expressing disagreement without blame.

8 **Mindfulness as a relational tool, not a private ritual**

Short moments of pausing, noticing, or grounding can support attention and regulation – especially before speaking tasks, after conflict, or during high-pressure periods.

9 **Self-carefulness as part of the learning ecology**

Self-carefulness includes pacing, boundaries, rest, and realistic expectations – especially for teachers who hold emotional labor. When self-carefulness is modeled and legitimized, it becomes part of the system rather than something done in secret after depletion.

10 **Empowerment dynamics: agency, voice, and shared power**

Well-being depends on whether learners and teachers experience dignity and choice. Empowerment practices include offering meaningful options, making criteria transparent, inviting student voice, and noticing who is consistently centered and who is consistently silent.

11 **Holding space for everyone's learning**

Holding space is a practice of presence: staying available without controlling, supporting without rescuing, and listening without rushing to fix. In learning spaces, it means making room for different learning tempos, identities, and levels of readiness – while continuing to hold clear purpose and compassionate boundaries.

CARRYING THE GIFTS Forward

In nature, nothing grows alone. Trees depend on soil, water, fungi, sunlight, and the quiet exchange of nutrients through unseen networks. Learning is similarly relational. It depends on conditions – many of which are shaped by the choices, structures, and relationships in our systems.

As the past 25 years come into view, language education offers a story worth noticing: humanistic educators reminded us that learning happens inside people and between them; methodological diversity increased teacher discernment; communicative approaches emphasized meaning-making and interaction; the action-oriented approach positioned learners as social agents within real contexts; and communicative voices kept returning the field to the lived reality of classroom talk.

Now the next step is to treat well-being not as a program, but as a relational, systemic, co-created condition. And to treat relational agility as infrastructure: the set of capacities that allows both learners and teachers to participate, connect, disagree, repair, and keep learning together.

Beyond method, collective well-being becomes the soil for learning. And relational agility -woven into humanistic teaching, and into whatever approaches are used – helps cultivate the conditions in which learning can take root.

Mary Scholl is an educator, teacher trainer, and founder of the Institute for Collaborative Learning. Her work centers on learner well-being, humanistic language teaching, and relational practices that strengthen learning communities. She supports teachers and institutions in cultivating classrooms where dignity, connection, and purposeful communication make learning possible.

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THE EVOLUTION OF PROMPTING:

HOW EDUCATORS PROMPTED AI INTO THEIR PEDAGOGY

Tina Austin

WHY PROMPTING MATTERS FOR EDUCATORS

When generative AI was first publicly released in 2022, I was teaching regenerative medicine and began experimenting with it alongside my teaching assistant to identify potential mistakes it could make. However, I noticed that my colleagues who experienced more FOMO trying to catch up a few months later suddenly faced a strange new skill requirement: "prompting." Instead of simply teaching, many found themselves trying to master a form of digital spell-casting. At first, they told me prompting felt like a novelty or a hack. But in just a few short years, it has matured into a professional practice that shapes how we teach, learn, and think about technology in education.

#FOMO

FOMO "fear of missing out": a worried feeling that you may miss exciting events that other people are going to, especially caused by things you see on social media *(Cambridge Dictionary)*

Today, effective prompting is no longer focused on tricking a model into producing answers. Rather, the question I get is how do we design interactions that strengthen student learning, encourage critical thinking, and build resilience in an AI-saturated world. This evolution tells us as much about the growth of educators as it does about the growth of the technology itself.

THE EARLY DAYS OF PROMPTING (2022–2023)

In 2022 and 2023, prompting was new territory for most teachers. Large language models (LLMs) were more prone to wild mistakes, their outputs often generic, error-filled, or bizarre. Educators experimented with:

- **Persona tricks and libraries:**
  Teachers copied prompts from online forums that offered prompt libraries "act like a historian," "pretend you are a debate coach" or "a pirate", without much tailoring to their own classroom context.
- **Zero-shot, few-shot, and multi-shot prompting:**
  Terms like these entered popular use around 2021–2022. A "zero-shot" prompt gave only instructions. A "few-shot" included sample answers. A "multi-shot" stacked dozens of examples to enforce patterns. For educators, this was more theory than practice; many simply pasted instructions and hoped for the best.
- **Quirky hacks:**
  Some swore that saying "please" or even issuing threats changed model behavior. Educators on forums shared screenshots claiming that saying "please" made the AI more cooperative, and produced sharper results. While fun, this often led to misconceptions about how AI really works.
- **Copy-paste culture:**
  Pre-packaged "prompt libraries" circulated, encouraging teachers to use generic formulas rather than craft prompts around their own learning goals.

While these tactics sometimes led to slightly different responses, research showed they were never reliable strategies. Instead, they reflected a deeper truth: early models often felt unpredictable, and educators were grasping for control. In classrooms, these hacks created myths about "personality" in AI rather than promoting clear, repeatable methods.

Looking back, these tricks are a reminder of how quickly the field has matured. What once felt like digital spell-casting has been replaced with more grounded approaches: Today's best practice is not about flattering or bullying an algorithm but about crafting prompts that align with **pedagogical goals** and respect the teacher's role as the human in the loop.

These methods occasionally produced interesting results, but they had major issues. Back then, I coined the term "illusion of comprehension" when it came to LLMs. Later studies called it the "illusion of thinking." Research had not yet emerged showing that tricking a model would not yield benefits. Moreover, none of these prompt libraries promoted critical thinking. They positioned educators as passive consumers rather than active collaborators, and they rarely aligned with sound pedagogy. Worse, teachers often had little awareness of AI's limitations, leading to misplaced trust in outputs. They were either classified as pro-AI hype techno-optimists, who are overly enthusiastic about AI and believe it will solve most educational problems, or as Luddites, a term rooted in the Industrial Revolution and now used to describe those perceived as resisting new technologies altogether.

THE TURNING POINT: WHAT CHANGED

Two big shifts transformed prompting from gimmick to pedagogy: better AI models and educator reflection.

1 Advances in technology

Pre-packaged "prompt libraries" circulated, encouraging teachers to use generic formulas rather than craft prompts around their own learning goals.

- **Bigger context windows:** By 2023–2024, models could handle far more input, making long prompts and documents workable.
- **Memory and retrieval augmentation:** Instead of re-explaining everything each time, teachers could use session memory or point models to curated resources.
- **Improved reasoning:** Chain-of-thought prompting became mainstream, enabling step-by-step explanations useful for math, science, and logic tasks.

2 Advances with AI in pedagogy

A small but growing number of educators began asking: "What do I want my students to learn?" rather than just "What can the AI produce?" For these early adopters, prompting slowly evolved from a tool of convenience to a method of scaffolding learning. Some teachers experimented with assignments where students would critique, refine, or challenge AI outputs rather than passively accept them.

Progress was uneven and often frustrating. Many educators still lacked the time, training, or institutional support to meaningfully integrate these approaches. Those who did make the shift often worked in isolation, sharing strategies informally through social media or professional networks rather than through formal professional development. However, the educators who persisted in this experimentation reported that this was a turning point when effective prompting stopped being just a technical trick and started becoming a form of critical AI literacy. Even so, implementing these approaches consistently remained challenging, with success often dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than systematic institutional change.

PROMPTING TODAY: (2025)
A PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

By 2025, for some educators prompting has matured into a mindful, intentional practice. Instead of engineering outputs with complicated formulas, educators now focus on clarity, scaffolding, and context. Key features of prompting today include:

- **Human-centered design:** Prompts are framed around student needs, not machine quirks.
- **Context over length:** Shorter, focused prompts often outperform long "catch-all" instructions.
- **Pedagogical integration:** Teachers embed prompts into their custom bots, for example, asking AI to create a first draft (that will produce mistakes) so students then critique.
- **Responsible use:** Prompts now include instructions to check for bias, cite sources, or compare perspectives.
- **Active collaboration:** Educators use AI as a partner in brainstorming, assessment design, and feedback, without surrendering professional judgment.

At the same time, teachers have recognized AI's frailties. Sometimes when outputs fall short, it is not because a teacher lacks "prompt literacy," but because AI simply cannot replicate human judgment, ethics, or contextual awareness. Effective prompting may save some workload, but it also creates invisible "repair work" as teachers adapt, correct, and contextualize AI outputs for real classrooms.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES
FOR EDUCATORS

Here are six practical prompt strategies that any teacher can adapt:

Prompt strategies	Sample prompt	Outcome
1. Compare & Contrast	*"Give me two different explanations of X, one simple and one advanced."*	Students discuss differences and appropriateness.
2. Critique the Draft	*"Write a short essay on Y. Now highlight three flaws in your own work."*	Students verify, expand, and critique AI's self-analysis.
3. Multiple Lenses	*"Explain this idea as if to a beginner, an intermediate learner, and an expert."*	Supports differentiated instruction.
4. Collaborative Rubrics	*"Generate a draft rubric for this assignment."*	Teacher and students refine it together.
5. Role Play with Caution	*"Act as a skeptical reviewer of this claim, but not taking AI's word for it."*	Encourages critical questioning while avoiding unhelpful "persona hacks."
6. Bias Check	*"Identify possible biases in this explanation."*	Reinforces ethical awareness and digital literacy.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Prompting looks different around the world – not because educators disagree on its value, but because educational realities, resources, and priorities vary widely.

- In resource-limited contexts, AI is often used selectively and strategically. Educators tend to focus prompting on areas where it offers the highest return for the least effort – such as generating practice materials. Here, prompting is less about experimentation and more about pragmatic support, helping teachers manage workload while preserving their professional judgement and pedagogical intent.
- In contrast, in well-resourced settings, prompting is more commonly integrated into broader pedagogical innovation. Teachers use AI to support flipped classrooms, project-based learning, AI-assisted research. Here, prompts are often more exploratory, reflecting greater access to devices, connectivity, and institutional support for innovation.
- Across all contexts, however, the common thread is **educator judgment**: AI can generate suggestions, materials, or perspectives, but it cannot replace the nuanced decisions teachers make about relevance, appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, and learner readiness.

This global diversity shows why there is no "one best prompt." What works in one classroom, institution, or country may be ineffective in another. Instead, effective prompting is always situated: shaped by teacher goals, student needs, cultural context, and local realities. Prompting, in this sense, is not a universal technique, but a contextual professional practice.

What works in one classroom, institution, or country may be ineffective in another. Instead, effective prompting is always situated: shaped by teacher goals, student needs, cultural context, and local realities.

THE DEBATE CONTINUES

Even in 2025, prompting remains an active and unresolved conversation in education.

One key question is whether we should standardize "prompt literacy" or "critical AI literacy" as part of teacher training. While some argue that structured training is essential to prevent misuse and overreliance, others caution against turning prompting into another checklist skill divorced from pedagogical intent.

There is also ongoing debate around prompt length and complexity. Are smaller, more contextual prompts better than long, detailed ones? This question reveals that prompting is not simply a technical skill, but a pedagogical judgment shaped by experience and context.

Also, educators are grappling on how we can balance efficiency gains with the invisible repair work teachers do – the cognitive and pedagogical labour required to evaluate, correct, contextualise, and ethically adapt AI-generated outputs for real classrooms? Prompting may save time, but it does not eliminate the human labour that underpins meaningful learning.

- Are smaller, more contextual prompts better than long, detailed ones?
- How do we balance efficiency gains with the invisible repair work teachers do?

Together, these debates point to a broader challenge: how to integrate AI into educational practice responsibly, without over-relying on it.

HOW FAR WE HAVE COME:
FROM DIGITAL TRICKS TO THOUGHTFUL PRACTICE

The evolution of prompting in education reflects a broader maturation in how we approach AI integration. What began as attempts to outsmart algorithms has gradually transformed into a more deliberate pedagogical approach, though this transformation remains incomplete and unevenly distributed.

Recent research reveals a critical gap between AI promises and classroom realities. A 2025 study of 57 teachers across Swedish and Australian schools found that teachers spend considerable time "reviewing, repairing and sometimes completely reworking AI-produced outputs that they perceive to be deficient" rather than simply using AI outputs directly (Selwyn, Ljungqvist, & Sonesson, 2025). This hidden labor challenges industry claims about AI's time-saving benefits.

The most effective educators no longer chase "magic words" or perfect prompts. Instead, they recognize that GenAI content was regularly criticized for being "not sophisticated enough" to pick up on local curriculum expectations and failing to understand specific classroom contexts. Teachers found that AI "doesn't know my students" and was inappropriately pitching feedback for particular known students, leading them to step in with their professional judgment.

This shift represents more than a change in technique, but rather it signals a fundamental reorientation toward viewing AI as requiring substantial human oversight rather than operating as an autonomous solution. Teachers described this work as involving "considerable time and effort" in "editing, refining, and sometimes completely reworking" AI outputs to make them pedagogically appropriate.

The promise of thoughtful AI integration lies in recognizing that the "success" of AI technologies depends on "human effort necessary to maintain the technologies". Effective prompting has evolved into a form of critical AI literacy that acknowledges both the potential and fundamental limitations of these tools in educational contexts.

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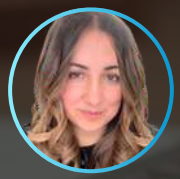

Tina Austin, an AI innovator and higher ed educator, revolutionizes AI integration across disciplines. Since 2022, she's pioneered the UnBlooms framework and built 100+ custom GPTs, training 900+ educators. Recognized in ASU+GSV Leading Women in AI, she bridges optimism and skepticism, advocating equity, responsibility, and sustainable teaching.

TEACHERS' VOICES ACROSS TIME:

A QUARTER CENTURY THROUGH MY EYES

Rana Mohammed Shebl

I did not become a teacher because I wanted to speak loudly. I became a teacher because I wanted to make sense of the world with others. Like many teachers at the beginning of the 21st century, I entered the classroom carrying lesson plans, expectations, and a quiet belief that if I worked hard enough, everything else would fall into place. My voice, back then, was careful. It followed rules. It stayed within lines drawn by curricula, policies, and traditions that had existed long before I arrived.

Then..

In those early years, teaching was often about doing things right. There was comfort in structure and clarity in routines. We were trained to deliver content, manage classrooms, and meet standards. Reflection existed, but mostly in private. Teachers talked in corridors, staff rooms, and after-school moments, sharing worries about students who struggled, lessons that failed, or systems that felt too rigid. Those conversations mattered deeply, yet they rarely traveled beyond the school walls.

Looking back, I realize that teachers' voices were always present. They were just soft. Not because teachers lacked ideas or insight, but because the space to speak openly was limited. Authority flowed in one direction, and many teachers learned to adapt rather than question. Survival often meant silence.

As I grew into the profession, small cracks began to appear. Educational reforms came and went. Technology entered classrooms, changing not only how we taught, but how we connected. Students' needs became more visible, more complex, and more human. Questions surfaced that could not be answered by textbooks alone. Why were some students disengaged despite our efforts? Why were dedicated teachers exhausted? Why did professional development sometimes feel disconnected from classroom reality?

Why were some students disengaged despite our efforts? Why were dedicated teachers exhausted? Why did professional development sometimes feel disconnected from classroom reality?

These questions marked a turning point. Slowly, teachers began to speak differently. Not louder, but more honestly. They shared experiences online, collaborated across schools, and began to name emotional and social realities that had long been ignored. Teaching was no longer just instructional work; it was relational, emotional, and deeply human.

My own voice changed when I moved into teacher training. I discovered that standing in front of teachers required a different kind of listening. Training was not about offering perfect answers, but about honoring lived experience. When teachers were invited to speak without fear of judgment, their reflections were thoughtful, practical, and grounded in care. They spoke about children before content, about connection before compliance, and about dignity before discipline.

What struck me most was how often teachers doubted the value of their own voices. Many began sentences with, "I'm not sure if this is right," or "This might sound simple, but..." Yet within those hesitant words lived profound understanding. Teachers knew their learners. They understood context. They noticed what no policy document could capture.

The challenge of our current moment is not encouraging teachers to speak, but creating systems that truly listen.

Now...

Today, teachers' voices are more visible than ever, but visibility alone does not guarantee being heard. Many teachers are invited to share feedback, attend workshops, or participate in initiatives, yet still feel that decisions are made elsewhere. The challenge of our current moment is not encouraging teachers to speak, but creating systems that truly listen.

Classrooms today carry heavy expectations. Teachers balance academic demands with emotional support, inclusion, technology, and accountability. They hold stories of resilience and fatigue in the same breath. In training rooms, teachers speak about joy and burnout, hope and frustration, often within the same sentence. These voices are not contradictory; they are human.

One of the most powerful moments I witness as a trainer is when a teacher says, "I thought it was just me." That sentence reveals how isolation silences voice. When teachers realize their struggles are shared, reflection turns into collective strength. Voice, in this sense, is not performance. It is connection.

Silencing teachers has consequences. When teachers are excluded from decision-making, reforms lose meaning. When teachers' emotional realities are ignored, burnout grows quietly. When teachers are not trusted, innovation fades. A system that speaks about teachers without listening to them cannot sustain change.

Next...

As we look toward the future, the question is not whether teachers should have a voice, but how seriously we take it. The next phase of education must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward genuine partnership. Teachers need spaces to reflect, question, and lead without fear. Their stories should inform training, policy, and practice.

The future also asks us to care for teachers as whole human beings. Well-being, emotional literacy, and identity are not extras added to teaching; they are central to it. Teachers who understand themselves teach with greater clarity and compassion. Supporting teacher voice means supporting teacher humanity.

When I imagine the next chapter of education, I imagine circles instead of hierarchies. I imagine professional learning that begins with listening. I imagine systems that value sustainability as much as success. Most of all, I imagine teachers who no longer apologize for their voices.

If this reflection sounds personal, it is because it is written in the margins of my own journey. My handwriting has been shaped by countless teachers I have listened to, learned from, and stood beside. Their voices echo through these words.

Teachers have never been silent. They have been waiting. The future of education depends on whether we are finally ready to listen.

> *Teachers have never been silent.*
> *They have been waiting.*
> *The future of education depends on*
> *whether we are finally ready to listen.*

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The first 25 years of the 21st century have marked one of the most dynamic periods in the history of education. Rapid technological innovation, shifting learner expectations, global disruptions, and evolving societal priorities have collectively reshaped how learning is designed, delivered, and experienced. Research across the fields of learning sciences, educational technology, and teacher development consistently highlights that education today is not merely an updated version of its past; it has undergone a structural and cultural transformation. As 2026 begins, examining what has changed – and what these changes imply for the future – provides valuable insights for teachers and education professionals worldwide.

Let's synthesize major trends documented in the literature to explore how education has evolved from early digital adoption ("Then") to fully integrated ecosystems ("Now"), and how current evidence suggests it may continue to evolve in the coming decade ("NEXT").

THEN, NOW, NEXT:

REIMAGINING HUMAN LEARNING

AT THE INTERSECTION OF INTELLIGENT TECHNOLOGIES, EVIDENCE, AND HUMANITY

Asst. Prof. Dr. Serap Uğur

25 THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

THEN:
EARLY DIGITALIZATION WITHOUT PEDAGOGICAL DISRUPTION

Research from the early 2000s portrays a period in which digital technologies entered educational environments without fundamentally reshaping pedagogical structures. Learning management systems, digital repositories, and early online communication tools expanded access to information and instructional materials; however, dominant teaching models largely remained linear, content-driven, and teacher-centered. Empirical studies indicate that technology during this phase was primarily used to support existing instructional routines rather than to redesign learning experiences in transformative ways (Sliwka et al., 2024).

LIMITED INTEGRATION AND EARLY FRAMEWORKS

Studies from this period show that early digital tools were mainly employed for accessing static content, completing structured tasks, facilitating basic communication (e.g., email and discussion forums), and managing course logistics through learning management systems. While these applications increased efficiency and reach, they rarely altered the nature of learning activities themselves.

Instructional frameworks such as TPACK and SAMR emerged to guide more meaningful technology integration. However, research consistently reports that implementation often remained at introductory levels, particularly at the substitution stage, where digital tools mirrored traditional practices rather than enabling pedagogical redesign. As a result, technology integration was frequently procedural rather than pedagogical.

THE FIRST DIGITAL DIVIDE

The literature from this era also highlights growing concerns regarding equity and access. Differences in device availability, internet connectivity, institutional infrastructure, and levels of digital literacy created uneven learning opportunities across regions and populations. These disparities determined which learners benefited from early digital initiatives and which remained excluded.

Importantly, research from this period established a foundational insight that continues to inform contemporary debates: technological access alone does not guarantee educational quality or equity. Without corresponding investments in pedagogy, support structures, and teacher capacity, digital tools risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them.

TEACHER ROLES AND PEDAGOGICAL MINDSETS

Research characterizes teacher identity in the early stages of digitalization as strongly aligned with knowledge transmission. Professional development initiatives focused primarily on technical proficiency – how to operate software or platforms – rather than on instructional design, learner engagement, or pedagogical transformation.

Consequently, technology was widely perceived as an addition to teaching practice rather than as a catalyst for rethinking how learning occurs. This emphasis on operational competence over pedagogical innovation limited the transformative potential of early digital education efforts.

NOW:
INTEGRATED LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS AND REFRAMED EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

Contemporary research shows that education has moved beyond its early digital phase. Technology is now embedded within learning ecosystems that integrate pedagogy, data, platforms, and human interaction. Accelerated by mobile technologies, global connectivity, and especially the COVID-19 pandemic, this shift led institutions to rethink flexibility, learner support, and resilience (UNESCO, 2020). Post-pandemic education increasingly relies on hybrid and blended models, with greater emphasis on well-being and social-emotional learning. Overall, today's educational landscape prioritizes adaptability, inclusion, and responsiveness to human needs, not just digital capacity.

> *"The crisis transformed digital learning from an optional enhancement into a systemic necessity."*

1 THE PANDEMIC AS AN INFLECTION POINT

The literature widely identifies the COVID-19 pandemic as a critical inflection point in educational digitalization. According to UNESCO (2020), the crisis transformed digital learning from an optional enhancement into a systemic necessity. Within a short period, teachers across educational levels were required to redesign instruction for remote and hybrid contexts, accelerating innovation at an unprecedented pace.

Empirical studies indicate that this transition produced several enduring outcomes. Teachers developed greater confidence in using digital platforms, institutions expanded blended and hybrid offerings, and awareness of learner well-being gained renewed prominence. At the same time, the pandemic intensified debates around equity, reinforcing the understanding that digital access is a prerequisite for educational access, but not a sufficient condition for quality learning.

2 AI AS A PEDAGOGICAL PARTNER

Within the current educational ecosystem, AI has emerged as a central focus of research and practice. Over the past decade, studies have documented the rapid expansion of AI applications designed to support personalized learning, adaptive feedback, automated assessment, language development, and learning analytics for early intervention (Sisman-Ugur, 2025a).

> *"... AI's pedagogical value depends on human mediation."*

Importantly, the literature consistently emphasizes that AI's pedagogical value depends on human mediation. Rather than replacing educators, AI systems reposition teachers as designers of learning experiences, interpreters of data-informed insights, and ethical decision-makers within increasingly complex instructional environments. This reframing underscores a shift from technology-driven efficiency toward pedagogically guided augmentation.

> *"Contemporary classrooms increasingly incorporate simulations, 3D environments, and embodied tasks that approximate real-world contexts..."*

3 IMMERSIVE LEARNING AND EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

In parallel with AI developments, immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR), mixed reality (MR), and simulation-based environments have gained substantial empirical support. Systematic reviews demonstrate that immersive learning environments can enhance spatial understanding, contextual reasoning, emotional engagement, and experiential knowledge, particularly in domains where abstract representation alone is insufficient (Ugur & Kuş, 2024).

These findings indicate a gradual movement away from exclusively symbolic forms of instruction toward learning grounded in interaction and experience. Contemporary classrooms increasingly incorporate simulations, 3D environments, and embodied tasks that approximate real-world contexts, thereby expanding the range of pedagogical strategies available to educators.

4 INCLUSION, WELL-BEING, AND LEARNER AGENCY

Recent research also highlights a growing emphasis on inclusion, learner agency, and digital well-being within current educational discourse. Studies report increased attention to social-emotional learning, cultural inclusivity, responsible technology use, and opportunities for student voice and choice (Sisman-Ugur, 2025a). This shift reflects a recognition that educational quality cannot be separated from learners' emotional safety, sense of belonging, and capacity for self-directed engagement.

As a result, education today is increasingly defined not only by the tools it employs, but by the values that guide their use. Contemporary learning ecosystems prioritize human-centered design principles alongside technological innovation, signaling a more holistic understanding of what effective education entails.

> *"...educational quality cannot be separated from learners' emotional safety, sense of belonging, and capacity for self-directed engagement."*

NEXT:
EVIDENCE-INFORMED PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

Recent educational literature increasingly moves beyond descriptive accounts of digital transformation toward evidence-informed projections about the future of learning (Sisman-Ugur, 2025a). Across studies in educational technology, learning sciences, and human–computer interaction, a shared emphasis emerges: future learning environments are expected to be characterized by deeper personalization, greater learner autonomy, and more sophisticated forms of human–technology collaboration. Importantly, these projections are grounded not in speculative assumptions, but in research trajectories and technological developments already underway.

1 AI AGENTS AND AUTONOMOUS LEARNING COMPANIONS

Research on AI and human–computer interaction suggests that educational AI systems are evolving from task-specific tools toward more autonomous and adaptive agents. Contemporary studies indicate that future learning ecosystems may incorporate AI tutors capable of providing continuous, context-sensitive support, as well as conversational agents designed to scaffold metacognitive processes such as reflection, goal setting, and self-monitoring (Sisman-Ugur, 2025b). In this emerging model, adaptive learning companions may dynamically adjust content difficulty and feedback based on learners' engagement patterns and progress.

However, the literature consistently underscores that the expansion of AI agency in education necessitates robust ethical frameworks. Issues of transparency, data privacy, accountability, and responsible algorithmic design are increasingly foregrounded, emphasizing that pedagogical effectiveness must be accompanied by ethical governance. As a result, AI agents are best understood not as independent instructors, but as components of carefully mediated human–AI learning partnerships.

2 IMMERSIVE AND PHYGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

As immersive technologies become more accessible and cost-effective, research predicts wider adoption of phygital learning environments that blend physical and digital experiences. Recent studies suggest that such environments hold particular promise for learning contexts that require spatial understanding, procedural knowledge, or experiential engagement (Ugur & Kuş, 2024-2025?). Applications frequently discussed in the literature include cultural heritage exploration, laboratory simulations, safety and emergency training, and collaborative problem-solving within shared three-dimensional spaces.

Grounded in experiential and embodied learning theories, this line of research argues that immersion can deepen conceptual understanding and improve knowledge retention by situating learning within meaningful contexts. Importantly, scholars caution that the educational value of immersive environments depends on intentional pedagogical design. Without clear learning objectives and reflective integration, immersive experiences risk becoming technologically impressive but pedagogically superficial.

3 NEURO-INFORMED LEARNING DESIGN

Emerging research in cognitive science, neuroeducation, and learning analytics points to a growing interest in neuro-informed approaches to learning design. Studies increasingly explore how instructional decisions might be informed by indicators such as cognitive load, attention patterns, and emotional engagement. Advances in eye-tracking technologies, affective computing, and brain–computer interface research suggest the possibility of more responsive learning systems that adapt to learners' cognitive and emotional states in real time.

At the same time, the literature emphasizes caution. Neuro-informed approaches remain methodologically complex and ethically sensitive, particularly regarding data interpretation and learner privacy. When applied carefully and transparently, however, such approaches may contribute to more inclusive and personalized learning environments by supporting learners with diverse cognitive profiles and needs.

4 EVOLUTION OF THE TEACHER ROLE

Across teacher education research, a consistent projection concerns the evolving role of educators in future learning ecosystems. Rather than diminishing teacher agency, technological advancement appears to expand professional responsibilities. Studies anticipate that educators will increasingly function as ethical leaders in technology use, curators of personalized learning pathways, designers of multimodal and immersive learning experiences, and coordinators of human–AI collaboration (Sisman-Ugur, 2025b).

This evolution underscores the continued centrality of pedagogical judgment, relational expertise, and professional ethics. Future teachers are expected to combine pedagogical wisdom with digital fluency, while maintaining a strong commitment to learner well-being, equity, and meaningful engagement. In this sense, technological innovation intensifies – rather than replaces – the human dimensions of teaching.

5 LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND CONNECTED WORLD

Recent literature also situates future educational transformation within broader social and global contexts. Sustainability, global citizenship, digital rights, and AI literacy are increasingly framed as essential competencies for the coming decade. Curricula will need to address environmental responsibility, critical media and AI literacy, and inclusive digital practices, while fostering learning communities that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries (Sisman-Ugur, 2025b).

These perspectives reflect a growing recognition that education's future is inseparable from societal challenges. Consequently, innovation is increasingly evaluated not only in terms of technological advancement, but also in relation to ethical responsibility, social cohesion, and long-term sustainability.

Read the EduVerse Newsletter #24, a special issue dedicated to sustainability.

A synthesis of the literature from the first quarter of the twenty-first century demonstrates that educational change has been a gradual, layered transformation rather than a simple technological upgrade. Over time, technology became embedded in learning systems, shifting priorities toward flexibility, inclusion, and learner well-being. Future learning will be shaped less by new technologies themselves and more by how well they are aligned with human needs through ethical, thoughtful pedagogy.

Across all stages, teachers remain central, with their roles expanding but their core values – empathy, ethical judgment, adaptability, and reflective practice – becoming even more essential in balancing innovation with care and equity.

In this sense, the next chapter of education is not solely about what technologies can do, but about what education chooses to become. Grounded in evidence and guided by human-centered values, the future of learning holds the potential to be not only more advanced, but also more inclusive, ethical, and meaningfully connected.

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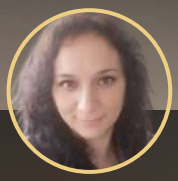

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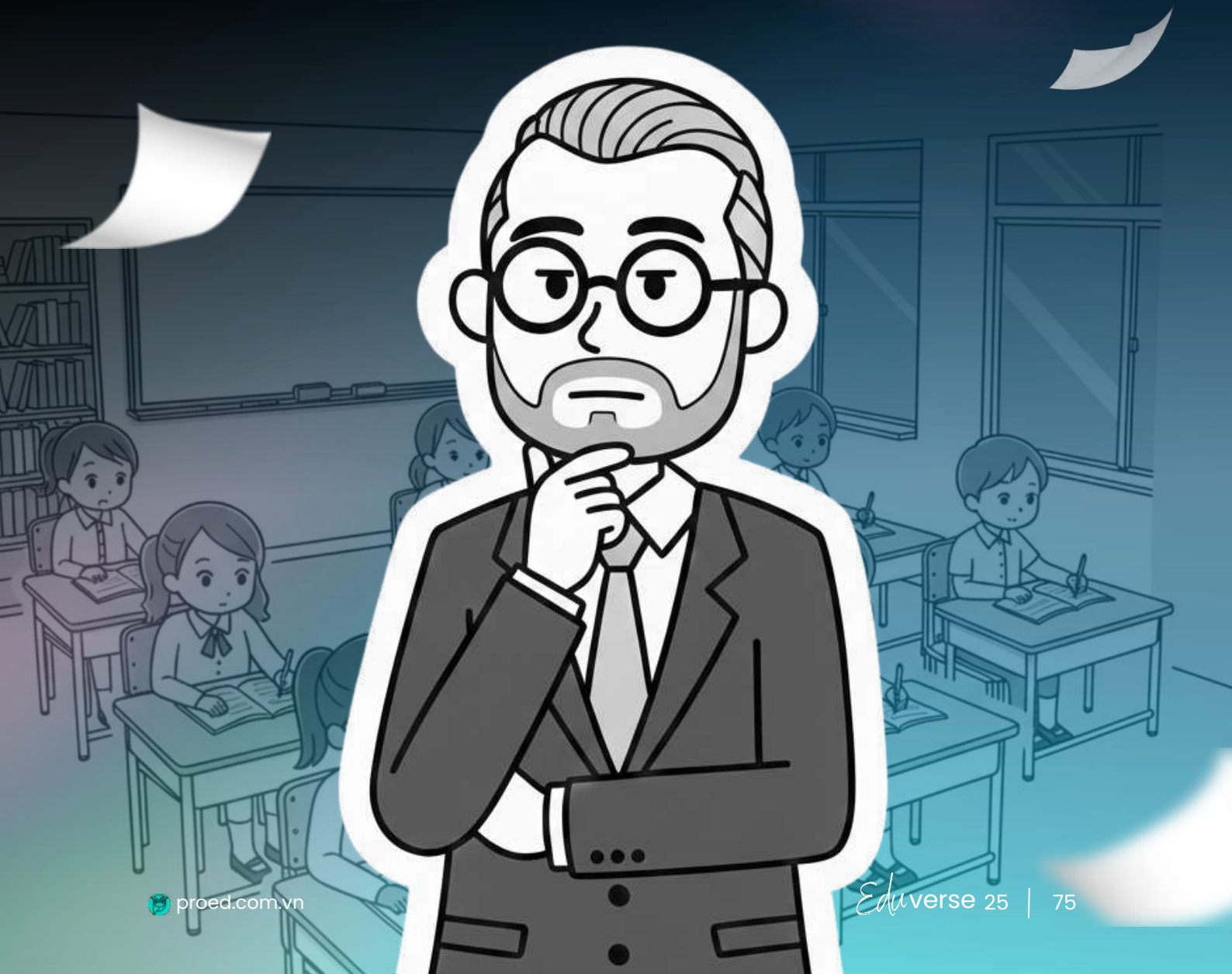
From Motivation to Distinction:

Rethinking LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN AN AGE OF ABUNDANCE

Mohamed Nabil



THEN:

WHEN MOTIVATION WAS ENOUGH

For much of the late 20th century and the early 21st century, language education, especially English language teaching, rested on a simple assumption: students learn English because they need it. They need it to access higher education, secure jobs, or improve their socio-economic status. Motivation was practical and clear.

In the early days of my career as both a learner and a teacher, this assumption influenced everything from curriculum design to classroom management. Grades, certificates, and future job prospects drove student engagement. Students studied English because it opened doors. Parents supported English learning because it represented upward mobility. Teachers relied on the promise of "future usefulness" to justify effort in the present.

In many schools, particularly those in economically challenged areas, this logic worked. English offered opportunities, mobility, and sometimes survival. I witnessed students persevere through difficult grammar structures, long reading passages, and repeated corrections because English symbolized hope. Even when learning was uncomfortable, the reason for learning was unquestioned.

However, as education systems became more global and I began working in elite private schools and international programs in high-income contexts, this logic began to break down. The traditional promise of English no longer resonated with a growing number of students. What once felt essential now felt optional. Motivation, once assumed, had to be negotiated.

"The traditional promise of English no longer resonated with a growing number of students. What once felt essential now felt optional. Motivation, once assumed, had to be negotiated."

NOW:

WHEN MOTIVATION COLLAPSES

In wealthier contexts, I often met students whose basic needs and future careers were already secured. Many came from families with established businesses, inherited wealth, or reliable professional pathways. In countries like Saudi Arabia, where economic security is often guaranteed by family structures, state support, or existing networks, English is not always perceived as a gateway; it is an accessory.

For these learners, English is not essential; it is optional.

This is where many traditional learning theories start to fail – not because they are wrong, but because they were designed for different realities. Instrumental motivation weakens when the rewards it offers lose value. If a student can hire a translator, outsource communication, or rely on bilingual assistants, the urgency to master English disappears. The language shifts from necessity to inconvenience.

At the same time, Maslow's hierarchy of needs turns upside down. Basic needs are met early. Self-esteem may come from family status rather than personal academic achievement. Grades lose their power. Certificates lose their urgency. Teachers lose their authority.

Classroom dynamics change accordingly. Traditional models assume teachers control knowledge and assessment. In elite contexts, though, students – and often their parents – see themselves as clients, and schools are service providers. Authority becomes negotiable. Compliance is not guaranteed.

This shift is further amplified by digital culture. Many students are deeply influenced by online figures – YouTubers, bloggers, and social-media figures – who have achieved fame, wealth, and global reach without formal education or advanced language skills. For these learners, visibility matters more than literacy. Popularity replaces eloquence. English, once again, feels irrelevant.

Finally, relevance declines at the curriculum level. Textbooks focused on job interviews, budgeting, or saving for a first car often feel disconnected from students' lived realities. When content does not reflect a learner's world, motivation collapses.

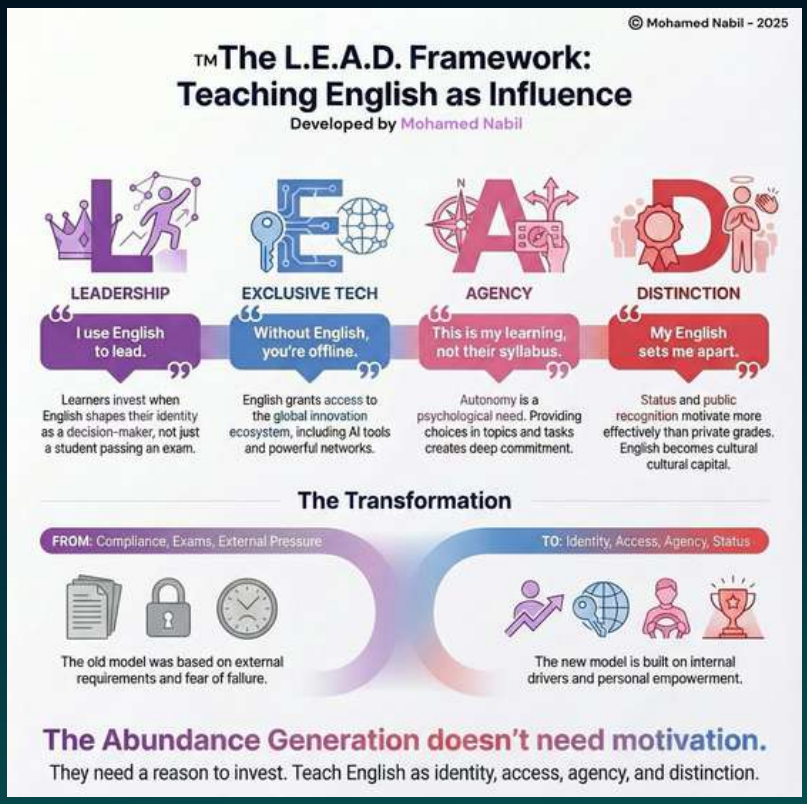
> *"Self-esteem may come from family status rather than personal academic achievement. Grades lose their power. Certificates lose their urgency.* ***Teachers lose their authority.****"*

THE NEED TO RE-ENGINEER MOTIVATION

After years of experience as a teacher trainer, academic leader, and consultant, one conclusion became clear: we cannot force old motivational models onto new educational realities. We must rethink motivation itself.

The MN L.E.A.D Framework emerged from this realization – not as a theoretical abstraction, but as a response to repeated classroom failures. It represents a shift away from viewing English as a purely functional skill and toward understanding it as a tool for **identity, influence, and distinction.**

In contexts of abundance, motivation is no longer driven by fear of failure or economic necessity. It is driven by who learners believe they are and who they want to become.



THE MN L.E.A.D FRAMEWORK

L — LEADERSHIP *(IDENTITY AND INVESTMENT)*

As Bonny Norton (2013) points out, motivation alone is not enough to explain language learning. What truly sustains engagement is investment – the degree to which learners see the language as part of who they are becoming. In affluent settings, students do not invest in English just to get a job. They invest when English enhances their identity.

Under the L.E.A.D framework, language learning is reframed as leadership development. Students learn not just to communicate, but to see themselves as global decision-makers, negotiators, and influencers. When their identity changes, investment follows naturally. English becomes a leadership language, not just a subject in school.

For example, instead of having students practice their speaking through traditional speaking tasks, they are involved in practice for hosting international conferences, leading cross-cultural negotiations, or representing national initiatives globally. This makes engagement shift dramatically.

Here are a few ideas for developing learner identity through language learning activities.

- Frame speaking tasks as leadership scenarios (press briefings, boardroom discussions, global forums).
- Use role-based projects where students act as diplomats, entrepreneurs, or policy advisors.
- Highlight real regional leaders who use English to amplify influence rather than seek approval.

E — EXCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY *(CONNECTIVISM)*

In the digital age, learning is defined not by what individuals know, but by what they can access and connect with. George Siemens' (2005) theory of connectivism captures this shift: the ability to know more is crucial, even more valuable than current knowledge.

In this new model, English serves as an interface. It connects learners to AI tools, global knowledge networks, innovation ecosystems, and international cooperation. Students may have access to technology, but without English, they remain mentally isolated. When AI tools, global platforms, and digital ecosystems are integrated meaningfully into language education, English stops feeling outdated. It becomes modern, strategic, and exclusive – not because it excludes others, but because it unlocks higher levels of access.

For instance, students using AI tools for research quickly realized that prompts, outputs, and insights were far richer in English than in their first language. English became a competitive advantage, not a school subject.

Self-Determination Theory highlights autonomy, competence, and relationships as key psychological needs for intrinsic motivation. Traditional language programs often undermine all three. When teachers control content, pace, and outcomes, autonomy vanishes. When assessment focuses on punishment instead of growth, competence diminishes. When learning feels imposed, relationships weaken.

In the L.E.A.D framework, agency is essential. Learners have meaningful choices over what they learn (topics), how they learn (tools), and how they demonstrate learning (outputs). For example, rather standard presentations, learners are allowed to choose whether to present their projects through podcasts, debates, or visual storytelling.

Choice is seen as a basic need, not a privilege. When agency returns, motivation becomes internal rather than imposed, and participation and quality improved significantly. Teachers can consider:

- Offering choice in topics, formats, and tools,
- Replacing some summative tests with self-designed projects, and
- Including reflective components where students justify their learning choices.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital offers insight into learners' behavior in affluent contexts. Many students already have economic capital. What they want, often unconsciously, is distinction.

They want to stand out – not academically, but socially and symbolically. They want language that conveys authority, sophistication, and presence. They want to be the most articulate voice in the room.

Under L.E.A.D, English is viewed as cultural capital – a sign of status, influence, and leadership. Language learning becomes focused on status and impact, not just survival. When lessons focused on how language signals intelligence, confidence, and leadership in high-stakes environments, students become highly motivated. To highlight this, teachers should:

- Teach advanced discourse features: tone, register, rhetorical devices,
- Analyze speeches, interviews, and high-level public communication, and
- Emphasize clarity, elegance, and impact over grammatical perfection.

NEXT:

EDUCATION BEYOND MOTIVATION

The next phase of education will no longer be driven by fear, compliance, or economic necessity. Instead, it will be shaped by deeper forces: identity, agency, relevance, and the human desire for distinction. Learners will engage not because they must, but because learning resonates with who they are and who they aspire to become.

At the same time, AI will continue to automate access to knowledge, while influencer culture keeps redefining traditional links between effort, reward, and success. In this shifting landscape, the teacher's role cannot remain centered on content delivery. It must evolve toward something more intentional: shaping meaningful motivation.

The educators who will thrive in this environment will not be those who simply explain concepts clearly, but those who understand learners deeply—teachers who can read the psychological, cultural, and social contexts shaping their students' lives, and align learning experiences accordingly. When education speaks to these realities, motivation is no longer imposed; it emerges naturally.

The past 25 years have taught us how to teach more effectively. The next challenge is more fundamental: understanding why learners should care at all.

The MN L.E.A.D Framework does not dismiss educational theory. It recalibrates it for contexts of wealth, privilege, and digital saturation. If education fails in these settings, it will not be because students lack motivation – but because we continue to promote learning using incentives that no longer matter.

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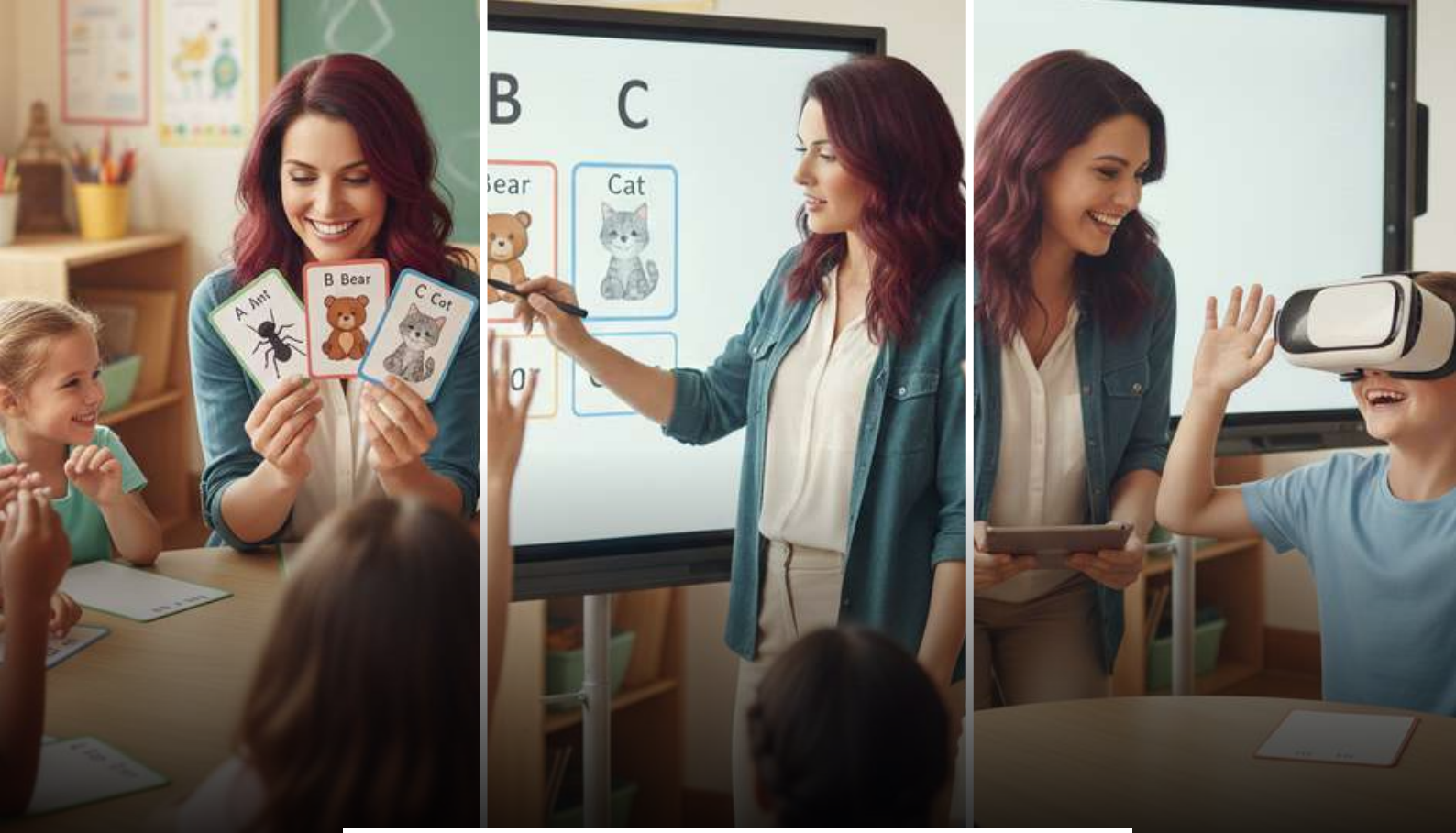


THEN, NOW, NEXT:

EVOLUTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Marcela Villan

25 THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

Over the past twenty-five years, education has undergone profound transformations, shaped by globalization, technological acceleration, shifting societal needs, and, more recently, a global pandemic. English Language Teaching (ELT), in particular, has mirrored and often unlocked these changes. Once largely centred on grammatical accuracy and structural mastery, the teaching of English has evolved into a multidimensional, human-centred practice that embraces communication, global citizenship, sustainability, technology, and intercultural understanding. This evolution has not left linguistic foundations aside, but rather has expanded them to meet the realities of an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

This reflection on the journey of ELT across three moments – Then, Now, and Next – highlights how and why teaching and learning English have transformed over the last quarter century, and what may be expected for the future.

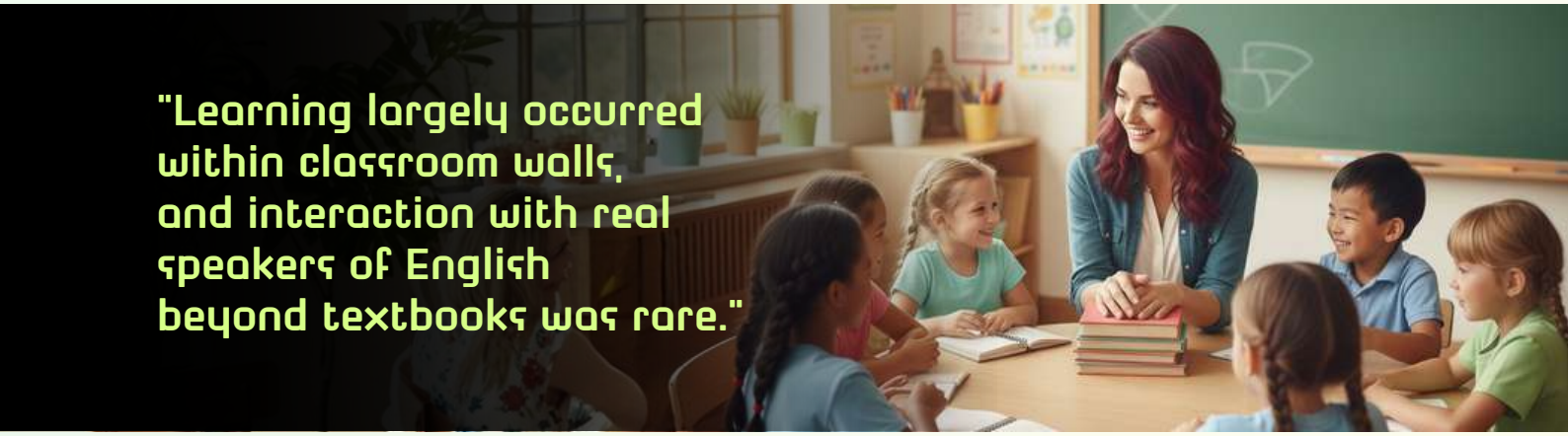
THEN:
FROM GRAMMAR-DRIVEN INSTRUCTION TO COMMUNICATIVE BEGINNINGS

Towards the end of the twentieth century, English classrooms in many parts of the world were still strongly influenced by grammar-translation methods and structural syllabi. Success was often measured by accuracy: correct verb tenses, proper sentence formation, and the ability to reproduce language rules. Coursebooks were linear, teacher-centred, and assessment focused heavily on written tests.

While communicative language teaching had already gained ground, its implementation was often partial. Speaking activities existed, but they were frequently controlled and disconnected from learners' real lives. Culture, when included, was typically limited to surface-level facts about English-speaking countries, reinforcing a narrow and sometimes monocultural view of the language.

Technology played a minimal role. Cassette players, CD-ROMs, and language labs represented innovation at the time. Learning largely occurred within classroom walls, and interaction with real speakers of English beyond textbooks was rare. English was taught as a subject, rather than as a tool for engaging with the world.

Yet, even then, seeds of change were being planted. Globalization, increased mobility, and the rise of the internet began to challenge traditional approaches, calling for learners who could not only know English, but use it meaningfully.



NOW:
ENGLISH AS A GATEWAY TO THE WORLD

Today, ELT looks completely different. English is no longer taught solely for linguistic competence, but for communicative, intercultural, and civic engagement. The focus has shifted from learning about the language to learning through the language.

Grammar still matters, but it is no longer the central focus. Instead, it serves communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Learners are encouraged to express opinions, solve problems, collaborate, and reflect using English as a medium rather than an end in itself.

This shift has opened the door to integrating broader themes such as global citizenship, global awareness, and sustainability. In a world facing climate change, inequality, forced migration, and digital transformation, language classrooms have become spaces where learners explore real-world issues, develop empathy, and engage with diverse viewpoints.

Teaching English now often involves discussing authentic texts, global challenges, ethical dilemmas, and local realities with global connections. Students are not passive recipients of content; they are active meaning-makers whose voices and experiences matter.

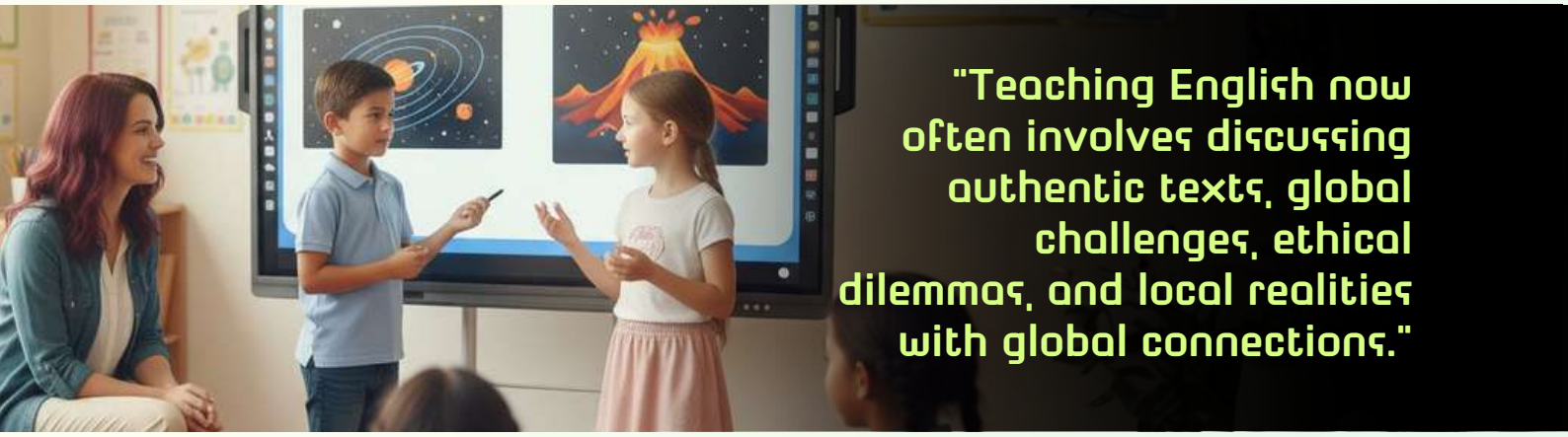
The inclusion of sustainability and global awareness responds to an urgent need. Education can no longer be neutral. English, as a global lingua franca, offers a unique platform to foster awareness, responsibility, and action.

By addressing topics such as sustainable development, responsible consumption, social justice, and cultural diversity, ELT helps learners develop the skills and mindsets needed for the twenty-first century: critical thinking, systems thinking, collaboration, and compassion. Language learning becomes relevant, purposeful, and deeply human.

This approach does not replace linguistic objectives; it enriches them. Learners acquire vocabulary, grammar, and discourse skills while engaging with meaningful content that prepares them for life beyond the classroom.

Perhaps no event has accelerated educational change as dramatically as the COVID-19 pandemic. What began as an emergency response quickly reshaped how we understand teaching and learning.

Before the pandemic, technology in ELT was often an add-on: interactive whiteboards, online exercises, or occasional blended learning experiences. During lockdowns, it became the primary medium of instruction in most parts of the world.



Teachers and learners adapted rapidly, embracing video conferencing platforms, learning management systems, collaborative documents, and digital resources where the context allowed them to do so. While the transition was challenging, it revealed new possibilities, though there is still a large percentage that do not have this possibility even today, especially in the Global South. This has opened a widening gap, which unfortunately, will be very difficult to close.

Virtual classrooms expanded access, flexibility, and inclusivity. Students could connect across borders, time zones, and cultures. English learning became more authentic through virtual exchanges, online projects, and international collaborations.

Post-pandemic ELT has retained many of these innovations. Hybrid models, flipped classrooms, and online communities of practice are now much more common than in the past. Technology is no longer seen as a threat to human connection, but as a tool to enhance it when used thoughtfully.

Crucially, this digital shift has reinforced the importance of pedagogy over tools. Effective ELT today blends solid linguistic foundations with meaningful interaction, digital literacy, and socio-emotional learning.

Among all these changes, one principle remains clear: evolution does not mean replacement. The fundamentals of language learning – vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, pronunciation, and fluency – continue to matter.

What has changed is how and why we teach them. Grammar is contextualized, vocabulary is purposeful, and skills are integrated. Learners acquire language through projects, discussions, problem-solving tasks, and creative expression.

Assessment, too, has evolved. Alongside traditional tests, performance-based assessment, portfolios, self-reflection, and peer feedback now play a greater role, offering a more holistic view of learning.

"AI, climate uncertainty, and shifting labour markets will continue to reshape education."

NEXT:
EDUCATING FOR AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Looking ahead, the future of ELT will likely be defined by complexity, adaptability, and humanity. AI, climate uncertainty, and shifting labour markets will continue to reshape education.

English classrooms will increasingly focus on learning how to learn, ethical use of technology, intercultural dialogue, and inner capacities such as empathy, resilience, and collaboration. Teachers will act as facilitators, designers of learning experiences, and guides in navigating information-rich environments.

Global citizenship and sustainability will no longer be “added topics” but integral dimensions of language education. English will remain a powerful tool, not only for communication, but for connection, understanding, and collective action.

However, moving into the future, the challenge will not be one of language vs. meaning, or technology vs. humanity, or tradition vs. innovation. Rather, the challenge will be one of balance, of finding a harmonious nexus that will continue to enable English education to empower people to connect and contribute in the years to come.

For educators, this shift has been both difficult and rich in meaning. Today, our role as educators has transitioned from simply being information transmitters to becoming designers, facilitators, and guides in this increasingly complex world. We are challenged to make educated decisions regarding pedagogical practices, provide various learning paths, and establish inclusive environments in which each person has a voice.

Looking to the future, what has remained constant within the context of English teaching is the human factor. Technology, resources, and the global agenda are very powerful instruments, but it is the vision and passion that the teacher instills within them that lend them purpose. Within the next chapter of English Language learning, the teacher will again assume an important role, not only to enable the learners to acquire a language but to use the language to understand the world around them and contribute to it meaningfully and responsibly.

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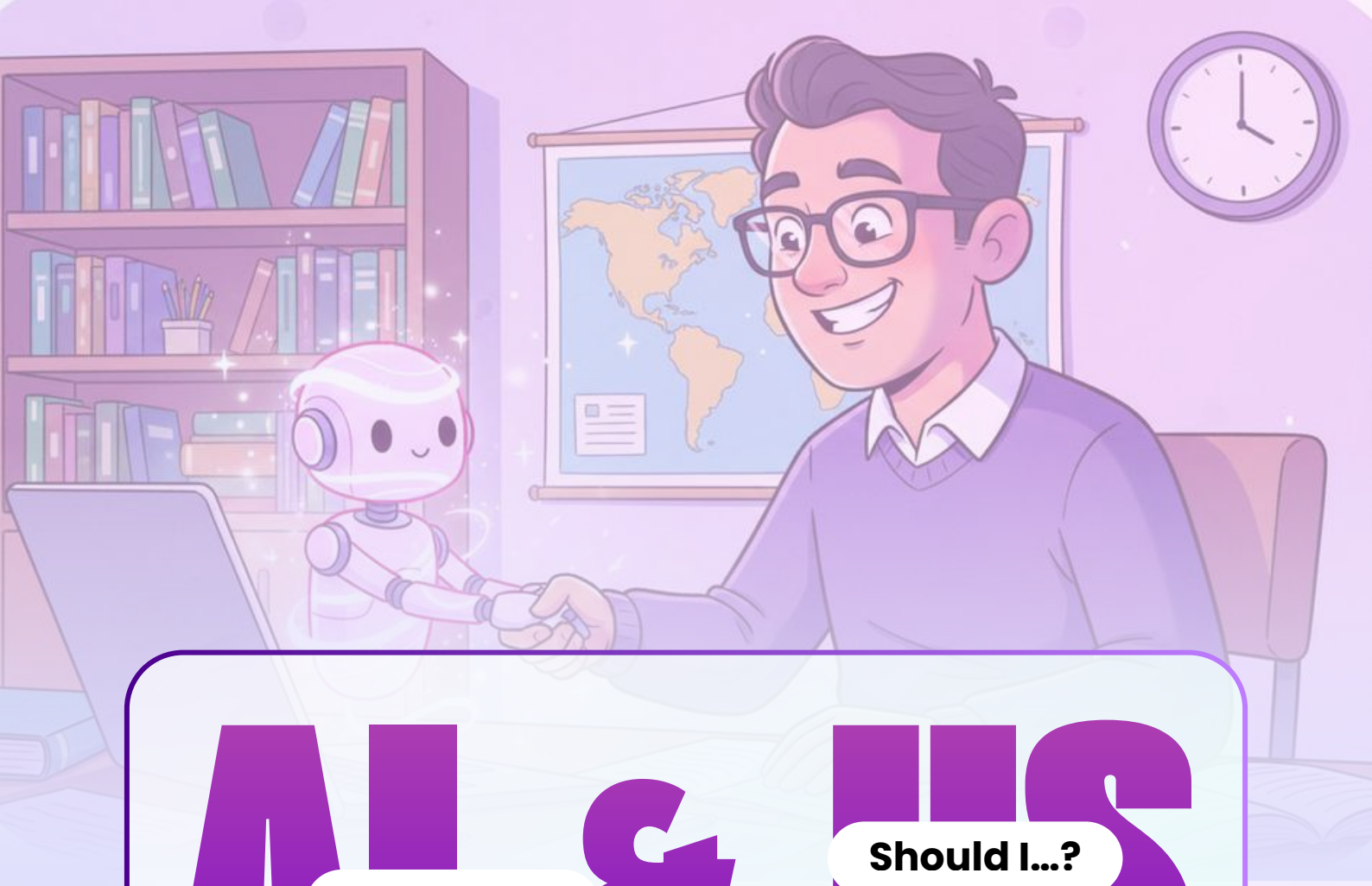
For EduVerse, she is the Guest Editor for its special edition #24, themed Growing Tomorrow: Teaching for a Sustainable Future, issued in November 2005.

Download the full article here.



AI & US

Can I...?

Should I...?

MY ETHICAL COMPASS

Robert Martínez

FROM CURIOSITY TO CONSCIENCE

As an English teacher and teacher educator interested in how technology can be used thoughtfully to enhance learning, the end of 2022 marked a turning point for me. AI was becoming more visible in education, and ChatGPT had just been released. While I was in my office planning some backup lessons, a colleague walked in and asked if I had seen it yet. We sat down and spent a few minutes exploring it before going into our classrooms. That was the start of a more intricate journey. I was used to digital technologies for language teaching, but this ChatGPT was different – I was really surprised and couldn't stop thinking about its potential for the language classroom.

I now see digital tools as neither good nor bad; their value depends on how well we understand learning and and how the tech at hand can be used to help (or hinder) our learners' learning process. Online apps can be very flashy and appealing, but that does not mean they're pedagogically sound, and oftentimes, many were not designed for learning at all. This is why, as informed educators, we need to explore these tools critically and consider their pedagogical return on investment (ROI) for both ourselves and our learners before adopting them. Ultimately, the key question is not Can I use it? but Should I?

I used to think that as long as I could tick a few pedagogical boxes for each tool I decided to use, then I could use it, and my learners would get something out of it. I'm glad to say that that thinking has changed over the years as we become more literate about ethical and responsible use in general – and I say "in general" because in my experience it has not been just about AI use, but all along about technologies and tools turning up every minute. In 2011, Spivack (2011) coined the term 'sharepocalypse' to describe not only the amount of information shared, but also the sense of overwhelm caused by the attention given to that data. Fourteen years later, I believe the situation has not improved, but rather worsened. We are now faced with an ever-expanding array of tools and possibilities, with new ones emerging almost daily. And this is why, I strongly believe, that AI education is more necessary than ever. Educators need to develop a clear understanding of both the risks and benefits of AI an, how we should use it for teaching and learning purposes – both outside and inside the classroom.

ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY

As a teacher and teacher educator, a language assessment specialist, and an inspector for well-known boards and organizations, I constantly have to "think twice and check thrice" before using any digital tool, not only AI applications. In my professional practice, the first question is always *Can I use it?*, but the more important one quickly follows: *Should I use it?*

Becoming more aware of academic integrity has been especially important, especially when my own students use AI to submit essays beyond their **CEFR level** organises language proficiency in six levels, A1 to C2, which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User, and that can be further subdivided according to the needs of the local context. without citing their use properly. In some cases, students even denied using it completely, only to be found out when asked to answer the same essay question live and failing to attain the level of their previous work.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

As a result, being a model for them and bringing AI literacy conversations into the classroom has become a necessary routine in my teaching practice. We need to explore with students what is acceptable and what is not, for example, generating ideas to get them started, conducting preliminary research, creating bibliographies for further reading and checking if they are accurate. This means moving beyond simply adding references at the end of a paper and ensuring that sources are actually read, understood, and used to inform their writing.

NAVIGATING

LEGAL AND ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

In addition to academic integrity, we need to be aware of legal and safe ways to use AI both in and outside the classroom. This makes it essential to stay informed about local, regional, national and international legislation, for example, in a European context, the GDPR and national or regional laws related to learner data privacy. **The GDPR** is a strict EU law that protects the personal data and privacy of EU residents, giving individuals more control over their information and imposing strict rules and potential heavy fines on organizations worldwide that handle EU citizens' data.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Not only is this awareness necessary, but it also regards AI tools themselves – are they transparent about the data they collect? Have we read the small print? Are we using these AI tools to create materials to use in the classroom without feeding any sensitive information into them? What's the age of consent in my context regardless of the AI tool? Are we encouraging them to use specific AI tools? There are many questions we need to ask ourselves and I wonder whether we are actually asking them, considering the busy timetables teachers have.

Recent evidence highlights why this matters. Atabey et al. (2025) audit of five popular AI tools lead to concerning results that none of the tools audited fully complied with the UK's data protection regulations or the Age Appropriate Design Code. And these were only five popular tools.

Ultimately, this reinforces our responsibility to model academic honesty and integrity. We must educate students on how to cite properly, acknowledge AI use, and reference AI-generated output appropriately. Is this easy? No. But as educators, we carry a significant responsibility to guide learners.

> "We must educate students on how to cite properly, acknowledge AI use, and reference AI-generated output appropriately. **Is this easy? No.** But as educators, we carry a significant responsibility to guide learners."

EVALUATING AI IN PRACTICE:

RISKS VS. BENEFITS

Learning Together With Robert

I love using AI to create content for my lessons and for my YouTube channel @LearningTogetherWithRobert, and I often use the Benefit/Risk ethical framework to center my reflections on the AI tool and the output. First of all, it is important to understand the risk of using output as it is. Human oversight is essential to ensure it is suitable, appropriate and in line with our context and lesson learning outcomes. The benefits of doing this is that we become more critical as opposed to lazy! We check and tweak what is necessary. This process forced us to think more carefully about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how our choices may benefit – or potentially harm – our students.

Another area gaining attention among educators is the use of AI for feedback. I have experimented with this as well. It is essential that we do not feed the AI any sensitive information, and that we have a clear set of criteria for the AI to use and for us to check and verify. Effective use goes far beyond asking if this essay is good or bad.

At the same time, it is easy to over-rely on tools that seem to do the work for us. Why struggle when AI can produce something in seconds? This is where the idea of 'cognitive offloading' becomes relevant. If we use AI to do what we say and that's it, then we are handing over control to AI and we stop using our brains altogether. To avoid this, we must remain critical – checking outputs not only for accuracy, but also for bias and transparency.

Most importantly, we need to actively use our own expertise to design effective, thoughtful prompts – grounded in clear criteria, learning outcomes, learner profiles, and sound instructional design. This will help us focus on what WE want from the output and keep on thinking carefully about our own learning and teaching approach.

MY PERSONAL AI USE PLAN AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Reflecting on my practice over the past year as I continue learning about ethical and responsible uses of AI, I'd like to share a few approaches, hoping they will be useful for those who are unsure where to start or would like some extra ideas. In my mind, AI should support and enhance what I do, not replace my work.

01 Areas where I use AI ethically & for professional integrity:

- Generate ideas and conduct preliminary research, especially when I don't know where to start!
- Create an initial bibliography to get me started with. From there, I gather the articles and information needed. An excellent tool is **Consensus.app** as it is designed for research and therefore much less likely to generate inaccurate references. **Perplexity.ai** is also quite good, in my experience.

02 Practicing digital responsibility & academic honesty when using AI

- Check and verify facts and data carefully. This is the exciting part as I check, review, discard or edit information from the AI output to ensure accuracy and relevance.
- Collect information I need for my references and citations so that everything is transparent.
- Ensure my voice is clear in the work I do. In my experience, 'author's voice' is the clearest indicator of pure AI output as it lacks feeling, emotion and the nuances only humans can add to their work.
- Check for bias. Early on, I noticed that the images I was creating were all representative of the LLM culture used by the AI and not representative of my context and learners. Solution? I began designing prompts that were aligned with Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (EDI) principles. Check my series on AI Prompt Writing videos on my YouTube channel for more instructions on this.

And to conclude, I would like to leave you with a few challenges and questions I still reflect on...

How can we strike a balance between over-relying on AI and maximizing its potential for support?

How do we ensure academic honesty while avoiding unintentional plagiarism?

How do we remain transparent and actively address bias?

These are not questions with easy answers, but they are essential ones if we want AI to genuinely serve teaching and learning rather than undermine it.

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AI Transparency Statement

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THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO STRATEGY:

Designing the Future of Learning with AI

Andy Lucchesi

Context & Tension

Over the past quarter-century educators have witnessed wave after wave of technology promises. Digital whiteboards, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and remote learning platforms have each been heralded as the catalyst that would transform schools. Then the pandemic forced every classroom online and acceleratedthe adoption of learning technologies at a pace no one could have predicted. In that whirlwind, the latest wave – generative AI – feels both exhilarating and exhausting. Teachers are experimenting with chatbots and lesson-planning assistants while administrators field pressure from parents, vendors, and policymakers to "implement AI" quickly.

Yet across many institutions, there is little shared strategy. One department adopts an AI grading tool while another bans it. Some teachers embrace generative AI to spark creativity while others fear the erosion of human judgment. The result is a landscape of pilots, workarounds and improvisations that leave faculty feeling fragmented and leaders uneasy about unintended consequences.

This tension is the starting point for understanding the future of learning. On one hand, the speed of change demands that institutions move with urgency; on the other, moving without a plan risks entrenching inequities, exposing students' data and undermining trust. The next decade of AI in education will not be defined by how quickly schools adopt tools but by how intentionally they design the conditions for using them. The question is not whether to use AI but how to build the institutional capacity and governance to do so responsibly. The path from experimentation to strategy requires shifting our focus from products to processes, from hype to design and from technology to human values. That journey is mapped by a governance-first framework – an AI Integration Roadmap – which reframes AI adoption as a question of leadership maturity rather than procurement.

> "Many institutions start with the question '*Which AI tools should we buy?*' rather than '*What problem are we solving?*'"

Why AI Adoption Keeps Failing at the System Level

Despite enthusiastic pilots and promising anecdotes, system-level AI adoption in education often stalls or backfires. One reason is **fragmentation**: individual teachers or departments adopt tools independently, creating islands of practice that never converge into a shared approach. An English teacher may use an AI writing coach while a math teacher avoids AI entirely, and there is no institutional mechanism to synthesise lessons learned. This fragmentation leads to duplication of effort and contradictory policies.

Another stumbling block is **tool-first thinking**. Many institutions start with the question "Which AI tools should we buy?" rather than "What problem are we solving?" This leads to procurement driven by vendor marketing rather than educational need. Without a clear vision, tools are bolted onto existing workflows without rethinking pedagogy or processes. When the novelty wears off, disillusionment follows and the tools are abandoned.

A lack of governance and evaluation exacerbates these challenges. Few institutions have coherent policies on data privacy, accountability or responsible use of AI. Pilots run without clear success criteria or plans for scaling. Educators may not know how models were trained, what biases they carry or who is accountable when something goes wrong. Without systematic evaluation, it is difficult to distinguish genuine benefits from hype. Fear of missteps – from cheating scandals to privacy breaches – breeds institutional fatigue and risk aversion. When the costs and risks of AI experiments accrue disproportionately to marginalised students or overburdened teachers, inequities widen.

Finally, **many educators and leaders are exhausted**. The past decade has seen relentless change: new devices, new platforms, emergency remote teaching, and now AI. When innovation is presented as an endless series of tools rather than a coherent strategy, it becomes another item on a growing list of initiatives. Teachers feel overwhelmed, and leaders perceive technology integration as a distraction rather than a driver of student learning. This fatigue fuels resistance and cynicism, making it harder to build momentum for responsible AI adoption.

Why the Future of Learning Requires a Different Approach

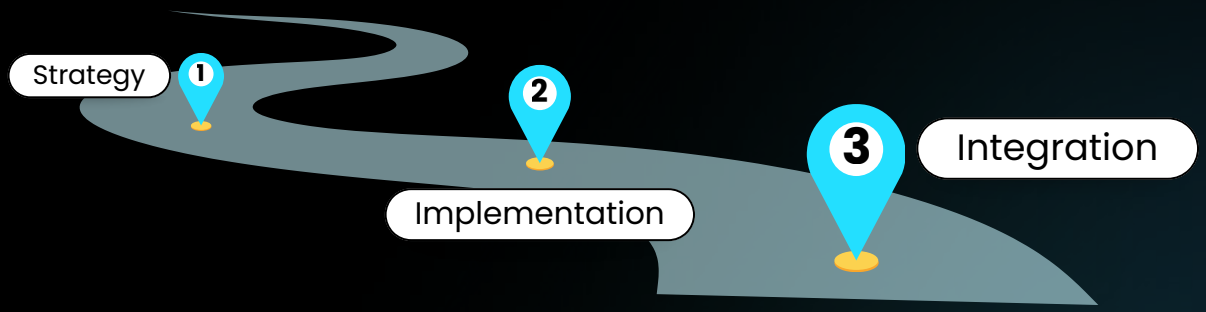
If we are to design a future of learning that benefits all students, we need to pivot from episodic innovation toward intentional design. This means treating AI not as a magic solution but as one component in a complex system of curriculum, pedagogy, policy and culture. Institutions are not startups; they are communities with histories, budgets, obligations and varying capacities. A school district cannot simply "move fast and break things" because the things at stake include students' trust and wellbeing. The future of learning will be shaped by how institutions build the capacity to govern AI, evaluate its impact and integrate it sustainably.

The starting point is to recognise that AI integration is primarily a governance challenge. Technical tools are evolving rapidly, but the fundamental questions of purpose, alignment and accountability remain constant. We need frameworks that enable leaders to pause before purchasing, to articulate a vision of how AI will advance their mission, to pilot in ways that generate evidence rather than headlines and to embed AI into the fabric of teaching and learning without eroding human connection. In other words, institutions must design the conditions under which AI serves their values rather than the other way around.

> "The future of learning will be shaped by how institutions build the capacity to govern AI, evaluate its impact and integrate it sustainably."

Introducing the AI Integration Roadmap in Three Strategic Acts

To support this shift, the AI Integration Roadmap offers a structured journey across three acts: Strategy, Implementation and Integration. Each act comprises three stages that move an institution from uncertainty toward sustainable practice. The roadmap is not a checklist but a developmental pathway. Its purpose is to help leaders ask the right questions at the right time, ensuring that early decisions lay the groundwork for later success. By sequencing reflection, experimentation and consolidation, the roadmap encourages thoughtful governance and evidence-based scaling.



The first act, Strategy, focuses on building the foundation. Institutions assess their readiness, articulate a clear vision and establish governance structures before engaging in experimentation. **The second act, Implementation**, translates strategy into evidence: pilots are designed intentionally, evaluated rigorously and scaled thoughtfully based on data. **The third act, Integration**, embeds AI sustainably: it addresses long-term resource planning, institutional integration and ongoing communication. Together, the acts reflect a progression from uncertainty to knowledge to sustainability.

> "By the end of Act I, an institution has paused the urge to buy the latest tool and instead built a foundation..."

1 ACT I – STRATEGY: BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS

Readiness

The Strategy act begins with **Readiness**. Institutions evaluate their technical infrastructure, data stewardship capabilities, staff capacity and community appetite for AI. This involves surveying teachers, assessing existing technologies, reviewing policies on data privacy and equity, and identifying strengths and gaps. Rather than jumping into pilots, leaders take stock of where they are.

Vision

Next is **Vision**. A clear and shared vision articulates why the institution is considering AI and how it aligns with its educational mission. Does the school seek to personalise learning, streamline administrative tasks or support teachers' professional growth? The vision should be rooted in pedagogy, ethics and equity, not vendor promises. It must be co-constructed with stakeholders, including educators, students, families and community members, to ensure legitimacy and relevance.

Governance

The third stage is **Governance**. This involves establishing policies and processes that set guardrails for AI use. Governance means clarifying roles and responsibilities: Who approves pilots? Who evaluates them? How are privacy and consent managed? It also includes creating ethics guidelines, risk-assessment procedures and mechanisms for accountability. Governance is not about bureaucracy for its own sake; it protects students, ensures transparency and builds trust. Robust governance enables experimentation by defining what is out of bounds and what must be monitored.

By the end of Act I, an institution has paused the urge to buy the latest tool and instead built a foundation: it knows its capacity, knows why it wants to pursue AI and has created guardrails that reduce risk. This foundation is essential for the subsequent experimentation to be safe, purposeful and aligned with mission.

ACT II – IMPLEMENTATION: FROM STRATEGY TO EVIDENCE

Pilot Design

With a solid foundation, institutions move into Implementation. The first stage here is **Pilot Design**. Pilots are small-scale experiments that explore a specific use case aligned with the vision. Rather than launching broad initiatives, leaders identify targeted questions: Can an AI writing assistant improve feedback for struggling writers? Can an adaptive tutor increase math retention for students behind grade level? Pilots should include clear goals, success metrics and timelines, and they should involve volunteer teachers who are trained and supported. Crucially, pilots must be designed to generate data that informs decisions, not to prove a predetermined narrative.

Evaluation

After pilots run, the next stage is **Evaluation**. Here the institution collects and analyses data: Did student outcomes improve? How did teachers and students experience the technology? Were there unintended consequences, such as increased workload or equity issues? Evaluation should be multidimensional, combining quantitative measures (e.g., achievement data, usage logs) with qualitative insights (e.g., surveys, focus groups). Findings should be shared transparently and should inform whether the pilot should be modified, abandoned or scaled.

Scaling

The third stage is **Scaling**. If pilots demonstrate positive impact and alignment with the vision, leaders can plan for broader adoption. Scaling requires careful planning: budgeting for licenses, ensuring technical support, training more educators, revisiting policies and communicating with stakeholders. It is tempting to scale quickly when a pilot shows promise, but the roadmap encourages measured expansion. Scaling should build on evidence and continue to monitor outcomes to catch issues early. If evaluation reveals significant problems, leaders may decide not to scale. By treating scaling as a strategic decision rather than a default outcome, institutions preserve the integrity of their vision and guard against hype-driven expansion.

During Act II, institutions have moved beyond intention to evidence. Through carefully designed pilots, rigorous evaluation and disciplined scaling decisions, AI initiatives are tested against real classroom needs rather than hype. This act ensures that any expansion is grounded in data, lived experience and ethical reflection.

> "During Act II, institutions have moved beyond intention to evidence..."

ACT III – INTEGRATION: MAKING AI SUSTAINABLE

Sustainability

The final act, Integration, addresses the long-term sustainability of AI in education. The first stage is **Sustainability**. Institutions must plan for ongoing resources: budgeting for maintenance and updates, supporting professional development, and ensuring continuous alignment with evolving ethics and policies. Sustainability also involves anticipating changes in technology and regulation. By planning for the long term, institutions prevent AI initiatives from becoming temporary projects that fade when funding ends or champions leave.n adaptive tutor increase math retention for students behind grade level? Pilots should include clear goals, success metrics and timelines, and they should involve volunteer teachers who are trained and supported. Crucially, pilots must be designed to generate data that informs decisions, not to prove a predetermined narrative.

Integration

Next is **Integration** in the organisational sense. AI initiatives should not remain special projects; they should become part of how the institution operates. This means embedding AI into curriculum planning, professional learning communities and assessment strategies. It requires aligning AI use with existing initiatives, such as culturally responsive teaching or competency-based learning, so that AI enhances rather than competes with them. Integration also means revisiting policies and workflows: data governance policies may need updating, procurement processes may need new criteria and roles may need redefining.

Communication

The final stage is **Communication**. Sustained success depends on transparent, ongoing communication with all stakeholders. Parents and students need clear explanations of what AI is used for, how data is protected and what rights they have. Teachers need communities of practice to share experiences, challenges and solutions. Leaders need channels to receive feedback and adjust course. Communication builds trust and reinforces the institution's commitment to ethical, equitable AI use. It also ensures that successes and failures are documented and shared, contributing to a culture of continuous improvement.

Act III acknowledges that technology integration is not a one-time event but a continuous practice. Sustainability, organisational integration and communication ensure that AI becomes a responsible component of the educational ecosystem rather than a passing fad or isolated initiative.

> "Act III acknowledges that technology integration is not a one-time event but a continuous practice..."

Why This Roadmap Redefines the Future of Learning

The AI Integration Roadmap reframes AI adoption as a journey of institutional growth rather than a shopping list of tools. By emphasising strategy before implementation, evidence before scaling and sustainability over hype, it moves institutions from reaction to leadership. The roadmap challenges the assumption that speed equals success. Instead, it suggests that coherence – alignment of vision, governance, experimentation and integration – is the measure of maturity. Schools that rush to adopt AI without this coherence risk replicating inequities and eroding trust. Those that follow the roadmap's progression build capacity for responsible innovation.

This governance-first approach also positions AI as part of "how we operate" rather than an external add-on. When AI is integrated through deliberate design, it supports teachers in focusing on human aspects of learning: mentoring, relationship-building, critical thinking. AI becomes a tool that augments professional judgment rather than replacing it. The roadmap's insistence on reflection, evidence and communication ensures that ethical considerations – such as bias, privacy and inclusion – remain at the centre. In this way, the roadmap aligns with broader movements toward culturally responsive teaching and equity-minded leadership.

As we look toward the next chapter of education, the question for leaders is not "How fast can we adopt AI?" but "What kind of institution do we want to be in an AI-enabled world?" The future of learning is a design choice. Institutions that invest time in readiness, vision and governance will be well positioned to harness AI thoughtfully. Those that rush without strategy may find themselves entangled in crises and chasing trends. The AI Integration Roadmap offers a compass, guiding educators from experimentation to strategy and from technology obsession to human-centred design. The invitation is to slow down in order to move forward with integrity.

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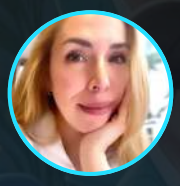

Andy Lucchesi is an AI in Education specialist, educator, and speaker focused on governance-first, ethical AI integration in learning systems. With over 16 years of experience in English language teaching and adult education, she works at the intersection of AI literacy, institutional strategy, and critical thinking. Andy is the co-founder of **Skilling Future**, where she co-designs actionable AI roadmaps and training programs that help educational institutions integrate AI responsibly, equitably, and sustainably.

Reflection on EFL EDTECH AND THE CHANGING CLASSROOM

WHEN TECHNOLOGY TEACHES TOO MUCH

Rob Howard

I've spent decades in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching – in classrooms, conference halls, and now online spaces filled with bright screens and even brighter promises. Over those years, I've watched our profession evolve from chalk and board markers to tablets and algorithms, from the sound of real conversation to the buzz of devices. And while technology has undoubtedly brought new opportunities, I can't help but see how, in many ways, it's quietly reshaping the very heart of learning – often for the worse.

This is something I've talked about many times. My 2019 talk **"Chalk & Talk or Swipe & Skype?"**, in plenaries like **"The Best AI Technology for Your Classroom is You"** and **"Has Technology TECHen Over Your Class?"**, and in discussions on Facebook where teachers share both inspiration and frustration about technology in education. Through all these talks and reflections, one theme keeps emerging: technology isn't inherently bad, but our growing dependence on it is eroding what truly makes learning human.

HOW WE GOT HERE:

From Human Connection to Digital Dependence

When I first started teaching English, things were simpler – not easier, but simpler. Lessons were about people. I learned to read my students' faces, notice the puzzled expressions that told me to slow down, or the spark in their eyes that said they'd just understood a tricky structure. Everything was tactile and direct – we wrote on boards, wrote on paper, and most importantly, talked to one another. Language learning was alive in the room.

Then came the internet, and with it, the first wave of digital tools that promised to make teaching more efficient. At first, it was exciting. Suddenly, we could access authentic materials, stream videos from around the world, and connect students with other speakers thousands of miles away. When I launched **EFLtalks** in 2015, my goal was exactly that: to use technology to share knowledge freely and build community, not to replace it.

***EFLtalks** - free platform for teachers to give short, focused, practical talks on YouTube*

EFLtalks, my free platform for teachers to give short, focused, practical talks on YouTube, was meant to show what happens when teachers help teachers. Over 400 educators from around the globe have shared ideas there, building a global PLN (Professional Learning Network) with 600 videos. It's technology at its best: a tool for connection and empowerment.

But as years passed, I started seeing something different happening in classrooms. The same tools that once empowered teachers were now beginning to control them.

> "Teachers were feeling pressure to "use more tech" - not because it improved learning, but because it looked innovative."

WHEN TECHNOLOGY

Stops Being a Tool

Around ten years ago, I noticed a new pattern: teachers were feeling pressure to "use more tech" – not because it improved learning, but because it looked innovative. Schools began buying expensive software subscriptions. Students were assigned to apps that tracked their progress, corrected their grammar, and "personalized" their lessons. And yet, I was hearing a growing complaint from both teachers and learners: "We're using more technology, but students aren't learning better."

That realization became one of the central ideas in my plenary **"Has Technology TECHen Over Your Class?"** – a title that's half-joking but also painfully accurate. The point I make in that session, and in many follow-ups, is this: the more we automate, the less we communicate.

When I ask teachers what they think their students remember most after a course, it's rarely an app or a piece of software. It's a conversation, a story, a moment of real understanding, but mostly, a teacher. That's because language is social. You can't fully automate empathy, humor, or the rhythm of real speech. But that's exactly what EdTech keeps trying to do.

THE EDTECH PARADOX:

More Tools, Less Learning

The EdTech industry promises efficiency, personalization, and engagement. On paper, it's everything a teacher could want. But here's the paradox I've seen play out over and over again: the more tools we add, the less students seem to learn.

I don't say this as a Luddite. I love technology. I've studied it. I use it every day to write, present, and communicate. But in the EFL classroom, I've seen how easily "digital learning" can become digital distraction. I often remind teachers in my talks on AI: "The best AI technology for your classroom is you." Because no matter how advanced a platform is, it can't replace the insight, adaptability, and emotional intelligence of a real teacher.

Here's what I've come to understand about why EdTech, as it's often implemented today, can harm learning outcomes:

01 Cognitive Overload and the Illusion of Productivity

Modern EdTech and AI platforms bombard learners with colors, notifications, progress bars, and badges. They look dynamic and engaging – but they often create cognitive overload. Students spend mental energy navigating the interface instead of processing the language. I've seen classes where learners spend half the time trying to log in or understand instructions on a screen rather than actually *speaking English.*

In talks and Facebook discussions, teachers often share the same complaint: the tech is beautiful, but it's *getting in the way*. That's the paradox – technology built to save time ends up stealing it from the real task.

02 "Personalization" Without Personal Contact

One of the biggest marketing points of EdTech is personalization – the idea that AI can adapt materials to each student's level and pace. But real personalization in language learning is not about data points; it's about *relationships*.

A teacher can notice when a student is anxious, bored, or confused – even when they say nothing. An app can't. AI doesn't hear tone, see body language, or sense hesitation. It can generate vocabulary lists, but it can't sense the pride or fear in a learner's voice when they finally use a new word in conversation. AI can't see you.

In one of my recent plenaries, **"Stop Listening to AI 'Experts' and Become One"**, I spoke about how teachers must be their own critical filter between tech and learning. Don't just listen to the "experts" expounding on the latest and greatest application. We need to question what these tools are really doing and who they're really serving. Most of the time, they're serving business models, not educational ones.

03 The Disappearing Teacher

As technology becomes more sophisticated, some institutions start to see teachers as an optional expense rather than an essential asset. Automated assessment tools, AI chatbots, and video lessons are marketed as cost-saving solutions. But this trend undermines the one thing students value most: *human interaction.*

During my plenary, **"The Best AI Technology for Your Classroom is You",** I pointed out that technology should enhance teaching, not replace it. The danger isn't AI itself – it's the mindset that teachers are less necessary because of it. I often remind people that the most effective lessons are still the ones where students are speaking, making mistakes, laughing, and connecting. No app has ever duplicated that yet.

04 Gamification Gone Wrong

Gamification, the use of points, badges, and leaderboards, can be motivating, but only when tied to meaningful learning goals. Too often, students play the game but forget the language. They focus on "winning" rather than *understanding*.

I've seen learners memorize phrases just to pass a quiz, only to forget them days later. The result? Surface-level engagement that doesn't translate into real communication skills. In EFL, success is measured not by points earned but by the ability to hold a conversation, express a thought, or understand humor in another language – things no algorithm can fully measure.

05 Teachers Without "Technogogy"

In many of my talks, I've used the term *technogogy* – the intersection of technology and pedagogy. The problem isn't that teachers don't want to use technology; it's that many aren't properly trained to integrate it meaningfully. Schools often hand teachers new tools without providing training in how those tools fit pedagogically. The result is tech for tech's sake – a shiny distraction from the core of teaching.

This is why I continue to present on the caveats of AI. Teachers need to develop their teaching skills, not their ability to just press play. Teacher development should be about subjects from grammar hacks to motivational strategies, not the latest freeware to make your job easier. It's not about selling products; it's about sharing experience. That's what professional development should be: grounded in authenticity and accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford expensive EdTech licenses. We don't need algorithms to personalize our growth – we need each other.

WHAT WE'RE LOSING

and How to Get It Back

When I think about what's being lost in the rush toward EdTech, I keep returning to one word: *presence*. In older classrooms, there was an energy. A give-and-take between teacher and students. You could feel life in the room. Now, with students staring at screens, that energy often disappears. We get compliance, but not engagement.

The irony is that the most valuable skills in language learning – critical thinking, empathy, cross-cultural communication – are exactly the ones that technology can't yet replicate well. These are *human* skills, not mechanical ones.

In my talk **"Is BELF Obsolete in the Age of AI?"**, I explored the idea that English as a Lingua Franca is evolving alongside technology, but that communication still requires more than accurate words. It requires understanding context, humor, and nuance – all of which come from real, messy, unpredictable human interaction designed to get the job done, not to be perfect.

So how do we reclaim that? By returning to the basics:

- **Use technology as a bridge, not a barrier.** Let it connect learners to new voices, not replace their own.
- **Prioritize conversation over convenience.** A five-minute genuine exchange teaches more than fifty multiple-choice questions.
- **Empower teachers as designers, not operators.** Let them decide when and how tech supports their methods, not the other way around.

> "...we must always ask: Is this helping my student communicate better, or just keeping them busy?"

WHY I STILL BELIEVE

in a Balanced Future

Despite my critiques, I'm not anti-technology. I'm pro-human. I believe we can and should use EdTech – but wisely. When used with intention, tools like online corpora, pronunciation analyzers, and interactive video can deepen understanding and bring language to life. But we must always ask: *Is this helping my student communicate better, or just keeping them busy?*

In every talk I give – whether it's at a conference, in webinars, or on YouTube – I remind teachers that we are the technology. We're the adaptive system. We process emotion, context, and culture in real time. We build trust. And trust is the foundation of learning.

Technology can simulate dialogue, but it can't replace the teacher who stays late to help a nervous student prepare for their first job interview in English. It can't feel pride when a shy learner finally speaks up. Those are the moments that make this profession what it is – and no app can replicate them.

Reclaiming the Classroom

As EFL teachers, we stand at a crossroads. On one side is a future where algorithms dictate what and how we teach; on the other is a future we build ourselves – one that values creativity, humanity, and critical thinking.

I've seen both sides, and I know which one I'm choosing. I want to continue using technology, but on my terms – as a complement to my teaching, not a competitor. I want students to see that learning a language isn't about mastering an app; it's about discovering new ways to connect with people and ideas.

When I look back at my journey – the talks I've given, the educators I've met, the debates we've had – I realize the same message runs through all of them: real education happens between people. Screens can display information, but they can't inspire. Data can track progress, but it can't build confidence. AI doesn't build character. Teachers do.

That's our job. That's why we teach.

And that's why, even in the age of AI, I'll keep reminding anyone who will listen: *the best technology in your classroom is you.*

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FROM AUTOMATION TO CONNECTION:

WHAT 25 YEARS IN EDUCATION & TECHNOLOGY HAVE TAUGHT US ABOUT HUMAN LEARNING

Dr. Daniele Ponzo

THEN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

When I started my career in the early 2000s, "digital transformation" was a buzzword whispered in the corridors of IT departments and universities. The focus was on information (systems, databases, procedures). We were building the infrastructure of the digital age, but not yet the human bridges that would connect people through it.

In education, this mirrored what was happening in technology: **a focus on content over connection.** Students were recipients of knowledge, teachers were transmitters, and "learning" meant remembering rather than doing. In corporate training and language education alike, success was measured in how much you *knew*, not in how well you could *apply* it.

25 THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

Then came the first major shift**: globalization.** Suddenly, teams were no longer local. Multinationals connected people across borders, and English became the *lingua franca* of collaboration. I experienced this first-hand when I joined an international IT company in Dublin. Technical knowledge was crucial, but the real challenge emerged between the lines: in the space where communication, culture, and confidence met.

The paradox was striking: the same professionals who could automate complex workflows or design advanced systems often froze when asked to present their ideas in English. They could speak "technology" fluently, but not "people".

This gap between *knowing* and *communicating*, between *language* and *connection*, would define much of my next twenty years in training and education.

NOW THE AGE OF CONNECTION

The last quarter century has been a crash course in collective adaptability. From e-learning platforms to the pandemic-driven rise of remote classrooms, technology has become not just a tool, but the *environment* where learning happens.

But technology alone doesn't teach. What truly transforms education is communication, the way we make meaning together in new contexts.

During my years working with IT professionals, I've seen that English is no longer just a skill to add to a CV. It's a *career enabler*, a bridge between expertise and visibility. And the same principle applies to education more broadly: digital tools may amplify content, but *language* (verbal, visual, emotional) is what truly gives it life.

Teachers, trainers, and coaches are no longer just deliverers of knowledge; they are *facilitators of understanding*. The most impactful educators today are those who can navigate uncertainty, translate complexity, and design learning experiences that go beyond the screen.

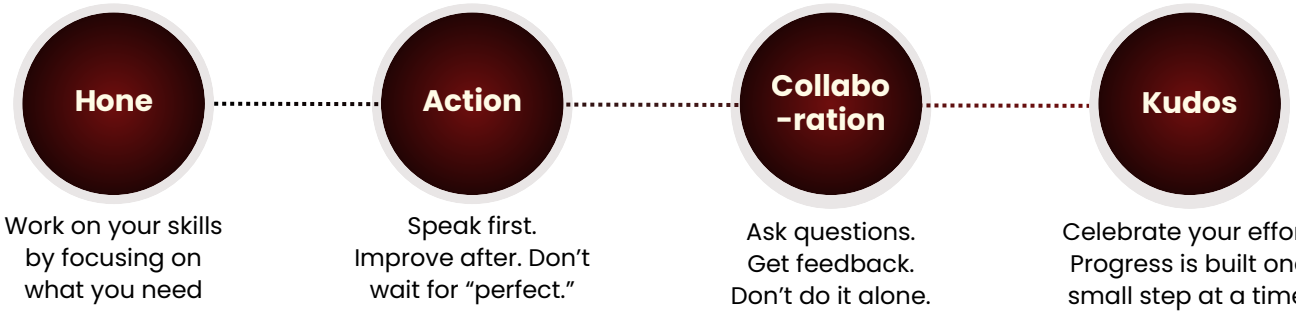
The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this realization. When classrooms moved online, we learned that education was not about the *platform*, but about the *quality of presence*. The challenge wasn't technological; it was relational. How do you keep human connection alive when the classroom becomes a grid of muted microphones?

Those months showed us something essential: digital literacy means nothing without emotional literacy. We discovered that engagement requires empathy, and that "soft skills" (communication, curiosity, collaboration) are in fact the hardest ones to teach and sustain.

"The most impactful educators today are those who can navigate uncertainty, translate complexity, and design learning experiences that go beyond the screen."

In my own practice, I responded to this need by blending my two worlds – technology and language – to create programs where children, teenagers and professionals could *practice communication as a skill*, not just study it as a subject.

My H.A.C.K. framework (Hone, Action, Collaboration, Kudos) grew from this principle: learning happens when knowledge meets practice, when reflection meets feedback, and when effort meets recognition.



That same principle can (and should) guide education at large. Whether you're teaching coding, languages, or history, learning becomes transformative when it's active, social, and visible.

LESSONS FROM THE FIRST 25 YEARS

Looking back, I see three lessons that have defined the evolution of learning since 2000:

1 Access without purpose creates noise.

The democratization of education – MOOCs, open-source resources, and now AI – has given everyone access to knowledge. But access doesn't automatically mean understanding. We have built oceans of information, yet many learners still struggle to swim. The next step is not *more content*, but *more context*.

Educators today need to become designers of meaning and curators who help learners connect the dots and apply what they learn in real scenarios. In my field, for example, teaching "business English" means helping professionals use language to *influence, negotiate, and lead* – not just to memorize vocabulary.

2 Confidence is a skill, not a gift.

For years, I've seen learners hide behind grammar books, waiting for the moment they would "feel ready" to speak. But readiness doesn't come from perfection; it comes from *practice in a safe environment.*

The same applies to teachers. The past 25 years have shown us that educators thrive when they, too, are given space to experiment, to fail safely, and to grow. Empowering teachers as learners through mentoring, reflection, and community is essential if we want innovation to be sustainable.

3 Language is leadership.

In every sector, the ability to communicate ideas clearly and empathetically has become a leadership skill. This goes beyond linguistic competence; it's about *voice*: the capacity to express, inspire, and connect across differences. When I train IT professionals, I often remind them that "communication is not decoration". It's the backbone of teamwork, the driver of trust, and the foundation of culture. Education systems that nurture this awareness go above and beyond preparing learners for exams: they're preparing them for life.

NEXT THE AGE OF TRANSFORMATION

If the first 25 years of this century were about connecting the world, the next 25 will be about humanizing it.

AI is already rewriting how we access information. Generative tools can summarize, translate, and even simulate learning conversations. But what they cannot replace – and must never replace – is *the educator's role as a connector of meaning*.

The future of education, in my view, lies in **hybrid intelligence:** the partnership between human creativity and technological precision. Teachers will not compete with AI; they will *collaborate* with it, using it to personalize learning while preserving empathy, ethics, and purpose.

Here's what this means in practice:

1 From AI literacy to AI fluency

Just as we once taught digital literacy, we now need to teach *AI fluency*: the ability to use, question, and co-create with intelligent systems. But this is not just about knowing how to prompt a chatbot. It's about critical thinking, ethical awareness, and understanding how technology shapes our perception of truth and knowledge.

2 From classrooms to communities

The next evolution of education is *social learning ecosystems*. Formal institutions will coexist with online communities, peer mentoring networks, and workplace academies. The boundary between "teacher" and "learner" will blur as it already has in many global classrooms.

My own journey reflects this shift. Through my work with schools and professionals, I've seen that learning accelerates when it's shared. A teacher explaining the CLIL method to colleagues, a developer mentoring a junior teammate in English. These are the real laboratories of learning.

3 From performance to purpose

In the coming decades, education will increasingly be measured not by test scores but by *transferable impact*: how learners apply what they know to improve their lives and strengthen their communities.

In this sense, language education offers a perfect metaphor. Learning English is not only about mastering grammar; it's also about opening doors. When professionals learn to communicate across cultures, they become more confident, they grow their careers and they expand the reach of their ideas.

Education at every level should aim for that kind of transformation: *from knowing to doing, from doing to becoming.*

BRINGING THE NEXT GAP

If I were to summarize what I've learned across these years in one sentence, it would be this: **technology changes fast, but people change through communication.**

In 2000, we focused on machines.
In 2020, we focused on platforms.
In 2026 and beyond, we must focus on *people.*

The paradox of our time is that the more we automate, the more we need authenticity. In a world of instant answers, learners still crave real connection: a teacher who listens, a mentor who believes in them, a voice that says, "You can do this".

That is why I believe the educator of the future will be part *designer*, part *coach*, and part *storyteller*. They will blend the precision of technology with the empathy of human experience.

And this is not wishful thinking. Around the world, I've seen teachers already doing this: integrating AI tools to personalize lessons, creating flipped classrooms to encourage autonomy, using storytelling to build confidence, and designing CLIL projects that bring language and content together.

Their classrooms, whether physical or virtual, are more than places of instruction: they are spaces where students grow together and prepare for the challenges ahead.

> *"In a world of instant answers, learners still crave real connection: a teacher who listens, a mentor who believes in them,* ***a voice that says, "You can do this".****"*

TEACHING FOR A CONNECTED FUTURE

As we enter the next quarter century, we have an opportunity and a responsibility to redefine what it means to *educate*.

We cannot prepare learners for the future by teaching them about the past. We must help them navigate uncertainty with confidence, curiosity, and compassion. That means equipping them not just with information, but with the *communication skills*, *cultural awareness*, and *emotional intelligence* to thrive in a global, multilingual, AI-augmented world.

I often tell my students: *you don't need to sound like a native speaker to lead; you need to sound like yourself, clearly and confidently.* The same is true for education. The goal is not to imitate what worked before, but to express who we are as educators, learners, and communities in a world that keeps changing.

Because if the past 25 years have taught us anything, it's this:
Education doesn't evolve through technology alone. It evolves through the courage to communicate.

"Education doesn't evolve through technology alone. It evolves through the courage to communicate."

Daniele Ponzo

Daniele Ponzo is a Business English Coach with 13+ years in IT and 8 years teaching English. He helps IT professionals improve communication for global careers. With a master's in Sociology and Mass Media and project leadership experience at Xerox and the Italian Ministry of Education, he blends technical expertise with coaching and has supported 300+ students. Passionate about helping professionals reach their potential, Daniele also hosts The Non-Native Leader, a video podcast sharing the stories of global leaders who learned English as a second language.

THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

LEARNING FORWARD WITHOUT LOSING OUR HUMANITY

Elishama Therese B. Dunton

Learning, Humanity, and Connection:
Balancing Innovation with Empathy and Well-Being

A year ago, a student in my class submitted a research report that, at first glance, appeared exemplary. The language was fluent, the structure carefully organised, and the arguments neatly aligned with the task requirements. It met every visible criterion of academic success. Yet when I asked the student to explain how the ideas had been developed and why particular sources had been chosen, there was a pause, followed by visible uncertainty. The student struggled to articulate the reasoning behind the work.

This was not a disciplinary moment, nor was it framed as an accusation. Rather, it was a revealing one. The work was polished, but the learning beneath it was fragile.

Around the same time, another student quietly submitted a well-being request through our school's digital platform, signalling emotional distress that had gone unnoticed in the classroom. The student had not spoken up, raised concerns, or demonstrated obvious behavioural changes. Without the platform, their experience may have remained invisible.

In both cases, technology did what it does best: it surfaced information efficiently. What it could not do was determine what came next.

These moments capture a defining tension in contemporary education. As AI, data platforms, and digital systems become increasingly embedded in schools, educators are expected to innovate rapidly and continuously. At the same time, student mental health concerns are rising globally, and classrooms are more linguistically and culturally diverse than ever, as highlighted in reports by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and the WHO (World Health Organization). The challenge, therefore, is not whether education should embrace innovation, but how it can do so without losing empathy, connection, and humanity.

> "The challenge, therefore, is not whether education should embrace innovation, but how it can do so without losing empathy, connection, and humanity."

Innovation Has Accelerated, and So Have Student Needs

Over the past twenty-five years, education has undergone profound transformation. Classrooms have shifted from static content delivery towards interactive, inquiry-based, and globally connected learning environments. Digital tools now enable real-time collaboration, personalised feedback, and access to information at an unprecedented scale. AI supports lesson planning, assessment design, differentiation, and content generation in ways that were largely unimaginable at the turn of the century.

This acceleration, however, has not occurred in isolation. It has coincided with growing pressures on young people. Students today navigate academic expectations alongside social media exposure, digital saturation, performance anxiety, and increasing uncertainty about their futures. The OECD (2021) highlights a clear relationship between emotional well-being, engagement, and learning outcomes, underscoring that academic success cannot be separated from social and emotional development.

In culturally and linguistically diverse contexts, these challenges are further compounded. Students may be learning in a second or third language while negotiating identity, belonging, and cultural expectations. For many, school is not only a place of academic learning but also a primary site of social and emotional development.

In this context, innovation alone is insufficient. When introduced without reflection, technology risks amplifying stress rather than alleviating it. Tools designed to increase efficiency can unintentionally increase surveillance, pressure, or comparison. The future of learning therefore depends not only on what tools are adopted, but on how thoughtfully they are integrated into the lived experiences of students.

Well-Being Systems
as Gateways, Not Solutions

In my current school context, student well-being is embedded into everyday practice rather than treated as a separate or reactive initiative. Digital platforms allow students to reflect on their emotional state, flag mental health concerns, or request a well-being check. These systems provide teachers and pastoral teams with timely insights that may otherwise remain invisible.

Crucially, however, technology does not replace professional judgment, but supports it. A well-being alert is not a diagnosis, nor is it a solution. It is a signal that invites human response.

The most meaningful work happens after the notification. It happens when a teacher checks in, listens carefully, and considers the student's emotional readiness, cultural background, and individual circumstances. International research consistently emphasises that well-being initiatives are most effective when they are relational rather than purely procedural (OECD, 2021).

In linguistically diverse classrooms, students may struggle to articulate distress verbally, particularly in a second language. Digital tools can provide a quieter entry point for communication, reducing barriers and stigma. Yet trust and understanding are built through conversation. Technology can open doors, but it is human connection that allows students to step through them.

> "Technology can open doors, but it is human connection that allows students to step through them."

AI, Assessment,
and Authentic Learning

A similar balance emerges in assessment, particularly in inquiry-based subjects such as Global Perspectives. Students complete a research report as part of their checkpoint assessment, requiring them to investigate global issues, evaluate sources, and construct reasoned arguments.

With the widespread availability of generative AI, attempting to eliminate its use entirely would be unrealistic and counterproductive. Students already interact with AI outside school contexts, and education cannot meaningfully engage with the future by ignoring this reality.

Global guidance increasingly suggests that generative AI should be approached through ethical use, transparency, and critical engagement rather than prohibition (Miao & Holmes, 2023). In practice, this requires a shift in assessment philosophy. Learning must be understood as a process, not merely a polished product.

When concerns arise regarding the authenticity of student work, AI detection tools may serve as an initial reference point, but they are never the final judgment. These tools are imperfect and cannot capture nuance, context, or learning intent.

Instead, students are asked to explain their thinking, justify their arguments, and reflect on how their work was developed. Conferences, reflections, oral explanations, and metacognitive tasks become central. This approach shifts the focus from surveillance to understanding.

Rather than asking, "Did you use AI?", the more meaningful question becomes, "What do you understand, and how did you arrive there?"

When students can articulate reasoning, demonstrate conceptual understanding, and reflect on their learning journey, authenticity is preserved regardless of the tools used. In this way, AI becomes a support for thinking, not a substitute for it (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

What Technology Cannot Replicate

Despite rapid technological advancement, certain aspects of teaching remain beyond the reach of automation. Empathy, ethical judgment, cultural sensitivity, and emotional attunement are deeply human capacities. International education frameworks increasingly recognise these skills as essential for preparing learners to navigate complexity and uncertainty (OECD, 2018).

As mental health concerns among young people continue to rise globally, the teacher's role as a relational anchor becomes increasingly significant. A timely conversation, a moment of reassurance, or an act of understanding can profoundly shape a student's sense of belonging and self-worth. These interactions cannot be generated, automated, or scaled through algorithms. They rely on presence, attentiveness, and professional intuition.

The danger lies not in innovation itself, but in forgetting what education is ultimately for. When efficiency and performance overshadow care and connection, learning becomes transactional rather than transformative.

Redefining the Teacher's Role in the Future of Learning

The future of learning does not diminish the role of teachers; it reshapes it. Teachers are increasingly called upon to act as ethical designers of learning experiences. They guide students through powerful technologies while safeguarding intellectual integrity and emotional well-being.

This role requires discernment. Not every tool needs to be used simply because it exists. Professional judgment involves knowing when innovation enhances learning and when restraint better serves students. In culturally diverse contexts, this discernment becomes even more critical. Tools must be adapted thoughtfully to respect language, identity, and local realities. Equity is not achieved through uniformity, but through responsiveness.

Teachers are no longer simply content deliverers. They are facilitators of dialogue, interpreters of data, and custodians of learning culture. This expanded role requires institutional trust, ongoing professional development, and recognition of the emotional labour inherent in teaching.

Holding Innovation and Humanity Together

The classrooms of the future will not be defined by the sophistication of their tools alone, but by the values that guide their use. When technology supports reflection, care, and critical thinking, it becomes a powerful ally. When it distances learners from their own voices or reduces relationships to metrics, it requires re-evaluation.

Education's task moving forward is not to choose between innovation and humanity, but to hold both deliberately and responsibly. Ultimately, the future of learning will be shaped less by technological capability than by human intention. In a world defined by acceleration and automation, education's most enduring contribution may be its commitment to empathy, dignity, and connection.

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Learning Without Borders:
TEACHING STUDENTS TO NETWORK WITH PURPOSE

Carla Powell Lewis

THEN:
WHEN GLOBAL LEARNING REQUIRED INTENTION

At the turn of the 21st century, global learning did not look the way it does today. There were no learning management systems, no high-speed Wi-Fi in every classroom, and certainly no social media platforms connecting students across continents in seconds. Yet, even then, visionary educators understood that meaningful learning extended beyond the four walls of a classroom.

In 2001, as a novice teacher observing best practices during her early years in education, I encountered a mentor whose approach would quietly forecast the future of global learning. Ms. Wilkerson, a veteran high school law studies teacher, had transformed her classroom into a hub of structured dialogue beyond state lines. With a modest four-computer lab stationed in the back of her classroom, students rotated in small groups, engaging in scheduled online discussions with peers in other states. The conversations were not casual exchanges. They were guided by prompts, anchored in constitutional principles, current events, and civic responsibility.

This was global learning before it had a label. It was intentional, inquiry-based, and rooted in the belief that students learn best when they are challenged to consider perspectives beyond their own communities. Access was limited, time was rationed, and technology was slow – but the pedagogy was sound.

That early experience serves as a powerful reminder: meaningful innovation in education has never been about tools alone; it has always been about purpose.

NOW: STUDENTS ARE GLOBAL - JUST NOT GUIDED

Fast forward to 2025, and today's students are unquestionably global citizens. They communicate across time zones through social media, gaming platforms, and messaging apps with little effort and even less adult supervision. They exchange ideas, humor, opinions, and misinformation at unprecedented speed. What once required scheduled rotations and dial-up connections now happens instinctively and continuously.

However, this unstructured connectivity presents a paradox. While students are networked, they are not necessarily learning. Without guidance, online discourse often lacks depth, critical analysis, and accountability. Conversations may reinforce echo chambers rather than promote understanding. Cultural misunderstandings can flourish without context. Civic dialogue is frequently replaced with performative commentary.

Schools, meanwhile, have struggled to catch up. In many classrooms, global learning remains underutilized or reduced to one-off virtual exchanges rather than embedded instructional practice. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated virtual learning, yet it also exposed a gap: technology expanded access, but pedagogy did not always follow.

The opportunity before educators now is not to introduce global connection – but to reclaim it with intention.

In many school systems, however, the absence of structured global learning is not due to lack of interest, but lack of guidance. Teachers are often expected to innovate without sufficient planning time, professional learning, or institutional support. As a result, global engagement remains optional rather than embedded, leaving its potential unrealized. Addressing this gap requires intentional investment in instructional design, collaborative partnerships, and educator capacity-building – ensuring that global learning is not dependent on individual initiative alone.

WHAT
STRUCTURED GLOBAL LEARNING
LOOKS LIKE

Structured global learning is not about allowing students to "chat" with peers abroad. It is about designing learning environments where global interaction serves clear academic and developmental goals.

In a structured setting, teachers intentionally partner with classrooms in other regions, states, or countries. Together, they co-design inquiry questions aligned to curriculum standards. Students engage through moderated discussion boards, synchronous or asynchronous exchanges, collaborative research tasks, and shared reflections. Norms for discourse are explicitly taught. Cultural context is introduced before conversations begin. Assessment criteria prioritize reasoning, evidence, and respectful engagement.

For example, students studying government might analyze how different countries approach voting rights. History students might compare how nations remember shared global events. Language arts classrooms may explore storytelling traditions across cultures. The global exchange becomes a vehicle for deeper learning – not a distraction from it.

At **Spirit of Excellence Learning Systems (SOELS)**, this approach is framed as learning abroad while staying home, emphasizing access, intentionality, and instructional purpose. Through curriculum design, instructional coaching, and professional development, SOELS supports educators in creating globally connected learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate, standards-aligned, and equity-centered. The goal is not novelty, but impact.

Spirit of Excellence Learning Systems (SOELS) supports educators and institutions in designing inquiry-driven, globally connected, and equity-centered learning experiences across K–12 and adult education. SOELS welcomes opportunities to respond to local, national, and international Requests for Proposals (RFPs) aligned with curriculum design, professional learning, and globally connected education initiatives.

WHY IT WORKS:
WHAT THE RESEARCH CONFIRMS

Decades of educational research affirm what practitioners like Ms. Wilkerson demonstrated long ago: structured collaboration enhances learning.

Research on computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) shows that when online interactions are intentionally designed, students develop stronger reasoning and problem-solving skills (Stahl, Koschmann, & Suthers, 2006). Inquiry-based learning environments – particularly those involving discussion and shared investigation – have been shown to deepen conceptual understanding and promote transferable knowledge (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Engagement is another critical outcome. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) identify cognitive engagement as essential for meaningful learning, noting that students are more invested when tasks are relevant, interactive, and socially connected. Global collaboration, when structured, meets all three conditions.

On an international scale, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes global competence as a core skill for the 21st century. Its framework highlights the importance of examining issues from multiple perspectives, engaging in open dialogue, and acting responsibly in a global society (OECD, 2018). These competencies do not emerge spontaneously; they must be taught and practiced.

Additionally, digital learning research underscores the role of networked environments in supporting deeper learning. Dede (2014) notes that collaborative, technology-mediated learning experiences foster critical thinking and prepare students for participation in complex social systems.

Together, these findings confirm that structured global interaction is not enrichment—it is rigorous pedagogy.

“Collaborative, technology-mediated learning experiences foster critical thinking and prepare students for participation in complex social systems.”

NETWORKING AT A YOUNG AGE: A REFRAMED SKILL

Traditionally, networking has been viewed as an adult or professional skill. Yet, when thoughtfully introduced, global collaboration helps students begin developing professional dispositions early. Students learn how to introduce ideas clearly, respond thoughtfully, ask meaningful questions, and build intellectual relationships. These are foundational skills for civic participation, higher education, and workforce readiness.

Importantly, structured global learning also advances equity. Students who may never have the opportunity to travel internationally can still engage in authentic cross-cultural exchange. When access is embedded within the curriculum rather than reserved for select programs, global learning becomes a shared experience rather than a privilege.

Through SOELS-supported models, educators are encouraged to see global collaboration not as an “extra,” but as a strategy for leveling the educational playing field.

NEXT:
THE FUTURE OF LEARNING IS CURATED CONNECTION

As education moves forward, the question is no longer whether students will connect globally – but who will guide that connection.

The next evolution of education positions teachers as designers of global learning ecosystems. With emerging tools, AI, and expanded digital platforms, the possibilities are vast. Yet, without strong instructional design, these tools risk amplifying noise rather than knowledge.

The future calls for curated connection – learning experiences that honor humanity, culture, and ethical responsibility while leveraging technology's reach. It calls for professional learning that equips teachers to facilitate global discourse with confidence. And it calls for educational systems to invest in time, collaboration, and instructional expertise – not just hardware.

Learning abroad while staying home is no longer a future concept. It is a present responsibility.

PURPOSE BEFORE PLATFORM

More than two decades after Ms. Wilkerson's students rotated through a four-computer lab to engage in interstate dialogue, the lesson remains the same: technology changes, but good teaching endures. When educators lead with intention, global learning becomes a powerful tool for inquiry, connection, and growth.

As schools reflect on the past 25 years and look toward what comes next, the path forward is clear. The future of education lies not in untamed connectivity, but in purposeful design – where students learn to navigate the world thoughtfully, one conversation at a time.

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Cultural Sensitivity in Practice: Lessons for the Modern Classroom

Eleni Havadjia

Over the past twenty-five years, classrooms around the world have changed in ways few educators at the turn of the century could have fully anticipated. Increased mobility, digital connectivity, shifting social norms, and global events have brought greater cultural, linguistic, and experiential diversity into learning environments. What was once considered an added dimension of teaching has become a daily reality in classrooms across educational systems.

As conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion have grown more visible, many education professionals today are more culturally aware than ever before. Teachers know that students come from different backgrounds, have different experiences, and learn in different ways. This awareness represents important progress, especially when compared to earlier models of education that would often assume uniformity among their learners. However, awareness alone is not the end goal when it comes to building and sustaining inclusive classrooms.

While cultural sensitivity is an essential starting point, it does not automatically translate into inclusive teaching practices or systems. The challenge facing educators today is not whether they care about equity and inclusion, but how that care is reflected in everyday classroom decisions. Moving from awareness to action does not require radical change. Instead, it calls for intention, reflection, and a willingness to adapt familiar practices in small but meaningful ways. Awareness becomes truly impactful when educators begin noticing the subtle dynamics that shape how students participate, behave, and engage with their learning. It is within these everyday moments that cultural sensitivity moves from theory into practice.

When Awareness Stays Theoretical

Many teachers around the world already value cultural sensitivity, even if they do not know how to navigate it. However, without learning how to address it through practical application, it can remain something abstract. This often happens when cultural awareness is understood as something additional, another responsibility on top of an already demanding role. In reality, cultural responsiveness is not about doing more to accommodate students. It is about doing what educators already do, but with greater awareness of how their cultural assumptions influence learning, behavior, and communication.

Action, in this case, does not mean

- Redesigning the entire curriculum overnight to fit everyone's identity;
- Becoming an expert on every culture represented in the classroom;
- Avoiding mistakes at all costs.

In reality, action begins with noticing patterns in the classroom, being conscious of biases, questioning assumptions, and adjusting teaching approaches where needed.

Where Culture Appears in Everyday Classroom Life

Cultural dynamics are present in classrooms every day, often in ways that are so familiar they go by unnoticed. They do not usually appear through explicit conflict or visible differences but through everyday interactions, expectations, and interpretations of one another. Learning to recognize these types of moments in the classroom is the first step toward turning cultural awareness into meaningful teaching practices.

Participation is one of the clearest ways culture shows up in learning environments. In many parts of the world, participating means speaking up, volunteering answers, or engaging in open classroom discussions. But not everyone is taught to engage in this way. Some students may come from cultural and familial backgrounds where listening attentively, observing others, and speaking only when invited are considered respectful and active forms of engagement. Educators may overlook quietly engaged students and unintentionally favor those who speak more freely when they define participation too narrowly.

> By recognizing different participation styles, educators can better understand students' learning needs in the moment.

By recognizing different participation styles, educators can better understand students' learning needs in the moment. For example, rather than grading participation only during oral discussions, a short written reflection period could allow quieter students to share their insights while still encouraging verbal discussion for those who are more inclined to speak. This type of adjustment honors diverse ways of participating without adding extra burden to the student.

Culture naturally shapes **behavior expectations**, as we can see from participation. What one educator interprets as confidence or assertiveness may be read as disruption or disrespect in another context. Conversely, students who are reserved or emotionally restrained may be misread as disengaged. Interpretations like these often happen unconsciously, but they can influence how students are disciplined, supported, or labelled.

When teachers pause to consider the cultural context behind the behavior of their students, they create space for understanding rather than rushing to judgment. For example, noticing that a student is silent during group work could lead to providing alternative ways to contribute, rather than assuming a lack of interest or effort on their part. This mirrors the principle seen in participation: the same behavior can mean entirely different things depending on the student's cultural framework.

Assessment and evaluation are other areas where culture quietly shapes classroom life. Traditional assessment styles often prioritize timed written expression assignments or individual performance in formal settings. These work for some students, but they may not reflect the abilities of those who excel through collaboration, oral communication, or applied learning. Rigid assessment practices may measure a student's familiarity with the testing system instead of assessing their understanding of the learning materials. Like participation and behavior expectations, assessment is an opportunity to notice differences, reflect, and adapt.

Finally, culture influences **communication with families**, which in turn shapes students' experiences. Some families are highly visible and invested in their children's education. They are attending meetings, engaging frequently with teachers, and knowing where to ask clarifying questions about their child's education. Others show support in quieter ways, such as reinforcing learning at home or placing strong trust in the school's guidance. Family engagement can be affected by language barriers, past educational experiences, and differing expectations about the school's role.

When educators interpret limited contact from their students' families as a lack of interest, they risk creating distance rather than partnership. Instead, pausing to consider context and offering multiple ways for families to participate builds stronger connections. This attitude is the same as the one used for participation, behavior expectations, and assessment style. By noticing, reflecting, and adapting teaching practices in real time, education professionals can begin moving away from awareness and more towards actionable systems.

These common classroom situations (participation, behavior, assessment, and family communication) are not issues that require resolution. They are opportunities for educators to make thoughtful adjustments to their practice. Paying attention to how culture subtly shapes classroom interactions, teachers can create environments that support all their students alike. Inclusion, in this sense, is not about changing students to fit the classroom but about shaping the classroom to recognize the students that are already there.

Practical Shifts That Support Inclusive Teaching

Turning cultural sensitivity into action does not require sweeping reforms. Small, intentional shifts that adjust the learning experience, without altering the core expectations or content, often yield the most meaningful changes. These shifts create an environment where students can feel seen, understood, and able to participate in their learning fully.

1. Redefining engagement

Engagement is traditionally measured by visible actions: raising hands, volunteering answers, or participating in group discussions. Nevertheless, students engage in various ways that may not be immediately obvious. Some may reflect internally before speaking, take detailed notes, or engage thoughtfully in peer discussions. Others may prefer independent reflection or creative expression outside the moment of instruction. By broadening how engagement is recognized in the classroom, educators acknowledge diverse ways of learning and make space for students whose contributions might otherwise go unnoticed.

2. Pausing before labelling behavior

It can be easy to interpret a student's withdrawal, distraction, or quietness as disengagement, defiance, or lack of effort. However, these behaviors often stem from unfamiliarity with classroom routines or differences in cultural norms for attention and public expression. Pausing before assigning meaning to students' behaviors allows educators to consider the context behind the behavior and to approach the student with curiosity rather than judgment. A teacher might notice a student sitting quietly at a group activity, and instead of immediately intervening, they could ask themselves, *"Could there be another way this student is participating or processing the material right now?"* This reflection opens a path to understanding the student, and it supports tailored guidance rather than constant default correction.

3. Offering flexibility in demonstrating learning

Traditional assessments often assume a single way of demonstrating knowledge. Yet students have different strengths, learning styles, and comfort levels with various formats. Offering multiple ways to demonstrate understanding (through written work, oral presentations, projects, or collaborative tasks) reduces barriers and allows students to showcase their strengths authentically. For instance, a science assignment might let students earn credit by showing their results in a diagram, talking about them to a small group, or writing a report. Flexibility in assessment signals that the teacher values the learning process over a single mode of expression, and it encourages students to engage in ways that feel meaningful to them.

> "Small, intentional shifts that adjust the learning experience, without altering the core expectations or content, often yield the most meaningful changes. "

4. Making expectations explicit

What is obvious to one student may not be obvious to another. Cultural differences, prior schooling, and individual life experiences can all impact the interpretation of instructions in the classroom. By giving out clear instructions with multiple options of execution, having consistent routines, and having transparent grading criteria, educators can help students navigate their learning with more confidence. For example, instead of saying, *"Complete the worksheet and share your ideas,"* a teacher could provide step-by-step guidance: *"Read each question carefully, write your answer in complete sentences, then choose one answer to discuss with a partner."* This clarity reduces miscommunication and allows students to focus on demonstrating understanding rather than decoding expectations.

These practical shifts in everyday behaviors do not lower educational standards; they clarify them. They allow educators to translate cultural sensitivity into concrete classroom choices that directly influence the students. Each adjustment may seem small in isolation, but altogether they create an environment where students can fully participate, demonstrate learning in ways that suit them, and feel that their individual experiences are recognized and valued within that environment. By approaching teaching with intentionality, educators move from awareness to action, shaping future classrooms where inclusion is an ongoing practice rather than an abstract ideal.

Reflection as a Professional Practice

Culturally responsive teaching is an evolving, dynamic practice that grows alongside the classroom and its students. Implementing practical strategies is important, but even well-intentioned efforts can fall short of their potential impact without self-reflection. Regular reflection helps educators bridge the gap between their intention and impact. It allows teachers to notice patterns in their teaching style, question implicit assumptions, and fine-tune their practice in ways that support all of their learners. Reflection does not ask educators to be self-critical, but rather, to use it as a tool for growth and more profound understanding.

Educators can begin by asking thoughtful questions such as:

Whose voices are most present in my classroom?

Are certain perspectives, cultural experiences, or learning styles more visible than others? Noticing who is consistently represented and who may be quieter or less visible can guide adjustments to participation, discussion, and curriculum design.

Who might be working harder to adapt, and why?

Some students may expend extra effort simply to navigate classroom expectations or participate in ways that feel safe within their cultural norms. Recognizing this effort allows teachers to provide meaningful support rather than assume disengagement.

Where might my own experiences, rather than my students' realities, shape my expectations?

Educators bring their own cultural frameworks, habits, and assumptions into the classroom. Reflection encourages awareness of how these personal lenses influence the interpretation of behavior, assessment, and engagement.

By engaging in these kinds of reflection practices regularly, educators create a pause between observation and action. For example, after noticing that certain students rarely speak in group discussions, a teacher might reflect on whether the classroom structure or group composition unintentionally limits their participation before trying to address it. This reflection could lead to a more meaningful course of action, such as a small adjustment, like rotating group roles, inviting written responses, or offering additional scaffolding.

Reflection also strengthens the teacher's ability to iterate on the practical shifts introduced in the previous section. Each adjustment (whether redefining engagement, pausing before labeling behavior, offering flexible assessments, or clarifying expectations) benefits from the lens of reflective practice. In this way, reflection becomes a continuous professional habit: a way to refine practice, adapt to the unique needs of each classroom, and sustain culturally responsive teaching over time.

Looking Ahead

Inclusive teaching has never been a fixed destination. Over the last quarter century, education has shown us that classrooms evolve alongside societies and that teaching practices must respond to changing student realities. Cultural awareness was once considered an added value in education; today, it is a professional necessity. What matters now is how that awareness is translated into daily practice. As education continues to change, awareness will remain an important foundation, but it is the choices educators make after becoming aware that will shape the future of learning.

The next chapter of education will not be defined solely by new technologies or methodologies, but by how thoughtfully educators respond to differences in their classrooms. What happens when a student participates quietly? When does a behavior challenge an expectation? What happens when an assessment fails to reveal a learner's true understanding? These moments are not disruptions; they are opportunities to act with intention. Small changes matter. Allowing multiple ways for students to participate matters. It is important to pause before interpreting behavior. It is crucial to provide students with flexible methods to demonstrate their learning. Stating clear expectations is crucial. Each decision contributes to how students experience belonging, capability, and fairness within the classroom.

Inclusive teaching does not demand perfection. It requires reflection, curiosity, and responsibility. Built through daily practice, inclusive classrooms recognize students as active participants rather than asking them to fit rigid systems – and it is through these choices that education continues to move forward.

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RE-DESIGNING EDUCATION:

WHY LEARNING IS RISING AS SCHOOLING FADES

James Mattiace

When the Carnegie Foundation announced in April 2023 that it would no longer support the **Carnegie Unit** – often referred to as "credit" or "seat time" – I co-authored an article with Ken O'Connor exploring the possibilities this shift created (The International Schools Network, 2023). Now, almost three years on, the possibilities we envisioned have far exceeded our predictions. Schooling, as we knew it, is essentially over, even if the traditional system has not yet recognised this reality. The current momentum around competency-based education, skills verification, alternative transcripts, credentialing, digital wallets, online schools, and workforce pathways is converging in a way that finally elevates learning over schooling.

The Carnegie Unit is a traditional, time-based measure of high school academic credit, standardized in 1906 to define a year of study as 120 hours *(about 40-60 min/day, 5 days/week, 36-40 weeks/year)* in one subject

FROM SCHOOLING TO LEARNING:
A SYSTEM IN TRANSITION

Let's define schooling as the familiar, traditional system most Western students experience, grade levels rigidly sorted by age, days divided into distinct subjects, and grades that blend behavior, knowledge, and compliance into an abstract ranking of "ability." Now imagine something different: students progress after demonstrating mastery of key competencies; problem-solving, negotiation, written communication, etc. They can show mastery in a classroom, on a sports field or stage, in a workplace, in an online setting, or through a trusted third-party credential. Evidence of learning sits in a verifiable digital wallet accessible to both the student and the authorizing institution, sharable with universities, vocational programs, or employers. And importantly, the competencies documented are aligned with the actual needs of society, whether that's meaningful employment, civic engagement, or social entrepreneurship.

As of July 2025, according to **Full Scale** (formerly The Aurora Institute and The Learning Accelerator), 48 U.S. states now permit schools to revise graduation requirements to include competency-based demonstrations of mastery in place of traditional credits (State of CBE, 2025). Schools can now decide what "counts" toward graduation, even if it's not a class.

By July 2025, more than 700 universities now accept mastery-based transcripts; transcripts with no grades, no subjects, just evidence of performance against clear criteria (Mastery Transcript Consortium, 2025). Globally, credentialing has exploded. It's estimated that over one million credentials exist across domains from technical expertise to communication to strategic management. Credly alone reports issuing over one hundred million digital credentials by early 2025 (Pearson, 2025). And worldwide, more than seventy million students are enrolled in online schools or programs, a number projected to surge dramatically (Coursmos, 2025).

The infrastructure now exists to build an educational ecosystem where students learn at their own pace, assemble and reassemble evidence of competencies, and engage academically in ways that reflect how people naturally learn. We can finally tether learning to societal needs. What is still not entirely constructed is the bridge between schools and employers or universities. In the 1940s and 50s, that bridge existed; industries needed literate, reasonably competent, compliant workers, and schools were designed to produce exactly that. Elite students, meanwhile, studied classical subjects because their future status was essentially guaranteed. In many non-Western contexts, only elites accessed schooling at all, so they too studied what was considered esteemed, not what workforce demands required.

REBUILDING TRUST

BETWEEN LEARNING AND OPPORTUNITY

Today, in both contexts, the gap between school design and real societal needs has never been wider. Yet that gap is beginning to narrow as confidence in emerging learning systems grows, driven by the rise of trusted third-party verification organisations. As credibility strengthens, more programmes are becoming willing to transition toward this new paradigm of learning.

The Assessment and Competency Collaborative

As an example, for decades, assessment reformers have had to convince parents and school boards that students could still access university with a transcript based on mastery rather than grades averaged across tasks. Standards-based grading has gained traction globally, although misapplications still plague the movement, as some schools adopt the label without shifting their practices. **The Assessment and Competency Collaborative** now exists to articulate clear standards for what authentic standards-based or competency-based practice actually looks like and to accredit schools that meet those standards, thus bringing some uniformity to the system and also adding trust.

Education Design Lab

Credentialing faces similar challenges. With so many issuers and credential types, there is still no global governing structure. **TAICEP**, a professional association of credential evaluators, is emerging as a potential international moderator. In the parallel world of skills validation, actually certifying that a person has mastered a skill, the **Education Design Lab** has created the Skills Validation Network to explore answers. And to standardize how digital badges and credentials are issued on the blockchain, **1EdTech** launched the widely adopted CLR Standard.

The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals (TAICEP)

1EdTech Consortium

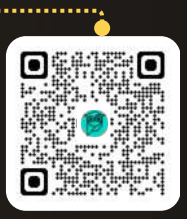
Across all these spaces, the same concerns have continued to surface: validity, verifiability, fraud prevention, rigor, communication, and portability. Repeatedly, new organizations, or coalitions of existing ones, are stepping up to address them. Some of these actors will become the backbone of the new educational ecosystem. Others will fade as more widely supported standards emerge. The evolution will not be neat and linear, it will not look like an assembly line. In many ways, that is the point, we are finally moving schooling away from an assembly-line mindset.

> *Some of these actors will become the backbone of the new educational ecosystem. Others will fade as more widely supported standards emerge.*

DEFINING
LEARNING TOGETHER

However, before education can fully shift from schooling to learning, there must be a shared understanding of what learning actually entails. In the United States, this has taken shape through the widespread adoption of Profiles of a Graduate or Profiles of a Learner, which articulate the intended outcomes of an educational pathway. Grounded in the principles of Understanding by Design, these frameworks begin with the end in mind and work backwards from there. This represents an important step toward a collective definition of learning.

Europe has advanced this work further through **the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**, which defines eight levels of learning across knowledge, skills (both cognitive and practical), and learner autonomy. The EQF also translates between national standards, so learning is recognized in different countries, offering a more complex and scalable model of shared understanding.



The European Qualifications Framework

Moving beyond frameworks alone, Ethiopia has adopted a nationwide, Pre K-12, competency-based curriculum that aligns with labor market and societal needs. The goal is to build a community of learners that can compete, innovate, and deliver on Ethiopia's most important needs.

Together, these developments signal the direction in which education is heading: toward systems organised around learning rather than schooling. As this shift accelerates, traditional school models will risk being replaced by new structures that are better aligned with the demands of the future.

> *...before education can fully shift from schooling to learning, there must be a shared understanding of what learning actually entails.*

A SYSTEM
STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION

There is no agreement on what exactly that new system will look like, partly because everything being developed today remains at the "2.0" or "2.5" stage. We simply do not yet know what a fully realized "4.0" model of learning will entail. A useful analogy is a community that has long relied on wells and a nearby river for water and suddenly decides to build a modern water delivery system.

Without coordination, different families take on separate pieces of the project. One family begins working on the main trunk lines, another family starts to connect houses to the main lines, a third family sees the need for a waste treatment system, while another views a reservoir as critical. Meanwhile, one family has decided to invent the most amazing toilet and begins trying to sell it to every other household. At the same time, some families resist the change altogether – either because they doubt the system will work or because they profit from selling buckets for hauling river water.

Education finds itself in a similar moment today. We see a proliferation of credentials, an explosion of online learning models, competing competency frameworks, and a growing array of workforce pathway programs and mandates. These efforts are interconnected, yet they are often advancing independently, each driven by its own vision of the future.

Over time, as in the imagined community, responsibility for managing and maintaining the system will likely consolidate under shared structures of authority and governance. As that happens, the old practices – wells and carrying water from the river – will gradually fade, replaced by systems better suited to the needs of a more complex and interconnected world.

The shift from schooling to learning is no longer speculative. The policies, tools, and verification mechanisms required to support learning-centered systems already exist, even if they remain fragmented. What is missing is not innovation, but coherence: shared definitions of learning, trusted standards for validation, and governance structures capable of aligning diverse efforts without stifling experimentation.

As these elements converge, education will be defined less by time spent in classrooms and more by demonstrated capability, adaptability, and contribution. The transition will be uneven and, at times, uncomfortable. Yet the direction is clear. The question facing education systems today is not whether schooling will give way to learning, but how intentionally, ethically, and inclusively that transformation will unfold.

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ELT AT SAI GON UNIVERSITY

A UNIVERSITY'S JOURNEY, A NATION'S STORY

Nguyen Thi Anh Dao

This reflection recounts my professional journey at Sai Gon University (SGU), beginning in 1984 when I first started teaching English at what was then the Teacher Training College of Ho Chi Minh City, and concluding with my official retirement in 2016. From this vantage point, I have remained a close observer of the institution where I built my lifetime career. Over more than three decades, I witnessed — and participated in — profound changes in educational philosophy, teacher development, curriculum design, teaching methodology, and technology integration. These transformations reflect not only the growth of SGU itself but also broader shifts in English language teachin (ELT) in Vietnam.

(Image source: SGU's website)

BRIEF HISTORY OF SAI GON UNIVERSITY

In 1984, the institution was known as the Teacher Training College of Ho Chi Minh City. Its primary mission was to train secondary school teachers through three-year programs. At that time, the college consisted of several departments responsible for training teachers in major school subjects, including Mathematics, Vietnamese Literature, Physics, Chemistry, History, Geography, Foreign Languages, Music, Fine Arts, and Physical Education. The focus was firmly on meeting the immediate needs of the city's education system, which was in the process of reconstruction after a long period of disruption.

Within the Department of Foreign Languages, there were originally three language sections: English, French, and Russian. These reflected historical and geopolitical influences on foreign language education in Vietnam. However, as the country gradually opened its doors to the international community, the demand for English increased dramatically. English soon emerged as the dominant foreign language required for academic, professional, and international communication. As a result, the French and Russian sections were eventually phased out due to declining enrollments, while the English section expanded rapidly.

To better respond to growing demand, the Department of Foreign Languages later restructured into two streams: English as a major for students specializing in language teaching and linguistics, and General English for students from other faculties. This expansion in scope led to a change in name, and the department became known as the Faculty of Linguistics, reflecting a broader academic orientation.

TEACHING STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In the years following 1975, Vietnam faced a serious shortage of qualified English teachers. Consequently, the Teacher Training College recruited many distinguished and experienced teachers who had graduated from the University of Pedagogy or who had accumulated extensive classroom experience. These educators played a crucial role in laying the foundations of English language teaching at the institution, often working with limited resources but strong professional commitment.

During the 1990s, important changes began to take place. Several teachers received scholarships from international aid programs such as AUSAID, enabling them to pursue higher education in Australia. Upon returning, these teachers not only contributed updated academic knowledge and teaching methodologies but also assumed key administrative and leadership roles within the faculty. Their international exposure helped bridge local practices with global trends in TESOL.

Following the introduction of the Open-door Policy (Đổi Mới), more Australian and other international universities brought offshore programs to Vietnam. These collaborations created additional pathways for lecturers to obtain postgraduate qualifications without leaving the country for extended periods. By the early 21st century, national socio-economic development further accelerated demand for higher academic credentials. Increasing numbers of lecturers earned MA, MEd., and MTESOL degrees, which in turn raised expectations for scientific research, curriculum innovation, and academic governance.

In recent years, the faculty has continued to strengthen its academic profile by increasing the number of PhD holders and doctoral candidates. Language proficiency standards have also been formalized: lecturers in specialized fields are required to demonstrate a minimum C1 level of English proficiency, while lecturers in non-specialized fields are expected to reach at least B2+ level. These requirements signal a clear commitment to quality assurance and international benchmarking.

CURRICULUM AND SYLLABUS DEVELOPMENT

From its early days, the Teacher Training College focused on equipping future teachers with solid subject-matter knowledge and essential pedagogical skills. The syllabus was designed to ensure that graduates could function effectively in real classroom contexts, particularly in secondary schools across Ho Chi Minh City. Courses emphasized foundational linguistics, grammar, reading comprehension, translation, and teaching methodology.

As Vietnam became increasingly integrated into the global economy, both teachers and students gained access to new opportunities. These changes prompted continuous curriculum updates. New courses were introduced to address emerging needs, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), intercultural communication, and applied linguistics. Teaching practice components were also refined to better connect theory with classroom reality.

At present, the Faculty of Linguistics offers both a regular program and a high-quality program designed to meet higher academic and professional standards. In addition, a master's program in linguistics has been established and has successfully run two to three cohorts. These developments reflect a shift from purely undergraduate teacher training toward a more comprehensive academic ecosystem that supports lifelong learning and professional advancement.

TEACHING METHODS: FROM TRADITION TO INNOVATION

In the late 20th century, teaching and learning largely followed a traditional, teacher-centered model. Students were assigned course books to read at home, and classroom time was devoted to lectures based on those texts. Teachers typically asked questions to check students' understanding of assigned readings, explained key concepts, and guided students through written exercises. The Grammar–Translation Method dominated instruction, with a strong emphasis on linguistic accuracy and knowledge of grammatical rules.

With the arrival of the new century and growing exposure to international scholarship, a gradual shift took place. Influenced by communicative language teaching (CLT) and learner-centered pedagogy, teachers began to reposition students at the heart of the learning process. Learners were encouraged to explore authentic materials from the internet, participate in pair and group work, and collaborate with peers both inside and outside the classroom. The focus expanded from linguistic competence to communicative competence, including fluency, interaction, and pragmatic use of language.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked another turning point. Online platforms became essential rather than optional, leading to the integration of online assignments and blended assessment practices. Currently, approximately 10% of midterm assessments are conducted online, and digital learning management systems support teaching and learning across programs. The curriculum is systematically reviewed every five years and submitted to the Ministry

TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Technology integration at Sai Gon University has evolved dramatically over the decades. During the period of the Teacher Training College, the Faculty of Foreign Languages had a small language laboratory equipped with outdated headsets and listening devices that were rarely used. Listening lessons often relied on cassette players, and later CD players, operated in ordinary classrooms that were frequently noisy and overcrowded. An overhead projector (OHP) was available but largely neglected due to the lack of funds for transparencies and specialized printing equipment.

After SGU was established, the language laboratory was gradually revitalized. Internet access was introduced for selected classes, often at the request of particularly dedicated teachers who recognized its potential for improving learning outcomes. However, it took several years before Wi-Fi connectivity and LCD projectors became standard features across classrooms.

In 2004, the British Council Malaysia introduced interactive whiteboards at the Vietnam Teachers of English (VTTN) National ELT Conference. Inspired by this innovation, the Faculty of Foreign Languages later installed an interactive whiteboard in its language laboratory. Unfortunately, due to administrative and logistical challenges, this technology remained underused for many years.

Today, with widespread internet access and reliable Wi-Fi, all classrooms at Sai Gon University are well equipped with LCD projectors and digital tools. Teaching and learning no longer depend heavily on a centralized language lab. Instead, technology has become seamlessly embedded in everyday classroom practice, supporting multimedia instruction, online collaboration, and flexible learning modes.

THE NATION'S STORY

The evolution of the Faculty of Linguistics at Sai Gon University is, in many ways, a microcosm of the broader trajectory of English language teaching in Vietnam. From its early role in meeting urgent post-war teacher shortages, through periods of expansion driven by economic reform and international integration, to its current engagement with quality assurance, research, and digital transformation, SGU's journey reflects how ELT in Vietnam has continually adapted to shifting national priorities and global influences. Changes in staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, and technology at SGU did not occur in isolation; they emerged in response to wider movements within Vietnamese education and society.

Seen from this perspective, the history of SGU is not simply an institutional narrative but part of a larger story of how English language education in Vietnam has moved from transmission-based instruction toward communicative, learner-centered, and increasingly professionalized practices. Having witnessed and contributed to these changes over more than three decades, I view SGU's development as evidence of ELT's growing maturity in Vietnam – an ongoing process shaped by local realities as much as by international trends. As the field continues to evolve, the experience of SGU suggests that sustainable progress lies not in abrupt transformation, but in continuous adaptation grounded in context, commitment, and a long-term vision for learning.

Nguyen Thi Anh Dao is an esteemed educator with 32 years of experience at Sai Gon University. She worked as a trainer for public school English teachers in Primary Projects by MoET and British Councils from 2008 to 2011. With 11 years as Training Quality Manager for VUS, she left a remarkable impact before resigning in 2022. Currently, she is working as a freelance TESOL trainer.

25 YEARS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

SHIFTS STANDARDS SUPPORT

THEN NOW NEXT
A QUARTER CENTURY OF EVOLUTION IN EDUCATION

Dr. Lou McLaughlin

The last 25 years have reshaped language education in ways few of us could have imagined. Technology, global mobility, new teaching approaches, and shifting learner needs have transformed how we teach, how we learn, and how we define quality. During this time, **Eaquals**, now established for more than 30 years, has focused its work on understanding these changes and supporting institutions and educators as they navigate them.

It has been a journey of steady, thoughtful development guided by a simple mission: to foster excellence in language education worldwide. From its beginning, Eaquals has aimed to support institutions and individuals in delivering high-quality learning experiences. That mission has stayed the same, even as everything around it has changed.

Eaquals
Excellence in Language Education

To reflect on this evolution, we return to the three aims that have shaped Eaquals' work:

- Improving the experience of language learners through clear, practical quality standards
- Accrediting providers who meet those standards
- Developing resources and training to support modern language educators

Each aim has expanded over the past quarter-century, adapting to new conditions while continuing to support high-quality language learning across contexts and cultures.

THEN BUILDING FOUNDATIONS IN A CHANGING WORLD

When Eaquals began its journey, the world of language education looked quite different. Schools and universities increasingly recognised the value of multilingualism, but the sector lacked a shared understanding of what "quality" meant in practice. Teachers relied heavily on textbooks, face-to-face teaching was the norm, and digital tools (when used) were often small add-ons rather than core parts of learning.

Against this backdrop, Eaquals set out to define clear, practical standards that could guide institutions in improving the experience of language learners. These standards were created to answer simple questions many teachers asked every day:

- What does good language teaching look like?
- How can we design learning that is meaningful and inclusive?
- How can institutions support teachers to keep improving?

Developing these standards required a deep understanding of how languages were being taught across different cultures, contexts, and educational traditions. It also required attention to global trends that would later reshape our work. Some of these trends were only beginning to emerge. For example:

- The internationalisation of education, with more students moving across borders
- The first signs of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) in mainstream schools
- Early experiments in English-medium instruction (EMI) at universities

Although these developments felt small at the time, they pointed toward a future where languages would no longer be taught in isolation but woven into wider educational experiences.

The first Eaquals accreditation scheme grew out of this need. It offered institutions a structured, supportive way to examine their practices, strengthen their systems, and raise the quality of the learner experience. Over time, these standards became a reference point well beyond Europe, contributing to discussions about quality, professionalism, and responsibility across the sector.

NOW RESPONDING TO GLOBAL SHIFTS WITH PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Over the past 25 years, language education has continued to evolve rapidly. The sector has grown more international, more diverse, and increasingly influenced by technology and global trends.

CHANGING LEARNER NEEDS

Today's learners bring different motivations and expectations. Many need language skills for multilingual academic environments. Others seek multilingual competence for professional or personal growth. Inclusivity, accessibility, and learner well-being have become central themes across all educational sectors.

Language institutions must now navigate diverse student profiles and ensure that their programmes reflect values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Sustainability, once a peripheral concern, has become an essential part of long-term institutional planning.

Eaquals has responded by ensuring that its standards evolve alongside these priorities. High-quality language education today is not only about effective teaching techniques; it is also about creating learning environments that are fair, supportive, and ethically grounded.

A TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

Perhaps the biggest shift has been technological growth. Online learning, once a niche option, is now a major part of the educational landscape. Blended learning designs, digital platforms, mobile resources, and virtual classrooms have become common practice.

More recently, AI has begun influencing how learners practise, how teachers design activities, and how feedback is delivered. These developments bring opportunities, but also challenges. Institutions need clear guidance on how to maintain quality and pedagogical integrity in these rapidly changing contexts.

Eaquals' work over the last 25 years reflects this shift. Where one accreditation scheme once served the needs of the sector, the diversity of today's learning environments requires a broader, more flexible approach. In response, Eaquals now offers a suite of accreditation schemes designed to reflect different educational realities:

- The Eaquals Inspection Scheme for Language Centres
- The Eaquals Inspection Scheme for Higher Education Institutions
- The Eaquals Inspection Scheme for Online Providers
- The Eaquals Inspection Scheme for K12 Schools

This expansion acknowledges that language education now takes place in varied environments, physical, digital, or a blend of both, and that each context requires tailored criteria to ensure fairness, relevance and standards that understand the specific challenges and strengths.

SUPPORTING EDUCATORS: RESOURCES FOR A MODERN LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

Eaquals' third aim has always been practical: to provide resources that help teachers, trainers, and managers strengthen their everyday work. Over the past 25 years, this area has grown significantly. Today, Eaquals supports educators worldwide through a range of tools designed for real classroom needs.

Eaquals Frameworks

Eaquals has developed three professional development frameworks for language teachers, trainers, and managers. These frameworks guide educators in assessing their skills, planning their professional growth, and identifying areas for development. They are designed to be accessible, adaptable, and applicable to all modern languages.

Their purpose is simple: to support a culture of continuous improvement in a profession that is always evolving.

Language Assessment Professionalisation Programme (LAPP)

Assessment literacy remains a critical need in the language education sector. While teachers are trained in pedagogy and methodology, many receive limited preparation in assessment, which is an important part of teaching that influences learning outcomes, student motivation, and programme design.

To address this gap, Eaquals collaborated with ALTE, to develop the LAPP programme. This training supports teachers in:

- understanding principles of valid and reliable assessment
- evaluating learner progress effectively
- giving constructive, purposeful feedback
- making informed decisions about testing and evaluation

LAPP equips educators with the confidence and skills to assess in ways that genuinely support learning rather than simply measure it.

Webinars and Events

Eaquals also provides a series of webinars that address current issues in language education. These sessions are designed to help educators stay informed about developments in teaching methodology, digital learning, assessment, and wider sector trends. They offer a platform for exchanging ideas, sharing challenges, and learning from colleagues across the world.

NEXT CONTINUITY INTO THE NEXT STAGE: LOOKING AHEAD WITH PURPOSE

Language education will continue to change. New technologies will emerge, global mobility will fluctuate, and learner needs will evolve. What is clear is that Eaquals' role continues to be defined by the same mission and aims that have guided its journey for more than 30 years.

Eaquals will continue to:

- observe developments across global education
- refine and update standards as new realities emerge
- listen to the needs of the language teaching community
- support institutions as they navigate change
- provide training and resources that respond to real challenges
- promote quality, professionalism, and integrity in language education

The commitment is to remain responsive, informed, and supportive as the sector develops.

Reflecting on a quarter century of evolution in language education reveals not only how much the sector has changed, but also how much has been achieved through collaboration, professionalism, and shared commitment. Eaquals has grown from a single accreditation scheme into an international reference point for quality in language education, supported by a community of institutions, teachers, trainers, and experts who believe in the value of purposeful, high-quality learning.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, Eaquals remains focused on supporting those who shape it, providing standards that guide good practice, accreditation that recognises excellence, and resources that empower educators to grow.

Language education will continue to evolve, as it always has, but the developments of the past 25 years have strengthened the foundations on which future progress can grow. With clear standards, informed practice, and strong professional support, the sector is well equipped to respond to whatever comes next.

Dr. Lou McLaughlin is the Executive Director of Eaquals, leading the Association's strategy, growth and member services. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics, is a founding member of ELT Ireland, and a former IATEFL Trustee. Her interests include teacher training, management in ELT, and young learners.

REFLECTING ON (ALMOST) 25 YEARS OF TEACHER EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATION

Khanh-Duc Kuttig

Khanh-Duc Kuttig, winner of the TESOL/NGL Teacher of the Year award in 2021, is an EFL instructor at the University of Siegen in Germany and has an MA in TESOL. She is currently Chair-elect of TESOL International Association's Teacher Educator Interest Section and a doctoral student at the Heidelberg University of Education, where her research focuses on the language competences of language teachers.

I started teaching in the autumn of 2005. A college student with no teaching experience but in need of a job. As much as I have grown as a teacher in the last 20 years, the English Language Teaching (ELT) landscape has changed massively, and in ways that I could never have imagined. In that time, native English-speaking teachers have certainly evolved from being unqualified, or minimally qualified, to possessing internationally recognized qualifications. They have grown as much as our profession has grown. Since I began teaching, ELT has seen a profound shift from a relatively unregulated "job for native speakers" to a research-informed, credentialed, and globally debated profession, one that is centered on specialized knowledge, reflective practice, and ongoing professional development. In this article, I reflect on the changes I have observed and, in part, experienced in my journey towards qualification and professionalization.

THE NATIVE SPEAKER ADVANTAGE

I was hired at a time when the notion of native-speaker was not controversial in ELT, but rather, for the potential teacher a bonus, if you will, and for the language school, a stamp of excellence. In many countries at the time, their unique selling point (USP) was their native English-speaking language teachers from Inner Circle countries. If you were not from one of these countries, but were still a native speaker, your chances of getting a teaching job were slim. However, if you had the looks and the 'right' name, your passport and origins could be overlooked, and you would be a part of the school's USP. Donald Freeman shares a similar story, saying he got into teaching "through the back door" and points out that his story (and I would say that of many teachers that I know) shows people's understanding of what it takes to teach languages - if you speak the language, you can teach it (Freeman et al., 2021).

For most of my early years teaching in Europe, I was never asked where I had trained or what qualifications I had. I was given a job because I was a native speaker. I taught in corporate training, which at the time, was a huge market in Germany. There was a demand for native English speakers, and all the colleagues I had worked with and the friends I made in those early years came from Inner Circle countries. I am thankful to that one Director of Studies, without whom I would not be where I am today. I am thankful for the chance she took on me, despite the pedagogically unsound decision she made. I took to teaching like a fish to water. At the same time, I was really lucky with the clients I worked with. They were managers, engineers, and scientists, all experts in their field of work, and I learnt from them as much, if not more than, they learnt from me. I got the experience that proved so valuable in my own development as a teacher. This was probably also the defining moment for me, as I found something that I was able to do well, enjoyed doing and could connect to my studies.

CHANGES IN HIRING AND THE RISE OF CERTIFICATE COURSES

The first noticeable change I saw were in the hiring processes, as the ELT labor market was becoming saturated with young, native English speakers. In the heyday of ELT tourism, as a gatekeeping of sorts, language schools started looking for qualified teachers, but at the same time, the challenge in the early 2000s was the availability of qualifications, especially if you were not based in the United Kingdom or North America. It was in my second year of teaching that I noticed the abundance of cheap certificate courses – those courses that promised us accredited qualifications to 'teach English abroad'.

In my research for this article, I discovered that the short course actually began in the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Hobbs, 2013). Such courses have not lost their popularity, as they provide trainees with a highly practical, skills-based, basic toolkit, something which may seem to be sufficient if you were young and didn't want to work in a pub during your gap year. These courses typically last a month and definitely meet the consumer demand for a focus on practice while offering the opportunity for a quick entry into ELT or a career change, and a way to obtain the necessary basic qualification for those on a tight budget. In fact, I remember a classmate's mother in the 1990s taking a certificate course at the British Council in Singapore as she prepared to transition out of nursing and into teaching. Hobbs (2013) suggests that these courses appear to have favored the native speaker because of their focus on practice rather than language awareness, working on the assumption that the native English speaker would have all the language knowledge that was needed in order to teach English. We know, of course, that this is far from the truth.

And it appears that this was just the beginning. While there are still many, many providers that offer TEFL courses cheaply, the accredited providers have managed to weather the storm and continue to be the stamp of quality for many language schools and potential teachers. Certificate providers have come and gone, but the big names remain. In fact, a teaching certificate is no longer just a teaching certificate and the end station. Depending on the provider, you can now choose to specialize, with the most notable being the young learner specialization.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about another shift – the online course. In the early 2000s, if you were living in Germany, like I was, and taking a course by distance learning from an accredited provider in the UK, you would receive weekly packages that contained your course materials. You would watch recorded lectures saved on CDs, complete the work in your own time, and then take a little walk to the post office to mail your assignments back to the UK. Now, even the big providers are offering their courses by distance learning online. Some providers even offer the option of lesson observation via Zoom, and a further specialization is teaching online. Providers like Trinity and Cambridge have continued to fine-tune their suite of courses to meet the changing landscape of ELT.

When I embarked on my Masters in TESOL at a British university in 2008, the post-diploma, postgraduate landscape was a very different one to now. While we can now choose different modes of study (face-to-face, distance, distance and online) amongst a variety of MA programs, at the time, MA TESOL programs were relatively homogeneous, theory-oriented, campus-based research degrees. Now, as a reflection of increased professionalism, and digital and global changes, the MA TESOL has evolved into a diverse family of programs (Stapleton & Shao, 2016). There are now MA degrees in language testing and assessment, English for Academic Purposes, and second language acquisition, to name a few. Fully online MA/MEd TESOL programs have expanded access worldwide, enabling teachers to study while working, making such courses more attractive than previous distance learning programs.

> "While there are many who will say that COVID-19 changed the way we teach and learn, I believe this is not entirely true. Changes to English language teacher education have been a long time coming.
>
> Khanh-Duc Kuttig

PROFESSIONALISM AND SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN ELT

In 2008, the year I started my MA TESOL, Richards (2008) observed the following about ELT:

> *" … compared with its status in the not too distant past … there is a much higher level of professionalism in ELT [English language teaching] today than previously. By this [it] is meant that English language teaching is seen as a career in a field of educational specialization[;] it requires a specialized knowledge base obtained through both academic study and practical experience, and it is a field of work where membership is based on entry requirements and standards" (p. 160).*

The question of what has driven this change remains.

More recently, Freeman et al. (2021) described teacher education in three phases. The first phase, with its beginnings in the 1990s, focused on the knowledge base of language teaching – its content. *"We needed a common language to be able to talk about what was going on as people were learning to teach languages"* (Freeman et al., 2021, p.3) and this phase was about developing the language specific to our profession. In the second phase, the context of learning is the center of attention, and here we have seen the shift from the school classroom, where English has been traditionally taught to much further beyond – to adult education in industry and all varieties of online learning. The third phase has to do with methodology, and we have seen methodologies come, go and return in the last 25 years, *"the methodology of a specific time or curriculum seemed to guide the teacher within his or her practice"* (Freeman et al., 2021, p.3).

While there are many who will say that COVID-19 changed the way we teach and learn, I believe this is not entirely true. Changes to English language teacher education have been a long time coming. I have seen what Freeman (2018) observed: that there are four areas that are changing in ELT and these, in turn, are driving the changes behind teacher education. These four areas are content, the teachers, the learners and their reasons for learning, and how English is being taught. The changes in content have driven universities to further specialize and redefine the MA TESOL courses they offer. The teachers entering the profession are no longer the native speakers of English, and will have many more professional development and learning options to choose from. The learners, as mentioned previously, are no longer based only in school classrooms. Certificate and diploma providers like Trinity and Cambridge have added to their suite of courses, offering now not only generic ELT qualifications like a one size fits all affair. And the methodologies we ascribe to reflect the changes in how and why we learn, and who learns.

GROWTH CHALLENGES HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

I have chosen to focus on this particular development in ELT because I see this as significant for our profession and our sense of professionalism. ELT is more than a tourist industry, and while many of my dearest friends and colleagues may have begun as tourist teachers after qualifying through a cheap certificate course, those who choose to remain in this profession (myself included) have grown with our profession. The certificate is not the end station for us. And we are so fortunate to have prevailed, because the opportunities for further qualification and professional development have responded to the changes in our field. And this is a field that is so rich, much richer than I had expected when I began teaching, some 20 years ago.

There are still challenges – further qualifications still remain elusive to those who may not have the financial means to invest in them. Some areas of our world may not have adequate infrastructure for online courses, and there will continue to be colleagues who will not even have the opportunity to take time off for their studies. However, it is heartening to see that professional learning is now also offered by many local providers. This represents an important step toward the decolonisation of ELT, even though courses from so-called Inner Circle countries are still often seen as more prestigious. My hope for the next 25 years is that this trend continues, leading to further decolonisation of the profession alongside greater professionalisation. As the content we teach, the learners we work with, and the societies we serve continue to change, we must also continue to train and support teachers for a career that is constantly evolving.

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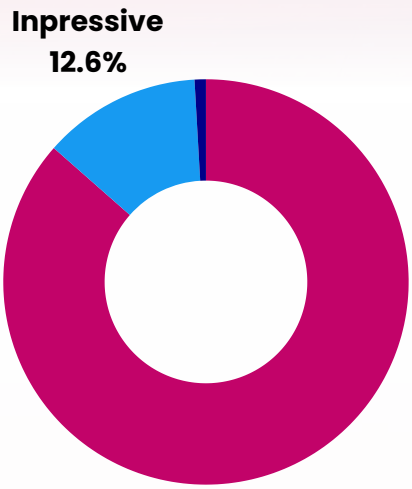

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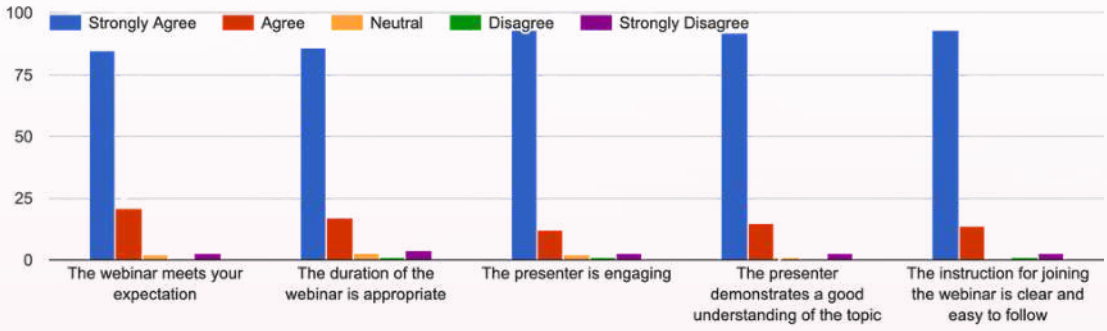

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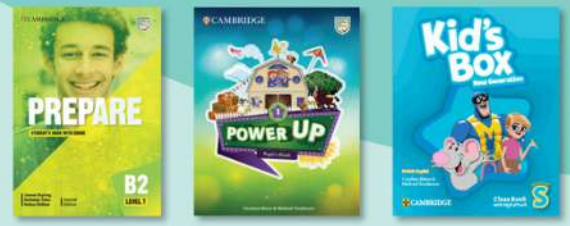

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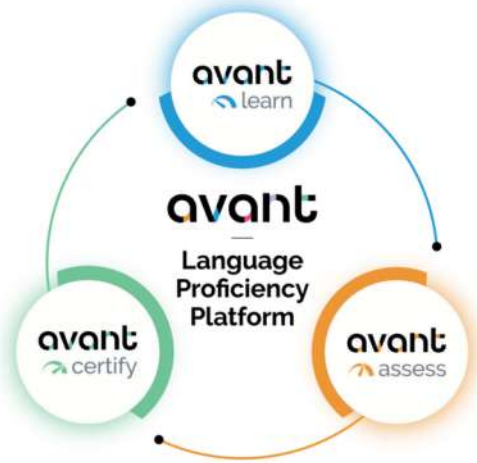

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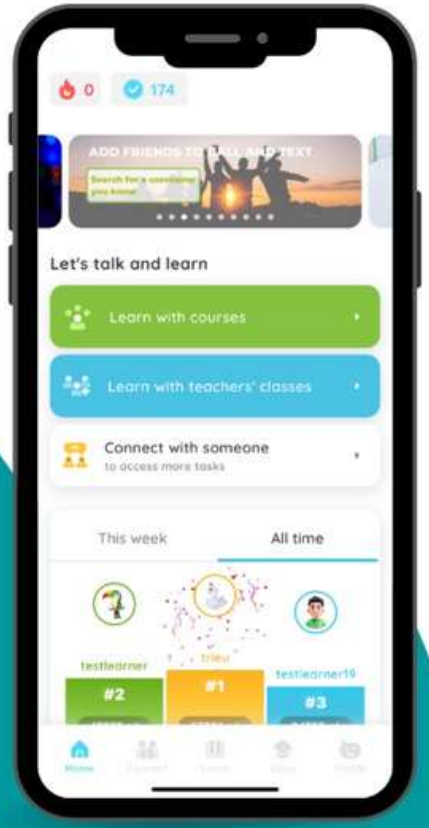

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- Classroom Management Strategies
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- Assessment Development (Pre/Post, Formative, Summative)
- ACT Preparation – Reading & Writing Only
- AP & CLEP Exam Support in Social Studies
- Citizenship/Naturalization Exam Preparation
- Historical Literacy & Research Project Guidance

Professional Learning & Leadership

- Professional Development Workshops & Training
- School Board & Leadership Retreat Facilitation
- Conference Presentation Coaching
- Keynote Addresses & Guest Speaking

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- Social Studies Content & Standards Support
- Educational Project & Program Management (e.g., summer/holiday camp curriculum, resource development)
- Curriculum & Presentation Development (for businesses, organizations, and churches)

Student, Family, & Community Engagement

- Student Enrichment & Engagement Sessions
- Parent Engagement Workshops
- Service-Learning & Community Engagement Project Design

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Contact

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