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LEARNING IN THE AGE OF
SINGULARITY TECHNOLOGIES

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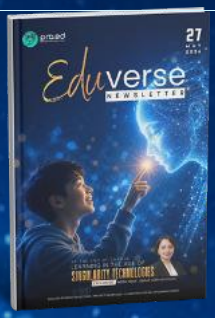

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DIALOGS *in the Classroom*

A CASE FOR CO-CREATED CONVERSATIONS

Amir Esmaeli

What if the teacher had simply invited the learners to create their own dialogs instead?

Amir Esmaeli is a Delta-qualified teacher, a Cambridge-certified trainer, and a speaking examiner. He holds an M.A. in TEFL and has taught English to learners of all ages and proficiency levels. Currently, he serves as the academic manager and team leader of foreign teachers at CB Centres in Vietnam.

A STORY FROM THE CLASROOM

A few weeks ago, I observed a colleague's lesson, and the experience stayed with me for several days. The students' textbook included four short role-plays designed to practise the simple past tense. As often happens with traditional role-play activities, the teacher asked students to work in pairs and perform the dialogs.

Soon afterward, the classroom filled with noise and scattered conversations. Some learners appeared disengaged, a few stronger pairs moved through the dialogs with ease, and the rest read the conversations rather robotically. After several minutes, the teacher invited volunteers to perform in front of the class. Unsurprisingly, participation was limited..

On my way home, I found myself wondering: What if the teacher had simply invited the learners to create their own dialogs instead? This reflection sparked my interest in exploring the potential of learner co-created dialogs as a versatile and powerful classroom tool.

WHAT ARE CO-CREATED DIALOGS?

By co-created dialogs, I mean teacher-guided but learner-generated conversations that students construct in pairs or small groups, rather than memorizing or performing scripts provided by the teacher or coursebook. Teachers can and should offer guidance or set constraints, such as a word limit, time limit, or required use of particular vocabulary or grammar. However, the actual content and flow of the conversation come from the learners themselves.

This differs significantly from many traditional role-play activities, where students may simply read aloud pre-written exchanges often filled with names, situations, or information that barely relate to or appeal to them.

WHAT MAKES CO-CREATED DIALOGS creative

1 Relevance to learners' interests

The first consideration is relevance. A dialog about booking a hotel room might be perfectly appropriate for adult business learners, but it might feel distant or artificial for teenagers in a small town who have never stayed in a hotel or are unlikely to book one by themselves.

When learners create their own dialogs around topics that genuinely interest them, language practice becomes far more authentic and memorable. This does not mean that we abandon our curricular principles or learning objectives. Rather, we frame those objectives within contexts that resonate with our particular learners.

For instance, if we need to practice making suggestions using How about...? or Why don't we...?, we could invite learners to create dialogs about planning their ideal weekend, choosing a film to watch together, or deciding on a class project topic. The language objective remains the same, but the context becomes more meaningful to the students.

2 Promotion of co-creation

The very nature of this approach places co-creation at its heart. When learners work together to construct a dialog, they negotiate meaning, make joint decisions about content and language, and build something collaboratively. This mirrors authentic language use more accurately than many traditional role-play activities.

In real life, we rarely recite memorized scripts or read aloud in front of others. Instead, we co-construct conversations in the moment, shaped by responses, clarification, hesitation, and adaptation. Co-created dialogs prepare learners for genuine communication beyond the classroom walls.

3 Modelling and clear success criteria

Despite the many benefits that co-created dialogs can bring, complete freedom without guidance or restrictions can be problematic. This is where modelling and clear instructions become essential.

Before asking learners to create their own dialogs, it is advisable to present a short sample conversation on the board, containing examples of the target vocabulary or grammar. This model serves multiple purposes: it demonstrates the expected length and structure, showcases the target language in context, and illustrates what a successful outcome might look like.

Equally important is making success criteria explicit. For example, in a lesson focused on giving advice, learners might be asked to:

- use at least three different expressions for giving advice,
- ask follow-up questions,
- and respond to advice positively or with hesitation.

When learners understand what success looks like, they are far more likely to achieve it.

4 Fair contribution from each speaker

Another consideration that is often overlooked is balance. We have all witnessed dialogs in which one learner dominates the conversation while the other contributes only brief or monosyllabic responses.

To address this, teachers can build balanced participation into the task success criteria. This might mean specifying a minimum number of turns for each speaker or requiring both participants to use particular language functions.

During monitoring, teachers should actively look for imbalanced dialogs and intervene with gentle prompts such as, "I notice Bao has asked three questions, but hasn't had a chance to answer any. Can you fix this?" This attention not only improves language practice but also fosters important collaborative skills.

WHY CO-CREATED DIALOGS *work so well*

There are compelling reasons why co-created dialogs deserve a more regular place and greater attention in our pedagogical repertoire.

Ease of design and minimal preparation

One of the most appealling aspects of co-created dialogs is their simplicity or ease of design. Once we have identified the learning objectives and chosen a relevant context, the preparation time required is minimal. A short and simple model dialog to illustrate the success criteria and some scaffolding for less proficient learners are often enough to launch the activity effectively. For teachers managing multiple classes or heavy workloads, this balance between minimal preparation and meaningful engagement is particularly valuable.

Importantly, the low preparation burden does not mean low pedagogical value. In fact, the opposite is true.

Target-oriented practice

Co-created dialogs are highly adaptable in terms of learning objectives. Whether the focus is vocabulary acquisition, grammar consolidation, pronunciation practice, or pragmatic skills such as turn-taking, this type of dialogs can be tailored accordingly.

Vocabulary tasks may require learners to incorporate particular lexical items into their conversation. For grammar, teachers can require the use of specific structures. Pronunciation can be addressed by asking learners to pay particular attention to certain sounds or intonation patterns. Speaking lessons can focus on interactional skills such as clarifying or responding naturally.

This target-oriented nature means that dialogs are not merely

Differentiation and emergent language

Arguably, the most pedagogically powerful aspect of co-created dialogs is their natural differentiation. When teachers provide a model and success criteria but allow learners freedom in execution, they create a supportive environment in which learners can produce language that reflects their current level of ability while still working toward the same broad outcome.

More advanced learners might produce longer, more complex dialogs with more sophisticated vocabulary and varied structures. Less proficient learners might create shorter, simpler exchanges that still meet the core criteria. Although learners may achieve this in varying degrees, all of them have a chance to experience a sense of achievement while working at an appropriate level of challenge.

This differentiation also reveals learners' emergent language (Thornbury, 2001)(*) and informs teachers about the areas in which they excel or struggle. While monitoring pairs or groups, teachers gain insight into what language is truly available to them, what they are experimenting with, and where they need support.

This type of formative assessment is invaluable because it emerges from real conversations. Learners are producing language they have chosen, not simply responding to controlled exercises. Teachers may notice recurring difficulties with question formation, limited vocabulary range, or opportunities to introduce more nuanced expressions. All these authentic insights allow us to focus on learners' specific needs in future lessons, making our practice more responsive and targeted.

* Thornbury, S. (2001). *Uncovering grammar.* Macmillan Heinemann.

Inclusivity through simultaneous participation

In many classroom activities, learners may work individually even when seated in groups. Co-created dialogs, by their very nature, require genuine collaboration and participation.

Learners must negotiate content, share ideas, offer suggestions, and make compromises. They are jointly responsible for the outcome, which fosters a sense of shared ownership. This collaborative dimension extends beyond language learning and helps develop broader transferable skills that learners can carry beyond the classrooms.

Many speaking activities unintentionally limit participation. While one pair performs, the rest of the class often waits passively with varying levels of attention. Co-created dialogs, when organized systematically in pairs or small groups working simultaneously, ensure that all learners are actively engaged at the same time.

When learners later perform for the class, teachers can also keep listeners actively engaged by assigning listening tasks. For example, students might:

- write down any errors they notice,
- identify the topic of each conversation,
- summarise the dialog in one sentence,
- note the strengths of each performance according to the success criteria, and
- choose the best pair.

This inclusive structure maximizes practice opportunities and maintains energy levels throughout the activity. Every learner is producing language, listening to a partner, and constructing meaning, rather than merely observing others do so.

In conclusion, co-created dialogs represent an accessible yet powerful approach to developing diverse language skills. They require minimal preparation time while offering substantial engagement and natural differentiation. When implemented thoughtfully, with attention to relevance, modelling, success criteria, and balanced participation, dialogs become far more than a simple role-play exercise.

They transform into opportunities for authentic collaboration, targeted practice, and meaningful language use. The insights we gain from observing learners' emergent language enable us to teach more responsively and effectively in future lessons.

Perhaps most importantly, they remind us that meaningful communication is rarely something learners memorise in advance. It is something they build together in real time – and our classrooms should create more space for exactly that.

SPECIAL INTRO

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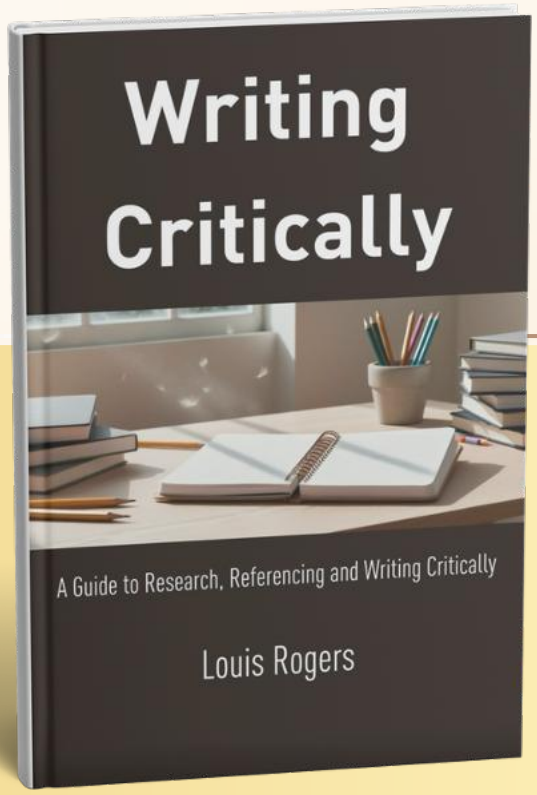

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WRITING CRITICALLY

A Guide to Research, Referencing and Writing Critically

Louis Rogers

Writing Critically: A Guide to Research, Referencing and Writing Critically by **Louis Rogers** offers a practical and accessible guide for students seeking to strengthen their academic writing skills. Moving step by step from critical reading to building clear, well-supported arguments, the book helps readers develop confidence in using sources, structuring essays, and writing with clarity and purpose.

Blending concise explanations with practical exercises, model texts, and useful phrase banks, the book breaks down complex academic writing processes into manageable and achievable steps. It also provides clear guidance on referencing systems, including APA, MLA, Chicago, and Harvard, making it a valuable companion for students across disciplines and contexts.

Designed for university students, EAP learners, and emerging academic writers, this book goes beyond teaching citation rules and essay structure. It encourages learners to think critically, engage responsibly with sources, and communicate ideas in ways that are clear, credible, and academically persuasive.

Louis Rogers is an English Language Teaching (ELT) author who has written a wide range of coursebooks and learning materials for international learners of English. His work focuses particularly on exam preparation and academic English, helping students develop the language and skills they need to succeed in study and assessment in English-speaking contexts.

THE HUMAN EDGE IN EDUCATION:

Why EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE Still Matters

Nia Tevdoradze

Do you remember a teacher who made you feel something special – safe, inspired, or curious? These feelings are often the ones that stay with us for the rest of our lives.

"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion."

Nia Tevdoradze

Integrating Emotional Intelligence (EI) into education isn't a soft skill 'add-on' – it's a fundamental catalyst for academic achievement, positive classroom climate, and lifelong well-being for both teachers and students. It is the most effective, humane way to stay relevant in the fast-paced era of AI. Many experts point out that while AI can replace routine, automatic work, it cannot replace empathy, compassion, or emotional connection. Therefore, EI is not only relevant – it is essential. It is the irreplaceable human skill that education must prioritise.

Research consistently shows that developing teachers' emotional intelligence directly enhances students' emotional growth and academic outcomes.

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS
OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Daniel Goleman's model defines EI as the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and those of others, focusing on four key domains: Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management.

Brain research shows that emotional states such as stress, safety, or joy directly affect cognition, memory, and executive function. This raises an important question: how can we create an understanding, compassionate, and encouraging environment for our students if we have not first understood our own emotions?

In Goleman's model, Self-awareness helps us recognise our stress triggers and emotional reactions. Self-management allows us to remain calm during conflict and model resilience. Social awareness enables us to understand what may lie behind a student's behaviour. Relationship management helps us build trust, give motivating feedback, and handle challenging conversations with students, parents, or colleagues. (Goleman, 1995).

For example, a teacher who notices rising frustration during a difficult lesson might pause, take a breath, and reframe the situation rather than reacting immediately. Similarly, when a student appears disengaged, social awareness encourages us to ask what might be happening beneath the surface, rather than assuming a lack of motivation.

These domains are not only theoretical. They shape how we see our students, how we interact with them, and how we respond to their needs in everyday teaching.

SEEING STUDENTS BEYOND LABELS

One of the most important aspects of emotional intelligence in teaching is how we perceive our students.

We often find ourselves viewing students through fixed lenses – some as "strong," others as "struggling." However, these expectations can limit both our perception and their potential. In reality, learning is not linear. Students we least expect may show remarkable progress, while high-achieving students may face hidden challenges.

Maintaining a balanced and open perspective allows us to observe more accurately and respond more fairly. This is closely connected to social awareness and relationship management, as it helps us build trust and create a classroom environment where all learners feel seen, supported, and capable of growth.

This mindset is reflected in the small, everyday interactions we have with our students. Recent studies conducted among top NBA teams have shown that the more basketball players engaged in verbal support or physical interaction with one another, the more successful the team's performance was (Kraus, Huang, & Keltner, 2010). Showing easy gestures like a high-five or giving simple comments such as *Well done! Go for it!* could result in winning the game.

While classrooms are very different environments, the principle remains the same. Every class, whether online or face-to-face, individual or group classes, is somehow stressful for all the participants. The fear of making mistakes, anxiety, psychological blocks and shyness all emerge at once. Creating a safe and encouraging environment can help reduce these barriers and significantly improve engagement and confidence. Try to introduce more social interactions in our lessons: high tens or timely encouragement like *Nicely done! Awesome! Good job!* These can significantly improve engagement and confidence. These are practical expressions of relationship management in action.

"Maintaining a balanced and open perspective allows us to observe more accurately and respond more fairly."

Nia Tevdoradze

At the same time, emotional intelligence requires us to understand each learner as an individual. We rarely know what a student has experienced before entering the classroom, and these experiences often shape their behaviour.

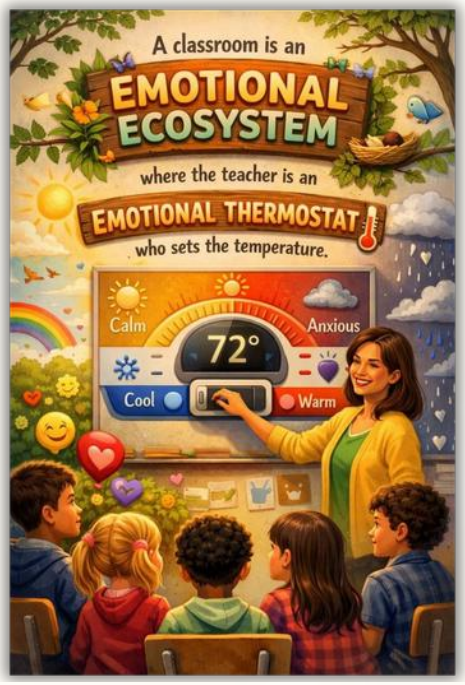
For instance, one of my young learners with ADHD struggled to concentrate during lessons. I found that allowing her to draw while listening helped her stay focused. She began illustrating what we discussed and sharing her drawings with me, which made her more engaged and productive.

This experience reinforced an important lesson: adapting to students' needs is often more effective than trying to fit them into a rigid structure. It is through this kind of responsiveness – grounded in social awareness and empathy – that emotional intelligence truly supports learning.

THE CLASSROOM
AS AN EMOTIONAL ECOSYSTEM

Think of the classroom as an **emotional ecosystem**, where the teacher acts as an **emotional thermostat**, setting the overall mood.

The way we respond, communicate, and manage our emotions influences how students feel—and how they learn. A calm, supportive teacher creates space for students to take risks and grow, while a tense environment can quickly shut learning down.



MINIMISING BURNOUT, MAXIMISING EMOTIONAL MATURITY AND MINDFULNESS

Struggling to fall asleep at night? Waking up already feeling exhausted? Suffering from frequent headaches? Looking forward to finishing your class? Then, welcome to the *Burnout Club.* We have all been through this at least once. In fact, educators are one of the most vulnerable groups prone to burnout and work exhaustion. But we must take care of ourselves.

First, it is important to distinguish between stress and distress. Stress can be a normal and even helpful response to environmental or internal anxieties and challenges, while distress occurs when stress is severe, prolonged, and coping with it becomes difficult.

Three common contributors to burnout are 3Fs: Frustration, Favouritism, and Fatigue.

Your student fails to answer the simplest question. After having taught them positive and negative answers to *Can you...?* for the 100th time, they still go *Yes, I am*. Their minds go completely blank. We can all relate to this situation, aren't we? And this is the summit of our frustration. Frustration often arises when we focus too much on what students cannot do, rather than recognising progress. Learning a language requires time, and every tiny achievement counts. Taking moments to reflect on progress can help shift this perspective.

We all have our favourite students, and there's nothing wrong or unusual about that. When your energies and vibes match those of your students, they become your favourites. Favouritism, although natural, needs to be managed carefully. As teachers, we must ensure that all students receive equal attention and support, even when we naturally connect more with some than others.

Fatigue, in this context, is closely linked to burnout. For educators, this is often intensified by the constant emotional and cognitive demands of teaching.

Another major energy drainer today is FOMO – *the Fear of Missing Out*. In the digital era, we are constantly exposed to new tools, trends, and innovations, especially in education and technology. There is an unspoken pressure to keep up, to try everything, and to stay ahead. Over time, this can become overwhelming.

This is why it is sometimes helpful to embrace the opposite idea: ROMO – *the Relief of Missing Out.* Instead of trying to do everything, we can allow ourselves to step back, slow down, and let go of what is not essential. Taking a pause gives us the space to observe our work more clearly, reflect on what truly matters, and identify areas for meaningful improvement.

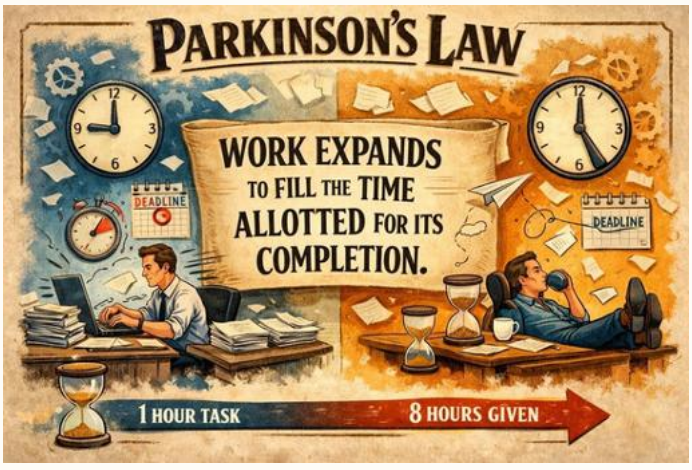
"Taking a pause gives us the space to observe our work more clearly, reflect on what truly matters, and identify areas for meaningful improvement."

Nia Tevdoradze

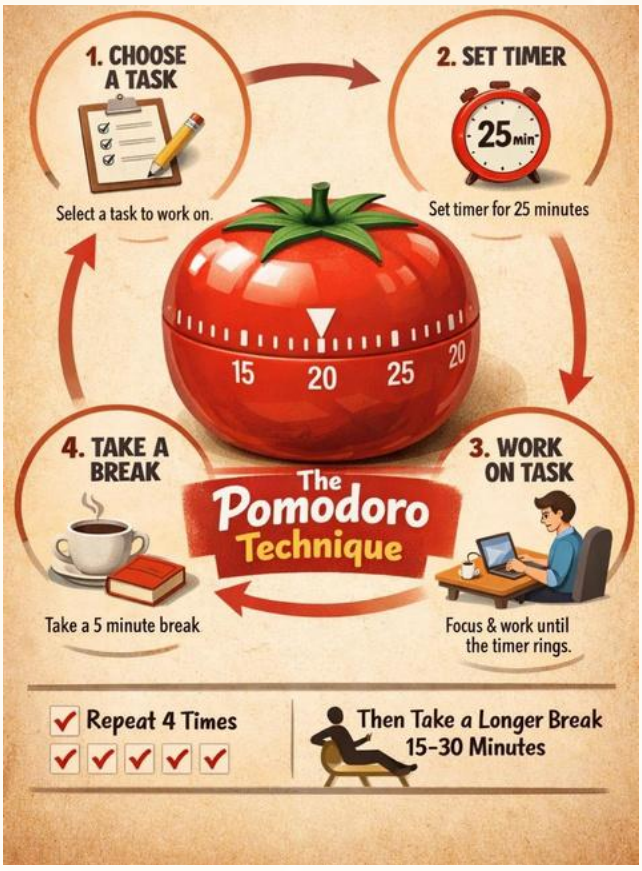
PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES
TO SUPPORT WELL-BEING

There are several simple yet powerful techniques that can help teachers manage their energy and maintain emotional balance - both in and beyond the classroom.

One important area is time management. According to Parkinson's Law, work tends to expand to fill the time allocated for its completion. This may mean you take longer than necessary to complete a task, or you procrastinate and complete the task right before the due date. Over time, this pattern can quietly contribute to stress and fatigue.



One effective way to address this is through the Pomodoro Technique, a time management method that is widely adopted. It splits work into 25-minute slots, also known as pomodoros, separated by a brief 5-minute break. After four pomodoros, a longer break of 15–30 minutes is taken. This structure serves to improve focus, minimise distractions, and prevent burnout by aligning with our natural attention span.



In practice, this approach can be adapted to teaching. Lessons can be organised into focused segments, with short pauses that allow both teachers and students to reset. During these short 5-minute breaks, students can do some simple exercises like Eye Exercises or Radio Taiso – a light exercise routine practised in Japan for nearly a century. Radio Taiso is very accessible: it can be done by people of all ages and physical conditions, making it a practical option for classroom use.

Finally, simple mindfulness techniques can help regulate emotional responses in challenging moments. The 4-7-8 breathing exercise, for instance, is a widely used method for calming the nervous system. By slowing down the breath, it helps reduce stress and restore focus. In teaching, this can be particularly useful before a demanding lesson, after a difficult interaction, or even as a short guided activity with students

Taken together, these techniques are not about adding more to an already full workload. Rather, they are small, manageable adjustments that help sustain energy, improve focus, and support both teacher well-being and classroom effectiveness.

LEARNING FROM
JAPANESE CONCEPTS OF BALANCE

Recently, I started exploring Asian philosophy, and I find it surprisingly helpful in terms of managing stress and anxiety.

Birdwatching is an activity that has been shown to be as beneficial as therapy in helping people feel calmer and more present. It encourages us to focus our mind in the present moment, notice the simplest things, bringing a sense of fulfilment and joy. This idea connects closely to the Japanese concept of Yutori (ゆとり) – living with spaciousness. Yutori is a lifestyle philosophy of slowing down, reducing stress, and finding balance in doing less but experiencing more.

Another powerful concept is Wabi-sabi (侘び寂び). In traditional Japanese aesthetics, wabi-sabi centres on the acceptance of imperfection. It is often described as the appreciation of beauty that is "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete." For educators, this perspective can be particularly meaningful. It reminds us to accept our own imperfections, as well as those of our students, including their different learning paces. Instead of striving for constant perfection, we can begin to see value in the process, in mistakes, and in gradual growth.

Finally, there is the concept of Ikigai (生き甲斐). IKIGAI is a Japanese concept that means "a reason for being," representing our personal sense of the meaning of life. Find something you love and enjoy doing the most, and use it to distract yourself from daily chaos, even for a short time (García and Miralles, 2017). In teaching, this might be the joy of helping students grow, creating meaningful learning experiences, or simply building human connections. Taking time to engage in something we genuinely enjoy, even briefly, can help us step away from daily pressures and regain a sense of balance.

Together, these ideas remind us that well-being is not about doing more, but about being more intentional. By slowing down, accepting imperfection, and reconnecting with purpose, we can sustain both our emotional balance and our effectiveness as educators.

In a world where technology is advancing faster than ever, Emotional Intelligence is no longer optional – it is what defines meaningful education. AI can support efficiency, generate content, and even personalise learning pathways. But it cannot understand a student's silence, sense their anxiety, or celebrate their small victories in a way that truly matters. It cannot replace the human connection that allows learning to happen.

As educators, we are not only teaching content – we are shaping experiences, relationships, and confidence. The way we respond, the way we listen, and the way we create space for our students to grow will always matter more than any tool we use.

"Perhaps the real question is not how we keep up with AI, but how we stay grounded in what makes us irreplaceable."

Nia Tevdoradze

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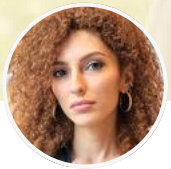


Nia Tevdoradze is a professional educator, linguist, translator and writer with 13 years of experience in education. Her mission is to empower cross-cultural educators by integrating emotional intelligence and social-emotional learning into teaching, helping both teachers and students thrive in the face of future global challenges.

EDUCATOR WELLBEING:

THE MISSING LINK IN LEARNING

Tahajra Worrell

The curriculum WE RARELY DISCUSS

Conversations about education today often centre on curriculum reform, AI in classrooms, assessment methods, and innovative teaching strategies. These discussions are important. Yet one of the most influential factors in a child's learning experience receives far less attention: the emotional wellbeing of the adults guiding them.

Teachers are not only facilitators of content. They are the emotional anchors of their classrooms. Before a student engages with grammar rules, scientific concepts, or historical timelines, they are reading the room. They notice tone, pace, posture, and presence. They are asking, often subconsciously, whether this is a space where it is safe to participate.

Many teachers recognise this moment. A student hesitates before answering a question and looks at the teacher carefully, searching for cues. Will mistakes be welcomed as part of learning, or corrected sharply? The answer often determines whether the student speaks up or withdraws.

This emotional atmosphere becomes part of what students learn. It shapes how comfortable they feel asking questions, making mistakes, or expressing uncertainty. When educators feel supported and grounded, classrooms tend to feel steady and open. When educators are overwhelmed or depleted, tension can enter the room in subtle but meaningful ways. If we want to improve learning outcomes globally, educator wellbeing must be understood as foundational rather than optional.

"Yet one of the most influential factors in a child's learning experience receives far less attention: the emotional wellbeing of the adults guiding them."

Tahajra Worrell

The biology of connection: WHY EMOTIONAL STATES SPREAD IN CLASSROOMS

Research in developmental psychology and social neuroscience helps explain why a teacher's internal state matters. Human nervous systems are responsive to one another. Emotional contagion research suggests that stress and calm can spread within groups through facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language. Although the precise mechanisms are still being studied, the evidence is consistent in one respect: emotional states influence collective environments.

This connects to the concept of co-regulation. Children develop emotional regulation skills through interactions with regulated adults. In early childhood especially, the adult nervous system provides stability while the child learns to manage frustration, excitement, and disappointment.

In classroom settings, co-regulation continues to matter. When a teacher remains calm during moments of disruption, students often settle more quickly. When an educator feels chronically strained, maintaining that steadiness becomes more difficult. Supporting teacher wellbeing is therefore not only about reducing stress. It is about strengthening the emotional conditions that make learning possible.

A simple classroom example illustrates this clearly. A group of students begins talking loudly during an activity. One teacher raises their voice immediately in frustration. Another pauses, lowers their tone, and calmly redirects the group. Both teachers aim for order, but the emotional tone they introduce into the room can lead to very different outcomes.

CO-REGULATION in the language classroom

These dynamics are particularly visible in English Language Teaching contexts. Learning a new language requires vulnerability. Students must speak before they feel fully competent. They risk mispronouncing words, searching for vocabulary, or expressing ideas imperfectly.

This vulnerability activates anxiety for many learners. In these moments, the teacher's emotional presence plays a decisive role. A teacher who responds to mistakes with visible impatience may unintentionally discourage participation. Students can interpret subtle tension as evaluation or rejection.

Consider a common language classroom moment. A student struggles to pronounce a new word and pauses mid-sentence. If the teacher interrupts quickly with correction, the student may become hesitant to try again. If the teacher smiles, allows time for the attempt, and gently models the correct pronunciation, the student remains engaged and the learning process continues.

Small responses like these shape the emotional climate of the classroom. When errors are treated as normal steps in learning, students become more willing to participate. Psychological safety supports fluency development and long-term confidence.

In multilingual and culturally diverse classrooms, the stakes may be even higher. Students may already be navigating identity questions, migration experiences, or cultural transitions. A teacher who communicates steadiness and respect helps learners feel capable in a new linguistic environment.

Moving beyond SURFACE-LEVEL TRAUMA AWARENESS

Many education systems now use the language of trauma-informed practice. This is a valuable development. However, effective implementation requires attention to the emotional capacity of the adults involved.

Teachers are not neutral observers of student experiences. They bring their own histories, stressors, and assumptions into the classroom. When educators lack space for reflection, challenging student behaviour can trigger disproportionate reactions.

For example, a teacher who feels personally disrespected by a student's tone may respond more strongly than intended. Another teacher may interpret the same behaviour as frustration or confusion and respond with curiosity instead of discipline. Reflective awareness allows educators to pause and choose responses more deliberately.

Schools can support this reflective capacity through simple practices. Staff meetings can occasionally include short reflection moments where teachers discuss difficult classroom situations and explore different interpretations of student behaviour. These conversations help normalise reflection as a professional skill rather than a personal weakness.

THE ACADEMIC AND ECONOMIC CASE for Wellbeing

Educator wellbeing is often framed as a moral issue. It is also an economic and academic one. Teacher attrition rates remain high in many countries. Research by Ingersoll and colleagues has shown that a significant proportion of teachers leave the profession within their first five years. Reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have similarly highlighted high levels of teacher stress across member countries.

High turnover disrupts student learning, weakens institutional memory, and increases recruitment costs. Stability in teaching staff correlates with improved academic outcomes and stronger student relationships.

There is also a cognitive dimension. Chronic stress impairs executive functioning. When educators are overwhelmed, planning, decision-making, and behaviour management become more taxing. In contrast, when teachers operate within manageable stress levels, they are better positioned to deliver thoughtful instruction and nuanced feedback.

Investing in educator wellbeing is therefore a practical strategy for strengthening both performance and retention.

The cost of EMOTIONAL WITHDRAWAL

Burnout is not only visible when teachers leave the profession. It also appears when educators remain physically present but emotionally disengaged. Emotional withdrawal can emerge as a protective response to prolonged stress.

In many classrooms, this shift appears gradually. A teacher who once greeted students at the door may stop doing so. Lessons continue, but interaction becomes minimal. Students complete tasks quietly, yet fewer questions are asked and discussion becomes limited.

Educational systems often focus on compliance and performance metrics. Yet connection remains one of the strongest predictors of learning. When teachers have the emotional bandwidth to engage with students, classroom climates improve. Supporting wellbeing helps preserve this essential relational element.

"Educational systems often focus on compliance and performance metrics. Yet connection remains one of the strongest predictors of learning."

Tahajra Worrell

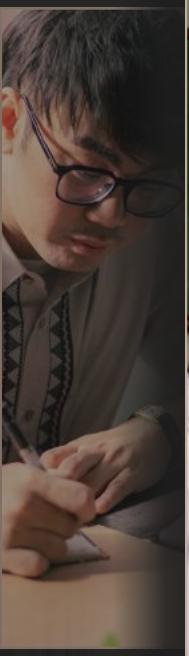
Challenging the culture of CONSTANT POSITIVITY

Within many education contexts, a culture of constant positivity prevails. Motivational slogans encourage teachers to remember their purpose or to keep pushing through challenges. While well-intentioned, this messaging can discourage honest conversations about strain.

When educators feel that expressing difficulty signals weakness or lack of commitment, they may suppress legitimate concerns. This can delay meaningful support and contribute to long-term exhaustion.

Schools can shift this culture by creating spaces where teachers can speak openly about challenges. For example, some schools introduce brief monthly "professional reflection circles" where teachers share one classroom success and one current difficulty. These conversations reduce isolation and allow colleagues to exchange practical strategies.

A healthier professional culture recognises both dedication and limitation. Respecting teacher wellbeing strengthens the commitment to students.



CULTURAL NUANCE and PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The experience of teacher wellbeing varies across cultural contexts. In some societies, teachers are viewed as moral authorities whose authority should not be questioned. This high status can bring pressure to appear consistently composed and competent.

In other contexts, educators may experience diminished professional respect and heightened scrutiny from parents or policymakers. Here, stress often stems from lack of agency and autonomy.

Efforts to support wellbeing must therefore be culturally responsive. In under-resourced environments, wellbeing may be closely tied to material conditions and safety. In high-pressure urban settings, psychological demands may be the dominant stressor.

Recognising these differences allows schools and education systems to design support structures that match the realities teachers face.

FROM INDIVIDUAL SELF-CARE TO SYSTEMIC CARE: Practical ways schools can support teachers

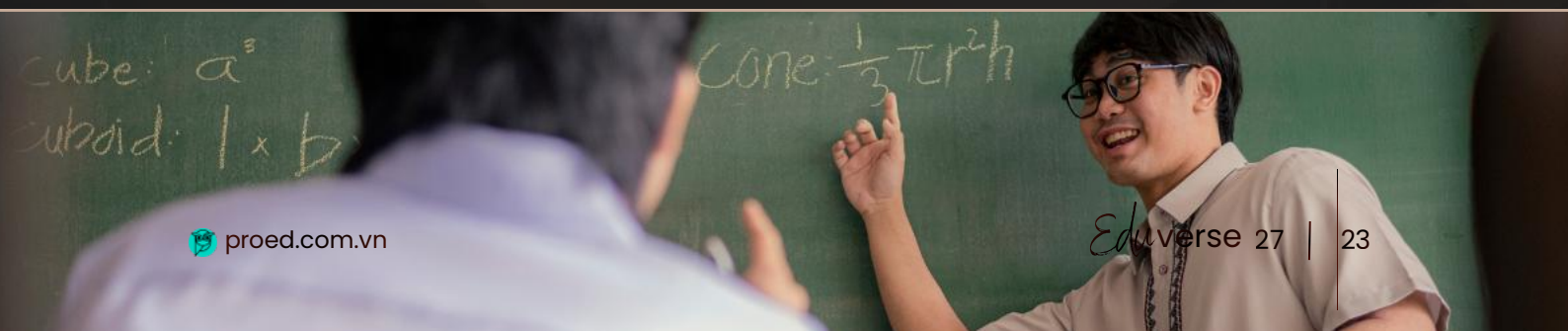
Wellbeing initiatives often place responsibility solely on individual teachers. While personal practices such as mindfulness or journaling can be helpful, they are insufficient without systemic support.

A comprehensive approach operates at multiple levels.

At the individual level, teachers can develop simple reflective habits. One useful prompt is to ask at the start of the day, "What emotional tone am I bringing into my classroom today?" This can help teachers pause and reset before interacting with students.

At the institutional level, leadership practices also play an important role. School leaders can regularly review workload expectations and remove unnecessary administrative tasks when new initiatives are introduced. When systems acknowledge teacher capacity, educators are better able to focus on the core work of teaching and supporting students.

When responsibility is shared across individuals, colleagues and institutions, wellbeing becomes part of the professional culture rather than being the sole responsibility of the teacher.



Reframing THE NARRATIVE OF TEACHING

For generations, teaching has been framed as a profession of sacrifice. While dedication is admirable, sustained depletion is neither ethical nor effective. If the goal of education is to cultivate resilient, thoughtful, and emotionally intelligent students, the adults guiding them must experience similar conditions.

Viewing teachers as the central infrastructure of education changes the conversation. Infrastructure requires maintenance and investment. When educators feel respected and supported, they are more likely to remain in the profession and to create stable learning environments.

Closing achievement gaps and promoting equity involves more than curriculum reform. It involves ensuring that the adults within classrooms have the emotional capacity to engage consistently and constructively with students.

TEACHING BEGINS WITH the Teacher

Education reform often prioritises tools, technologies, and policies. These matter. However, all of them operate through human relationships. The emotional presence of the educator influences how students interpret instruction, authority, and belonging.

Supporting educator wellbeing is not a peripheral concern. It is central to improving learning outcomes. When teachers have the capacity to remain steady, reflective, and connected, students benefit academically and socially.

If we are committed to strengthening global education systems, we must recognise the hidden curriculum that operates in every classroom. Teaching begins with the teacher. Investing in educator wellbeing is one of the most direct and effective strategies available for supporting children's long-term success.

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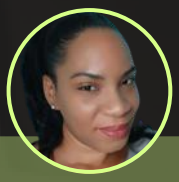

Tahajra Worrell is an education and personal development practitioner exploring the connection between educator wellbeing and children's learning outcomes. Her work focuses on emotional awareness, reflective practice, and creating learning environments where both adults and children can thrive.

SPECIAL INTRO

EduVerse is excited to launch its podcast channel **EduVerse PD Podcast**, an innovative and groundbreaking professional development experience designed to empower educators in an innovative and accessible way.

This podcast series explores **cutting-edge educational trends**, shares **practical classroom techniques**, and dives deep into **EdTech innovations** and the role of **AI in education**. Our goal is to provide you with actionable insights that you can apply immediately in your classrooms, enhancing your teaching and empowering your students.

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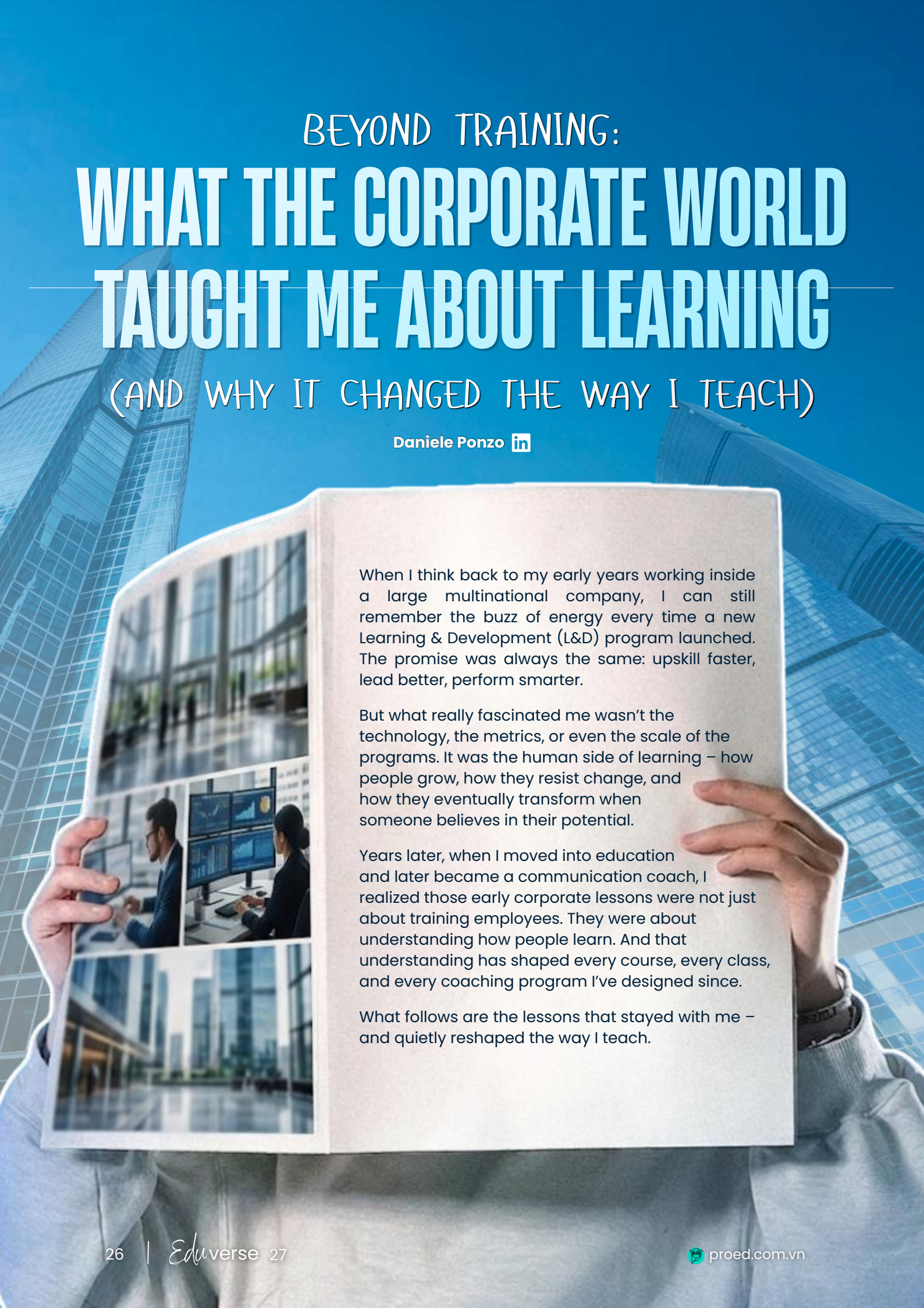
BEYOND TRAINING:
WHAT THE CORPORATE WORLD TAUGHT ME ABOUT LEARNING
(AND WHY IT CHANGED THE WAY I TEACH)

Daniele Ponzo



When I think back to my early years working inside a large multinational company, I can still remember the buzz of energy every time a new Learning & Development (L&D) program launched. The promise was always the same: upskill faster, lead better, perform smarter.

But what really fascinated me wasn't the technology, the metrics, or even the scale of the programs. It was the human side of learning – how people grow, how they resist change, and how they eventually transform when someone believes in their potential.

Years later, when I moved into education and later became a communication coach, I realized those early corporate lessons were not just about training employees. They were about understanding how people learn. And that understanding has shaped every course, every class, and every coaching program I've designed since.

What follows are the lessons that stayed with me – and quietly reshaped the way I teach.

Lesson 1

Learning doesn't happen in classrooms. It happens in conversations.

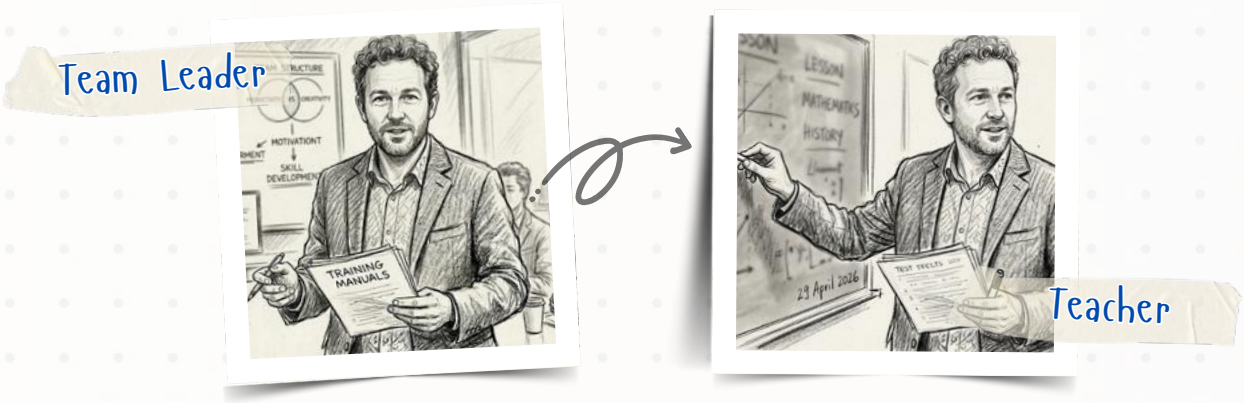
When I became Team Leader of a large international Service Delivery department, I spent months delivering technical and soft-skills training for employees. Everything was perfectly structured: needs analyses, annual plans, post-training evaluations.

But something didn't add up.

People would attend training, fill in feedback forms, even say it was "useful." Yet, six months later, behaviour hadn't changed much. Reports were written the same way, meetings were run the same way, and cross-department communication still broke down.

The real learning, I discovered, wasn't happening *inside* the classroom. It was happening *around* it: in the corridor chats, the informal mentoring moments, and the one-to-one discussions after a presentation had gone wrong.

That's when I learned one of the most valuable lessons for both corporate and traditional education: People don't learn when you tell them what to do. They learn when they reflect on what they've done.



When I later became an English teacher and then a communication coach, I carried that principle with me. A grammar rule or a pronunciation exercise means little until a learner *feels* how it changes their confidence in a real conversation.

This is why, in my sessions today, reflection is not an afterthought. It's the method. Whether I'm helping an IT professional prepare for a global meeting or a Project Manager refine their presentation delivery, learning starts with awareness and grows through feedback.

> *People don't learn when you tell them what to do. They learn when they reflect on what they've done.*
>
> – Daniele Ponzo

Lesson 2

Leadership and learning speak the same language

One of my responsibilities in corporate life was to identify and prepare new Service Delivery Professionals. We ran internal mentoring programs where senior staff coached junior colleagues. Some mentors excelled, while others struggled – despite their expertise.

The difference was communication. The best mentors weren't necessarily the most technical. They were the ones who could listen, guide, and inspire trust. In mentoring, as in teaching, knowledge alone does not automatically give you authority. How you share that knowledge matters just as much.

That realization changed my professional direction. I began studying not just English, but the language of leadership: how tone, clarity, and empathy shape perception. Years later, this became a central theme in my book *Easy English for IT*. Communication is not just a soft skill; it is a strategic one.

When professionals learn to speak with clarity and confidence, they do more than improve their English. They grow into modern leaders.

And the same applies to educators. Teachers lead learning communities. We motivate, guide, and create safe environments for growth. In that sense, we are all leaders – because leadership, at its core, is about helping others see what they are capable of becoming.

Lesson 3

The mentor-mentee relationship is the hidden curriculum

If I had to choose the most transformative experience of my corporate years, it would be mentoring – both as a mentor and as a mentee.

As a mentee, I learned humility: how to accept feedback without taking it personally. I learned that growth often begins with discomfort. As a mentor, I learned patience: not everyone learns the same way or at the same pace. Some need encouragement, others need challenge. Some thrive on structure, others on freedom. But most of all, I learned that mentoring is not about giving answers. It's about asking the right questions.

That insight reshaped the way I teach. In coaching, I rarely correct immediately. Instead, I invite reflection:

- *How else could you express that idea?*
- *What would make that message clearer?*
- *How do you think your tone sounded there?*

It may be slower – but it is deeper.

I believe mentoring principles could, and should, be embedded more intentionally into mainstream education. Imagine classrooms where feedback feels like partnership rather than judgment; where teachers act as guides and learners take ownership of their development.

Because in the end, learning is a dialogue, not a download.

Lesson 4

Confidence is learned – just like any skill

Working in recruitment and coaching taught me something I still see every day in education: talent without confidence often goes unnoticed.

I've interviewed brilliant professionals who undersold themselves simply because they struggled to articulate their value. I've coached employees with strong technical skills who hesitated to speak up in meetings.

It wasn't a language issue. It was a communication mindset.

When I transitioned into teaching English, this pattern became even more visible. Learners often said, "I know the words, but I can't make them come out right." The same challenge, just expressed differently. That's when I realized that teaching language and teaching confidence are inseparable. You can't expect someone to speak fluently if they don't believe their voice matters.

In both corporate training and language learning, the real transformation happens when learners shift from "I need to be perfect" to "I want to be understood." That shift is the foundation of confidence – and the key to authentic communication.

> *[...] teaching language and teaching confidence are inseparable.*
>
> – Daniele Ponzo

Lesson 5

Reflection is the bridge between learning and change

Every training program I attended had evaluation metrics. After each L&D initiative, we measured ROI, engagement, and completion rates. Yet one thing was missing: *reflection.*

We were so busy tracking outcomes that we often forgot to ask, "What did you learn about yourself through this process?"

When I began designing my own courses years later, I built reflection into the curriculum itself. I call it the **Kudos phase**, part of my H.A.C.K. framework (Hone, Action, Collaboration, Kudos). It's the moment where learners pause to recognize not just results, but *effort*.

Teachers often do this intuitively, celebrating small wins, encouraging progress, or validating emotions. But I think we can learn from the corporate world's structured approach to feedback: consistent, actionable, and data-informed.

The best learning environments balance both: the heart of teaching and the structure of development. Reflection connects the two.

Lesson 6

Learning is a system – and every system can be designed.

One of the most surprising lessons I took from corporate L&D is that learning doesn't happen by accident. It happens by design.

Every successful program I managed – whether in automation, compliance, or leadership – shared the same logic: clear objectives, consistent feedback loops, and opportunities for real-world application.

When I moved into education, I saw how often teachers had to reinvent the wheel. Passion was everywhere, but systems were sometimes missing.

Teaching, after all, is project management for the human mind. If corporate education sometimes lacks empathy, traditional education sometimes lacks structure. The future of learning needs both.

Today, when I design learning experiences – whether for English learners, corporate teams, or teacher-training workshops – I approach them like an engineer. I map the process, identify friction points, and ensure every activity connects to a meaningful outcome.

Lesson 7

Growth is contagious!

One of the most fulfilling moments in my career came years after I left the corporate world. I reconnected with a former colleague I had mentored during my time as an L&D specialist. He had since become a training manager himself.

He told me, "You probably don't remember, but you once said something that stuck with me: *'You don't teach people to grow. You grow with them.'*"

That sentence, I realized, summarized everything I believe about learning.

Growth is relational. It spreads through trust, curiosity, and visibility. When one person starts improving – whether it's their English, their confidence, or their teaching approach – it gives permission for others to do the same.

That's how I see my work today as a communication coach for IT professionals. Every time a client tells me they led a meeting successfully in English, or finally spoke up in an international team, I know that ripple will reach someone else – a colleague, a manager, a mentee.

And that's how change happens: one conversation at a time.

Bringing It All Together

The educator as designer, coach, and connector

The line between corporate training and formal education is blurring. Teachers are becoming learning designers. Coaches are becoming facilitators of transformation. Corporations are realizing that empathy and human connection are not optional – they are strategic.

My journey through corporate L&D, mentoring, teaching, and coaching has taught me that the future of learning is hybrid in the best possible sense. Not hybrid in terms of online versus offline, but hybrid in terms of head and heart, systems and stories, knowledge and connection.

This is where educators can lead.

We don't just teach lessons; we design experiences.
We don't just deliver content; we shape confidence.
We don't just train skills; we cultivate mindsets.

Modern education is about turning information into transformation.

Or, in simpler terms:
People don't grow because we teach them. They grow because we connect with them.

An Invitation to Reflect

Looking back, I can see how each stage of my journey – corporate L&D, mentoring, teaching, and coaching – has been part of the same story: learning how people learn.

In corporate life, I learned to build systems. In education, I learned to build empathy. In coaching, I learned to build confidence. And I believe that's the evolution educators are called to embrace today.

If you can combine structure with empathy, feedback with curiosity, and communication with purpose, you can help learners not only *understand* better – but also *become* better. Because in the end, whether you're leading a global team or a classroom of learners, the goal is the same: to help people find their voice. And once they do, the learning never really stops.

So perhaps the question is not only what the corporate world can teach education. Perhaps the deeper question is this:

"What lessons from your own professional journey are still waiting to shape the way you teach?"

– Daniele Ponzo

Daniele Ponzo is a Business English Coach, author of Easy English for IT, with 13+ years in IT and 8 in language training. He helps tech professionals communicate with clarity and authority. With leadership experience at Xerox and the Italian Ministry of Education, he blends tech expertise and coaching. Host of The Non-Native Leader podcast.

PROJECT SHOWCASE

SMALL HANDS, BIG IMPACT:

T.A.F. TREES & FORESTATION

Gülin Erhan

Trees are fundamental components of ecosystems, playing a crucial role in sustaining biodiversity by providing food and shelter for a wide range of organisms, including microorganisms, plants, and animals. Beyond their ecological value, trees are closely linked to human well-being, contributing to social development and long-term sustainability (Kozlowski & Song, 2022). Despite global environmental challenges, tree planting and conservation remain cost-effective and impactful strategies for addressing ecological and social issues (Turner-Skoff & Cavender, 2019).

For children, direct interaction with nature is particularly valuable. Even in urban environments, spending time around trees helps young learners better understand natural processes (Tyrväinen et al., 2005). Schools play a key role in this process, as they offer flexible environments where experiential and outdoor learning can be integrated into the curriculum. Research suggests that environmental education at an early age fosters awareness, responsibility, and positive attitudes toward nature (Strong, 1998). Furthermore, younger children tend to feel a stronger emotional connection to nature, highlighting the importance of introducing meaningful environmental experiences early in life (Liefländer et al., 2013).

PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Based on these principles, the eTwinning project *"T.A.F. – Trees and Forestation"* was developed for students aged 8–11. The project aims to enhance environmental awareness through hands-on learning, outdoor observation, and active participation.

Implemented across five countries – Türkiye, Greece, Georgia, Croatia, and Romania – the project involved 124 students and 10 teachers. This international collaboration not only broadened students' perspectives on environmental issues but also supported intercultural communication and global awareness.

DESIGNING MEANINGFUL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Rather than focusing on a large number of activities, the project prioritized a smaller set of carefully designed experiences that aligned closely with its learning goals. These activities combined environmental education with digital literacy, ensuring that students were both cognitively and emotionally engaged.

One of the most impactful experiences was a field visit to the Zero Carbon Point Education Center, organized in collaboration with the Ege Forest Foundation. This activity allowed students to observe sustainability practices in real-world contexts. Through hands-on exploration, they learned about renewable energy, efficient resource use, and environmental protection, helping them connect theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Another key activity, *"If Trees Could Talk,"* encouraged students to create environmental messages from the perspective of trees. This task promoted empathy and perspective-taking, moving beyond factual learning to foster a deeper emotional connection with nature. Students engaged creatively while reflecting on environmental responsibility, demonstrating how cognitive and emotional learning can work together.

Digital integration also played an important role. In the collaborative creation of the e-book "The Oldest Living Trees," students developed research, evaluation, and presentation skills. Tools such as Genially and other Web 2.0 platforms were selected not simply for engagement, but for their ability to support active learning. By creating and sharing content, students moved from passive consumption to active knowledge construction, strengthening both understanding and ownership of their learning.

Early activities focusing on communication and digital safety helped establish a strong foundation. Through introductions, collaborative tasks, and the creation of an e-safety song, students developed awareness of responsible online behavior while building a supportive digital learning environment.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND REAL-WORLD LEARNING

The project extended beyond the classroom through collaboration with experts, institutions, and non-governmental organizations. Seminars delivered by professionals provided students with practical insights into environmental sustainability.

Partnership with the Ege Forest Foundation further enriched the learning experience, allowing students to engage in applied training related to environmental protection. These interactions strengthened the connection between classroom learning and real-life contexts.

Family involvement also played a meaningful role. Parents participated in workshops and creative activities, reinforcing learning at home and helping to extend environmental awareness beyond the school setting.

THE IMPACT

Overall, the combination of experiential learning, digital integration, and international collaboration proved effective in creating meaningful and lasting learning experiences. Beyond these academic outcomes, the project also had a noticeable impact on students' attitudes and behaviours.

Students became more aware of digital safety and began to apply e-safety rules in their daily practices. For instance, they showed increased sensitivity about sharing personal information and often reminded each other about protecting their privacy during online activities. Students also demonstrated a growing understanding of digital ethics. They became more careful about using reliable sources, giving references, and respecting copyright rules when creating their digital products.

The project also influenced their environmental mindset. Many students expressed a stronger sense of responsibility toward nature and showed increased willingness to participate in activities such as tree planting and environmental protection. These changes indicate that the project supported not only cognitive learning but also behavioural and attitudinal development.

To further illustrate the impact, several concrete examples emerged during the project. For instance, during digital activities, students began to actively remind each other not to share personal information and asked questions such as “Are we allowed to use this image?” or “Should we give a reference here?”, reflecting their growing awareness of digital ethics and e-safety.

In addition, some students took initiative beyond assigned tasks by creating their own environmental messages and sharing them with their peers and families. These small but meaningful actions demonstrate that the project not only increased awareness but also encouraged responsible behaviour and active participation.

THE CHALLENGES

Despite its success, the project presented several challenges. Coordinating activities across multiple countries required careful planning, particularly when managing different schedules and varying levels of digital competence. Some students initially found it difficult to express abstract ideas in empathy-based tasks, while others needed additional support in using digital tools effectively.

These challenges were addressed through structured guidance, peer collaboration, and continuous support from teachers. This process highlighted the importance of flexibility and scaffolding when implementing complex, collaborative projects.

A key insight from the project was that depth is more impactful than breadth. Focusing on fewer, well-structured activities allowed for more meaningful engagement and deeper learning.

> *“Focusing on fewer, well-structured activities allowed for more meaningful engagement and deeper learning.”*
>
> Gülin Erhan

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS FOR EDUCATORS

This project offers several adaptable ideas that teachers can easily implement in different educational contexts. Even small-scale activities can effectively promote environmental awareness and student engagement.

Teachers can begin with simple practices such as organizing observation activities around trees in the school environment, encouraging students to keep nature journals, or conducting creative writing tasks like imagining messages from trees. Digital tools can be integrated through basic activities such as creating posters, short presentations, or collaborative slides, depending on available resources.

For schools with limited technological access, many activities can be adapted into offline formats. Drawing, storytelling, classroom discussions, and hands-on activities such as planting seeds or observing local plants can provide meaningful learning experiences without requiring digital tools.

In contexts without international partners, teachers can still foster collaboration by encouraging group work within the classroom or across different classes in the same school. Students can share their work through school exhibitions, presentations, or local community events, maintaining the collaborative spirit of the project.

Ultimately, the key element is not the scale of the project, but the opportunity it provides for students to actively engage with nature, think critically, and develop a sense of environmental responsibility.

The T.A.F. project highlights the transformative potential of early environmental education. By engaging students in active, collaborative, and experiential learning processes, the project contributed to the development of environmentally conscious individuals.

Beyond its structured activities and outcomes, one of the most meaningful takeaways was witnessing how students gradually developed a sense of responsibility toward both nature and their digital environments. As an educator, this project reinforced the idea that learning becomes truly effective when students are not only informed but also emotionally engaged and given opportunities to take ownership of their actions.

One particularly powerful moment was observing students reminding each other about protecting personal information or asking whether they should cite a source. These small but significant behaviours reflected a deeper shift – from passive learners to responsible and aware individuals.

As the project continues, it reinforces a simple but powerful idea: small actions, when guided thoughtfully, can lead to meaningful and lasting impact.

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CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES

Welcome to our monthly **Classroom Techniques** column, where you can find practical teaching techniques that can be implemented in your classroom right away. Whether you're a seasoned professional or a new teacher full of enthusiasm, this column is designed to supply you with new ideas every month to improve your classroom performance.

The Mystery of DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

6 POWERFUL TECHNIQUES FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

WHAT IS IT?

Differentiated Instruction is a teaching approach that adapts content, activities, support, and assessment to students' different readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, ensuring all learners can access learning meaningfully and achieve the same learning goals through flexible pathways.

WHY IT MATTERS

Boost engagement & motivation

Support mixed-ability classrooms

Promote inclusion & equity

Encourage student autonomy

Help all students reach their goals

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

- ✗ Differentiated instruction means preparing many different lessons.
- ✓ It's about flexible support and choices.

- ✗ It makes lessons too complicated.
- ✓ Small changes can make a big difference.

- ✗ It is only for struggling students.
- ✓ It supports ALL learners, including advanced students.

- ✗ It lowers academic standards.
- ✓ The learning goal stays the same; only the pathway changes.

6 CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES
TO MEET EVERY LEARNER WHERE THEY ARE

1 TIERED TASKS

Offer different levels of the same task to match students' readiness.

Purpose: Support mixed abilities, reduce overload, and challenge stronger learners.

2 CHOICE BOARDS

Let students choose how they will demonstrate and apply their learning.

Purpose: Increase motivation, encourage autonomy, and use students' strengths.

3 FLEXIBLE GROUPING

Group students in different ways based on skill, interest, or learning goals.

Purpose: Encourage collaboration, avoid fixed labels, and promote peer learning.

4 LEARNING STATIONS

Set up different stations with varied activities for students to explore and learn.

Purpose: Increase engagement, support different learning styles, and reduce teacher-centered instruction.

5 THINK – PAIR – SHARE

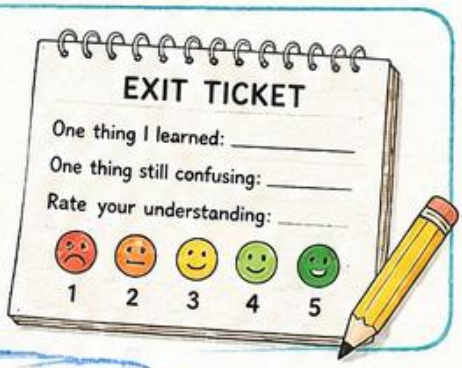
Purpose:
Support shy students, provide processing time, and increase participation.

6 EXIT TICKETS

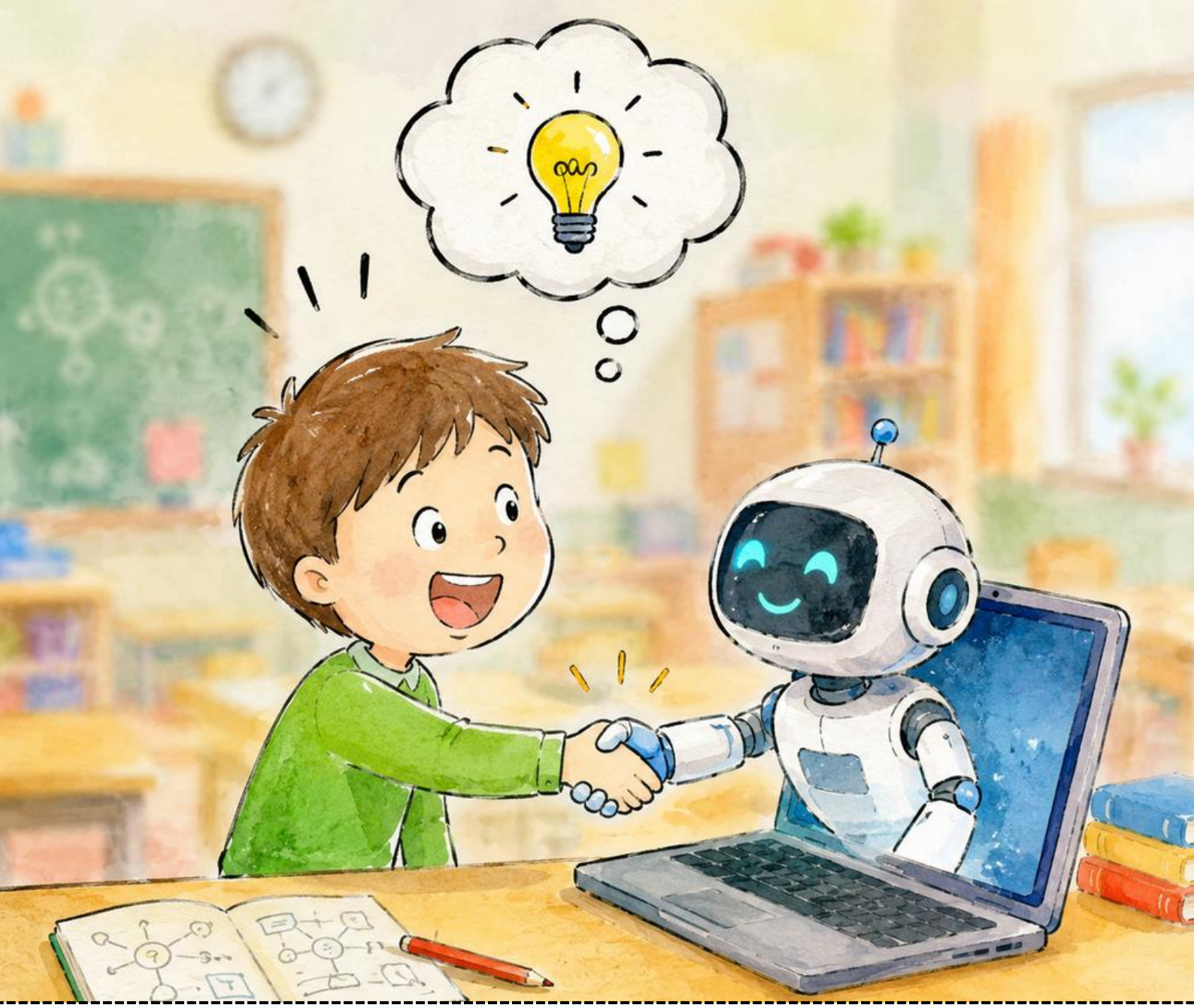
End the lesson with a quick reflection.

Examples:
- One thing I learned
- One thing still confusing
- Rate your understanding (1–5)

Purpose: Quick formative assessment, check understanding, and guide future instruction.



When we teach in different ways, every student can shine!



THE HUMAN-CENTRIC AI CLASSROOM:

KEEPING THINKING AT THE CORE

Kompeo Pompeo Uwendo

A few months ago, I asked a student to explain an answer he had submitted for homework. It was well-written, structured, and technically correct. But when I followed up with a simple question, "Can you walk me through how you got this?". He paused.

He looked back at the screen, then at me, and said, "I'm not really sure. I asked AI."

That moment stayed with me. Not because the student had done something wrong, but because it showed something I had been noticing for a while. The issue was not the use of AI itself. It was the growing gap between having an answer and actually understanding it. That gap is where a great deal of teaching seems to sit now.

Back in early 2024, many of us were trying to figure out what AI meant for the classroom. There were real concerns. Some teachers avoided it completely. Others tried to control it. It felt like something familiar was shifting too quickly.

Now, in 2026, things feel a bit more settled. Not solved, but clearer.

AI has not removed thinking from the classroom. If anything, it has made thinking more visible. It is often easier now to notice when a student genuinely understands something and when they do not. Students who think clearly tend to use AI differently. They ask more focused questions, refine responses, and sometimes even challenge the information they receive. Others simply accept the first answer and move on. That difference becomes obvious very quickly when you talk to them.

So the question is no longer whether AI belongs in education. It already does. The more useful question is what we choose to do with it.

WHEN ASKING BECOMES THE WORK

One thing I did not expect is how much this shift would revolve around questioning.

We hear terms like prompt engineering, but in everyday classroom practice, it is often much simpler than that. It comes down to whether students can clearly express what they need. And many cannot, at least not at first.

One student might type, "Explain this topic," and receive a response that sounds polished but does not genuinely help. Another student might ask, "Can you break this into steps and show where the key changes happen?" That usually leads to something much more useful.

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One student might type, "Explain this topic," and receive a response that sounds polished but does not genuinely help. Another student might ask, "Can you break this into steps and show where the key changes happen?" That usually leads to something much more useful.

The difference may seem small on the surface, but it matters. To ask the second question, the student must first pause and think. What exactly am I trying to understand? Where am I getting stuck? What kind of answer would help?

That pause is part of learning.

It connects to metacognition, which is the ability to think about and monitor one's own thinking. Mollick (2024) suggests that AI tools can support this process when they are used thoughtfully, particularly when learners actively engage with responses rather than passively consuming them. At the same time, poor prompts can also reveal something important. When students repeatedly receive vague or unhelpful AI responses, it often reflects unclear thinking rather than a technological problem. For teachers, that becomes useful diagnostic information.

> **"For a long time, the final product was often enough. If a student wrote a strong essay, you could assume they understood the topic. That is no longer always the case."**
>
> Kompeo Pompeo Uwendo

LOOKING BEYOND THE FINAL ANSWER

This is where assessment begins to shift.

For a long time, the final product was often enough. If a student wrote a strong essay, you could assume they understood the topic. That is no longer always the case.

Students can now produce work that looks complete, but when you ask them to explain it – why a particular idea was included, or how they arrived at a conclusion – the understanding is not always there. I have seen this happen more than once.

Because of this, it makes sense to look a bit differently at what we assess – not only the final answer, but also at the thinking process behind it, at how the student got there. For example:

These questions do not always lead to neat or simple assessment. In fact, they often make evaluation more complex and time-consuming. However, they also provide a much clearer picture of learning.

More broadly, education has already been moving in this direction. UNESCO (2023) and Luckin (2024) both emphasise the growing importance of critical thinking and judgment, and human decision-making in AI-supported learning environments. AI is not creating this shift on its own – it is simply making it harder to ignore.

A PRACTICAL WAY TO START

This does not need to be complicated. One approach that has worked in my classes is what I think of as an AI reflective essay. The structure is simple.

First,

students write a draft on their own. This stage matters because it shows what they can currently do without AI support and preserves the productive cognitive effort involved in the task.

Afterward,

they use AI to respond to their work. Some ask for counterarguments. Others ask what is missing or unclear. Some just ask if the writing is good.

The last stage

is where the activity becomes useful. Students revise their work and write a short reflection explainng what they changed, what they ignored, and why they made those decisions. Some of the reflections are quite basic; others are more thoughtful. But even the weaker ones show they are thinking and monitoring their own learning.

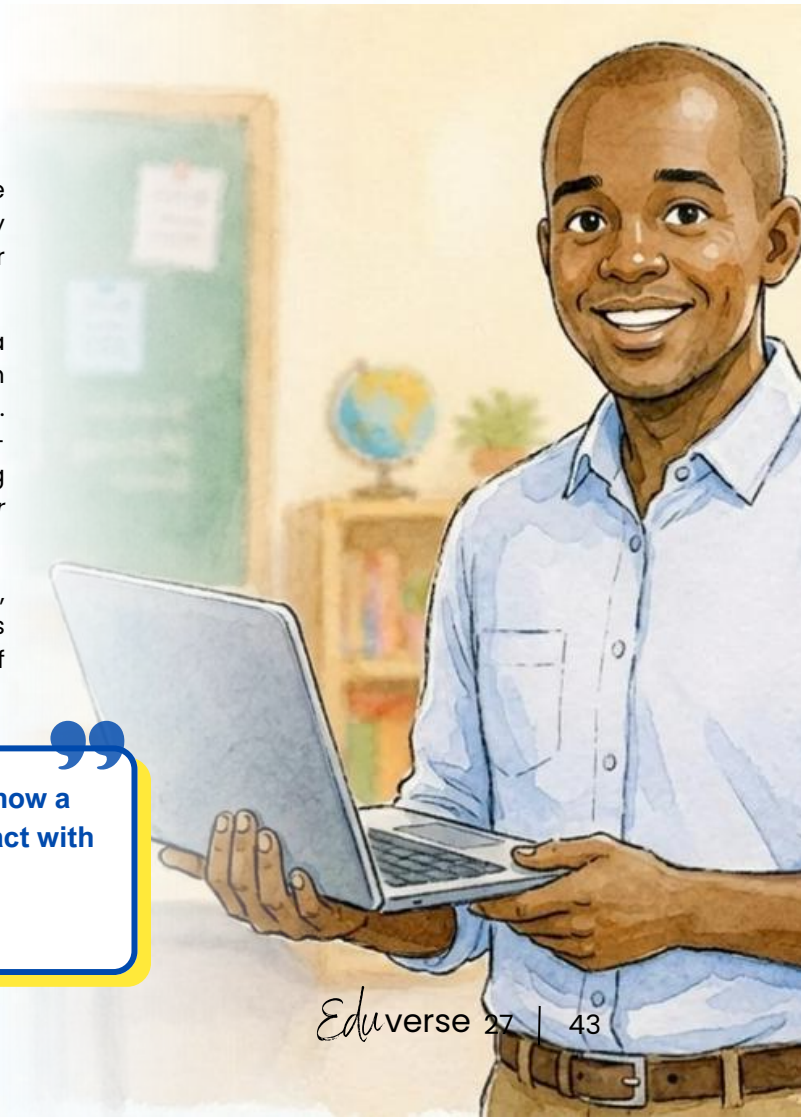
What I have noticed over time is that many students begin to slow down during this process. They become slightly more cautious about accepting the first answer AI provides – at least not all of them.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

There is a common concern that AI reduces the importance of teachers. That has not been my experience. If anything, AI changes where our attention goes.

There is still content to teach. But there is now a much stronger focus on how students interact with information and how they make sense of it. Sometimes this is as simple as putting an AI-generated answer on the board and talking through it: *Is it complete? Does it actually answer the question? How could we check it?*

These are not particularly complicated questions, but they are increasingly important ones. Students need to see that answers are not the end of thinking. They are part of the thinking process.



> **"There is still content to teach. But there is now a much stronger focus on how students interact with information and how they make sense of it."**
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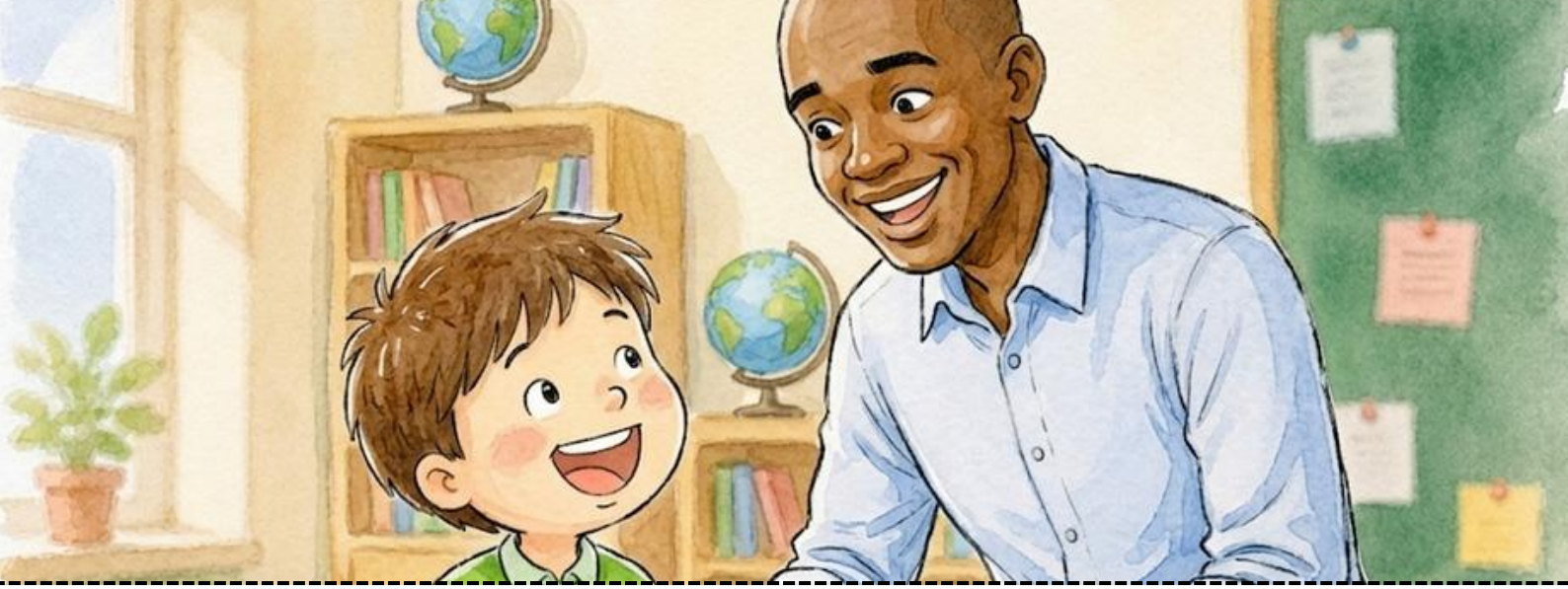

WHAT HAS NOT CHANGED

With so much discussion about AI, it is easy to lose sight of what remains the same.

Students still need to understand what they are learning. They still need to explain it, apply it, and sometimes struggle with it. AI can support parts of this process, but it cannot do it for them.

It can generate explanations, but it does not decide what matters in a specific context. It can suggest ideas, but it cannot fully judge whether an idea genuinely makes sense for a particular learner. That responsibility still belongs to the student, to the human thinking.

In most classrooms, the essential question remains surprisingly simple: Can the student explain what they have learned in their own words?

> **"In most classrooms, the essential question remains surprisingly simple: Can the student explain what they have learned in their own words?"**
>
> Kompeo Pompeo Uwendo

WHAT I AM NOTICING OVER TIME

As AI becomes more embedded in classroom practice, certain patterns are beginning to emerge more clearly.

Students who rely fully on AI often have difficulty when asked to explain their work. Even basic follow-up questions can be a challenge. In contrast, students who use it more thoughtfully tend to do better. They check responses, adjust their questions, and seem more confident when discussing their ideas.

There is also a difference in how students describe their work. Some can explain their thinking step by step, including moments where they changed direction or reconsidered an idea. Others focus almost entirely on the finished product, with little awareness of how the answer was constructed.

These observations are not perfect, and they are not always consistent across every learner or classroom. Still, the overall pattern is there.

CHALLENGES
ALONG THE WAY

Certainly, this approach is not without its difficulties.

Some students will continue looking for shortcuts. That has always been part of education, long before AI entered classrooms. Time is another issue. Looking at how students think takes longer than marking final answers. In a busy schedule, that is not always easy to manage.

Access is another important factor. Not all students have the same level of access to devices or internet or AI tools outside school. Any meaningful classroom integration of AI must take these inequalities into account.

There is also the question of supporting different kinds of learners. Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning emphasise providing multiple ways for students to engage with content and demonstrate understanding (Meyer & Rose, 2024). In AI-supported classrooms, that flexibility becomes even more important.

None of these challenges are simple. But they are manageable – and they are worth working through carefully.

MOVING FORWARD

AI is now part of the classroom. That much is clear. What matters is how it is used.

If AI becomes a shortcut that replaces thinking, then it creates real educational problems. But when used thoughtfully, it can support reflection, questioning, revision, and deeper engagement with ideas. The difference often comes down to task design and teacher guidance. The way we structure learning experiences still matters enormously.

A human-centered classroom keeps the focus where it has always belonged: on understanding, questioning, interpreting, and making sense of ideas. Technology may continue to change rapidly, but meaningful learning still depends on students being willing to think—and on teachers continuing to create the conditions that make that thinking possible.

That will not change.

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Kompeo Pompeo Uwendo is a writer and educator who believes in clear, simple teaching. He shares practical ideas that help students build discipline, improve study habits, and do better in school. His work focuses on real challenges students face, offering easy guidance that supports steady growth, better focus, and long-term success in different learning environments.

BEYOND THE PERSONALISATION HYPE

WHAT KNOWLEDGE TRACING MEANS FOR ADULT EDUCATORS

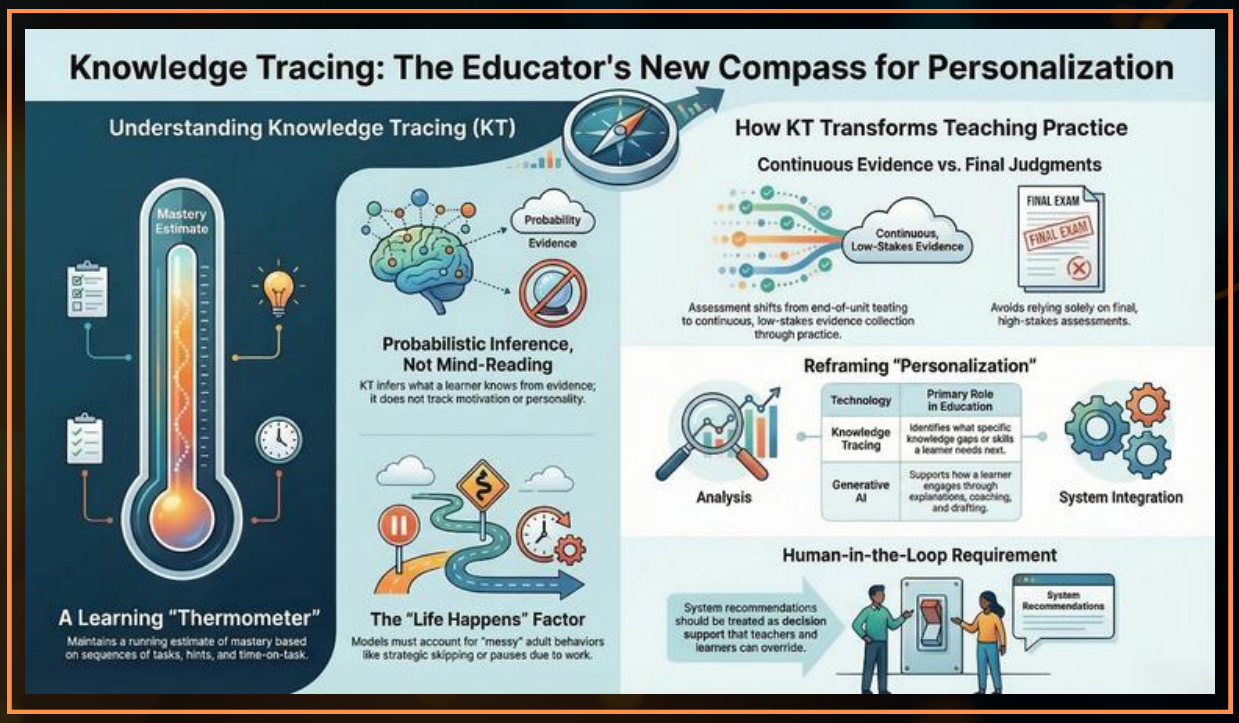
Dr. Kamil Mielnik

AI is often presented as a solution for personalised learning. Platforms promise to adapt content automatically so that learners progress faster, stay motivated, and achieve better outcomes. Yet many educators are still unsure what these systems actually do – and what they mean in practice.

One of the core mechanisms behind these systems is knowledge tracing. In simple terms, it is a way of estimating what a learner currently understands based on their learning activity. These estimates can help educators decide where support or extension might be needed, but they are not definitive answers. They are signals that require interpretation.

For adult education, this matters even more. Adult learners bring complex lives, shifting goals, and varying levels of engagement. Any use of AI must therefore respect autonomy, context, and professional judgement.

This article aims to demystify knowledge tracing, explain what it does in practical terms, and explore how it can be used responsibly – as a tool to support teaching, not replace it.



Why "Personalised Learning„ OFTEN DISAPPOINTS IN PRACTICE

Many adult education providers are being sold a familiar promise: learning platforms will personalise learning automatically so that learners progress faster, stay motivated, and complete more often.
In reality, personalisation is not something you can simply "switch on." It is the result of three things working well together:

- a clear understanding of what progress means (skills, competences, outcomes),
- reliable evidence of what each learner can currently do,
- and thoughtful teaching decisions that use those insights to support, not control, learners.

For adult learners, this becomes even more complex. Their learning is shaped by work, family responsibilities, and competing priorities. This means that real personalisation must include flexibility, relevance, and respect for autonomy – not just smarter algorithms (Kaiser et al., 2023).
This is where knowledge tracing becomes useful for educators. At its core, it tries to answer a simple but important question:

"Given what this learner has done so far, what do we think they know now—and what should happen next?" (Piech et al., 2015)

KNOWLEDGE TRACING in Plain English

A simple way to understand it

Knowledge tracing (KT) is a way of estimating a learner's current level of mastery based on what they have done so far – such as questions answered, tasks completed, attempts made, or time spent. (Piech et al., 2015)

One way to think about it is as a **learning "thermometer."** After each meaningful activity, the system updates its estimate of the learner's understanding. Importantly, it does not "know" what a learner understands. It infers mastery from available evidence, and those inferences are probabilistic. They can be wrong – especially when the data is limited or when behaviour is influenced by factors unrelated to learning.

Why it became popular

Knowledge tracing gained attention when newer models like Deep Knowledge Tracing (DKT) showed that it was possible to track patterns in learner activity over time and predict future performance without manually defining every relationship between concepts (Piech et al., 2015).

More recent developments have improved how these systems handle real-world conditions, such as incomplete data, large numbers of learners, and more complex learning pathways.

What knowledge tracing is not

Knowledge tracing is not:

- a personality profile
- a motivation detector
- a guaranteed measure of understanding

Adult learners often display irregular learning patterns – pausing, returning, skipping, or focusing selectively due to life demands. A system may misinterpret these behaviours unless the system is designed with adult learning realities in mind. (Kaiser et al., 2023).

What Knowledge Tracing
CHANGES FOR ADULT EDUCATORS

Knowledge tracing shifts personalisation from "more content" to **better decisions about practice**, especially decisions that respect adult learners' time and goals.

It forces clarity about what you teach

Knowledge Tracing cannot function without a clear structure of skills or competences (skills/competences and links to activities). If your course is simply a collection of resources or materials without a coherent skills structure, the system will tend to personalise at a superficial level, recommending more of the same rather than addressing specific gaps that block progress.

For educators, this can be valuable. It encourages clearer curriculum design:

- What are the key competences?
- What does mastery look like (the behaviours that demonstrate the competencies)?
- Which activities provide meaningful evidence?

When these are clear, the system can support teaching rather than override it.

It changes the role of assessment

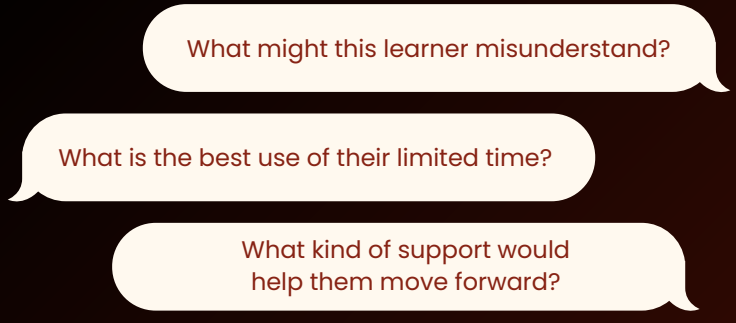
In a knowledge-tracing-driven environment, assessment becomes continuous. Instead of relying only on end-of-unit tests, evidence is gathered through regular, low-stakes activities.

This can support adult learners by providing quick feedback and visible progress. However, it also raises challenges. Adult learners may guess, skip tasks, or disengage due to external pressures. Not all behaviour reflects understanding.

This means that **task design matters**. Tasks must be designed so that *performance is interpretable*. Activities must generate meaningful evidence, not just data.

It reframes personalisation as professional fudgement

A knowledge tracing system should be treated as other professional instruments (such as diagnostic tools, screening tools, formative checks). It should be understood as a **decision-support tool**, not a decision-maker. Its value lies in helping educators ask better questions:



This is especially important in adult education because adults value relevance and autonomy; the system should offer informed options, not fixed pathways (Kaiser et al., 2023).

Practical Questions

BEFORE IMPLEMENTING AN ADAPTIVE SYSTEM

Before adopting any adaptive learning system, educators and programme leaders should ask a few key questions.

WHAT IS THE UNIT OF MASTERY – SKILLS, TOPICS, OR TEST ITEMS?

Is the system tracking skills, topics, or individual test items?
If this is unclear, the system may optimise for short-term performance rather than meaningful competence.

WHAT EVIDENCE UPDATES THE MODEL?

What data is being used—attempts, time, hints, revisits?
More data is not always better if it becomes irrelevant or intrusive.

HOW DOES THE SYSTEM HANDLE REAL-LIFE INTERRUPTIONS?

Adult learners frequently pause and return. You should ask whether the system supports flexible pacing, re-entry, and goal changes without penalising the learner or treating them as "failing".

CAN TEACHERS OVERRIDE RECOMMENDATIONS—AND CAN LEARNERS CHOOSE?

If the system cannot be overridden, it is not "personalised"; it is automated. For adult learning, autonomy is a design requirement, not an option.

HOW IS PERFORMANCE VALIDATED?

In non-technical terms: does the vendor test the system in a way that mirrors real use (using only the data available before a decision is made). Some systems appear accurate because they rely on information that would not be available in real teaching situations.
Ask whether the system reflects real use, not just ideal conditions.

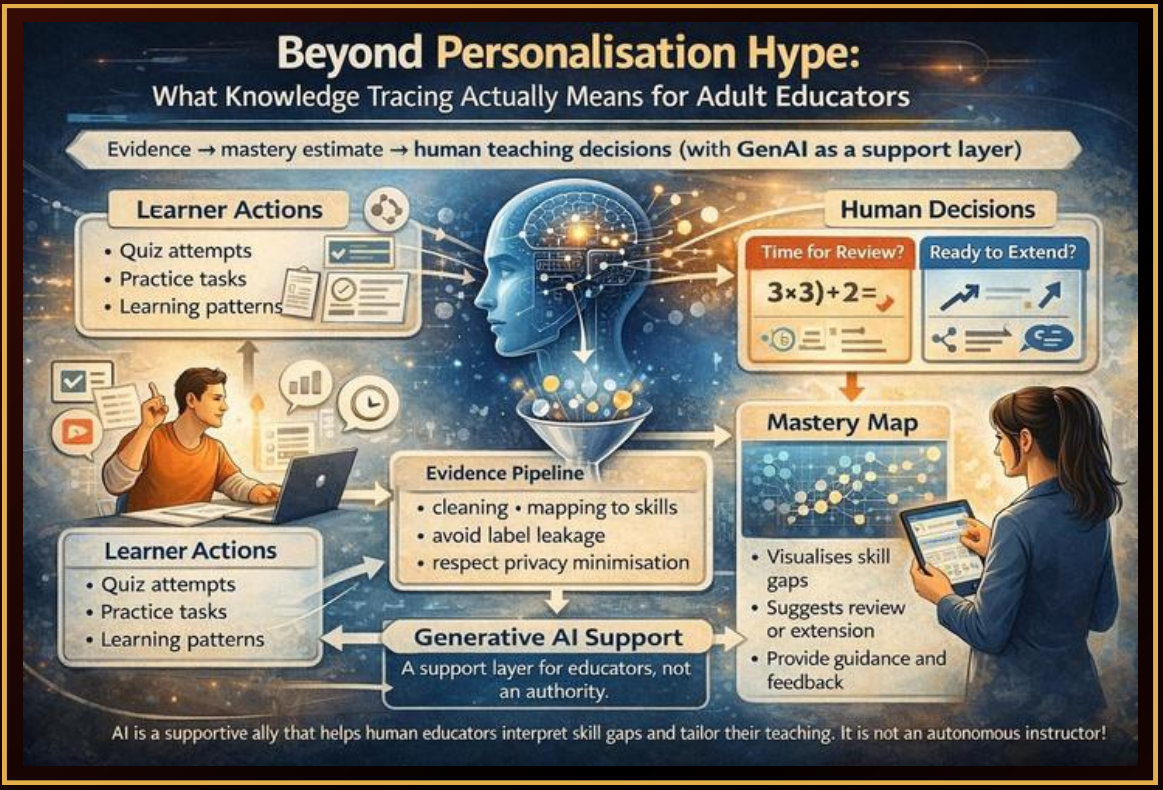
Red flags to watch for

- Claims to detect motivation or emotions without strong evidence
- High-stakes decisions made without human review
- Lack of clarity about what outcomes are being optimised

These red flags matter not only educationally but legally if decisions significantly affect learners.

Where Generative AI Fits

AND WHERE IT SHOULD NOT



Generative AI is entering adult education rapidly – often through chat-based tutoring, lesson drafting, or automated feedback tools. A useful way to approach this is to separate its role from that of knowledge tracing:

Knowledge tracing helps us understand what learners need ⇄ **Generative AI supports how learners engage with that need**

In practice, generative AI can add value in several ways.

As an explanation layer, it can offer alternative explanations and examples when a learner is struggling with a concept, helping to address misunderstandings from different angles (UNESCO, 2023).

As a metacognitive coach, it can prompt learners to reflect on their thinking, for example, by asking questions such as *"Why did you choose this answer?"* or *"What would change if...?"* This helps learners stay actively involved in the learning process rather than relying passively on answers (UNESCO, 2023).

As a drafting assistant, it can generate practice tasks or variations that teachers can review and adapt to ensure they are accurate and aligned with learning goals.

However, generative AI should not quietly become the system that makes important decisions. In adult education, it should not determine access, assessment outcomes, or progression without clear human oversight.

What Knowledge Tracing Means

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

For most educators, knowledge tracing does not require a complete redesign of teaching. Instead, it invites a shift in how we think about learning, evidence, and decision-making in the classroom.

In practice, this might mean:

DESIGNING ACTIVITIES THAT GENERATE CLEARER EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING.

Rather than relying only on final answers, tasks can be structured to show how learners think, where they hesitate, and how they approach problems. For example, instead of asking learners to choose the correct answer in a multiple-choice task, ask them to briefly explain why they chose it. This allows teachers to see their reasoning, not just the result.

USING DATA AS A STARTING POINT FOR DIALOGUE, NOT A FINAL JUDGEMENT.

Insights from the system can guide conversations with learners – helping teachers ask better questions, rather than simply accepting recommendations. For example, if a system suggests that a learner is struggling with a topic, the teacher might ask: "I noticed this area seems challenging – what part did you find difficult?" This turns data into a meaningful learning conversation.

ALLOWING FLEXIBILITY IN PACING AND PROGRESSION.

Adult learners often move in uneven patterns. Systems should support this, not penalise it, giving learners space to pause, revisit, and re-engage. A learner who has been inactive for a week due to work commitments can return to review previous content before moving forward, rather than being pushed automatically to the next level.

SUPPORTING LEARNERS IN REFLECTING ON THEIR OWN LEARNING.

When learners understand what they know – and what they need next – they are better able to take ownership of their progress. For instance, after completing a task, learners might answer a quick reflection prompt such as: "What did you understand well?" and "What would you like more practice on?" This helps them become more aware of their learning process.

At the same time, it is important to recognise the limits of any system. Data can highlight patterns, but it cannot fully capture a learner's context, motivation, or goals. These remain visible only through human interaction.

Ultimately, knowledge tracing does not reduce the role of the teacher – it makes it more important. It shifts the focus from delivering content to interpreting evidence, guiding learning, and supporting learners in ways that no system can fully replicate.

Knowledge tracing does not reduce the role of the teacher - it makes it more important.

Dr. Kamil Mielnik

Knowledge tracing is often presented as a solution for personalised learning, but its real value is more practical. It does not replace teaching – it offers insights that can help educators make better decisions about learning.

For adult education, this matters. Learners bring complex lives, shifting goals, and varying levels of engagement. Any system must support this reality, not oversimplify it.

Used thoughtfully, knowledge tracing can help teachers focus attention, prioritise support, and use time more effectively. But it works best when combined with professional judgement.

Beyond the hype, the opportunity is not to replace educators with technology, but to use it as a tool for clearer thinking, better questions, and more responsive teaching.

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Dr. Kamil Mielnik is an expert in competency-based learning, AI-driven teaching, and international training development, with nearly 20 years of experience in language education and digital L&D solutions. He currently serves as Competence Development Manager at InPost, leading strategic learning programs across Europe to enhance skills and operational efficiency. He also heads the Interdepartmental Foreign Language Study Centre at Ignatianum University, where he drives research-based language education initiatives.

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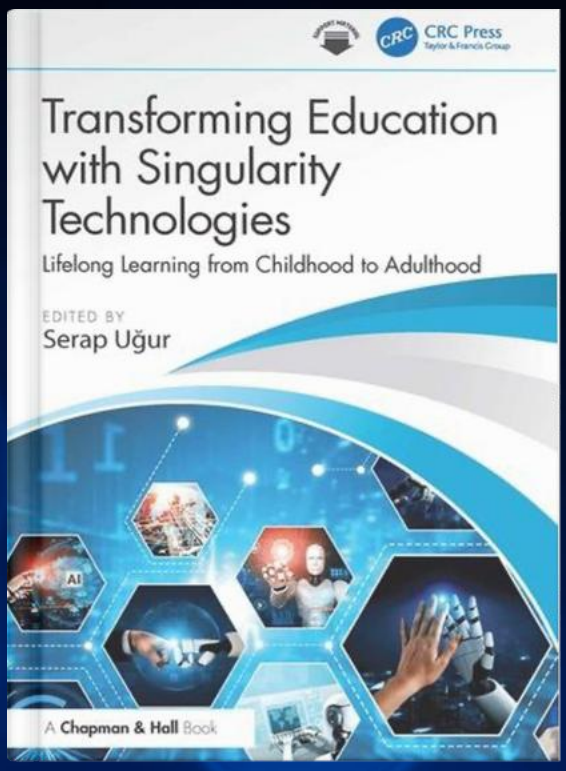

As AI transforms education at lightning speed, frameworks for teaching and learning are urgently needed. By emphasizing applications over tools, these chapters provide enduring insights that will remain valuable after today's technologies have evolved. As such, this volume is a valuable resource for educators who are committed to preparing students for an AI-enhanced future.

Dr. Ilka Kostka

Academic Director and Teaching Professor at Northeastern University, USA

Available on Amazon and Routledge website

Published in April 2026 by Chapman & Hall and edited by **Dr. Serap Sisman-Ugur,** *Transforming Education with Singularity Technologies: Lifelong Learning from Childhood to Adulthood* explores how artificial intelligence, immersive technologies, and rapidly evolving digital systems are reshaping the future of education. Bringing together perspectives from international scholars and educators, the book invites readers to rethink not only how we teach and learn, but also what learning itself may become in the age of technological singularity.

Across its chapters, the book examines how emerging technologies may create more flexible, personalized, and accessible learning experiences for learners across the lifespan. From childhood education to adult learning, the contributors explore themes such as AI-driven learning systems, immersive environments, lifelong learning, and the evolving relationship between humans and intelligent technologies.

Rather than presenting technology as simply a tool, the book encourages deeper reflection on the future structures, purposes, and human dimensions of education. Blending theoretical insights with future-oriented perspectives, it offers educators, researchers, and professionals a thought-provoking exploration of the opportunities and challenges shaping the next era of learning.

***The EduVerse Newsletter** is honored to feature an exclusive interview with **Dr. Serap Sisman-Ugur,** where she shares the vision behind this book, her perspectives on the future of learning in the age of AI and immersive technologies, and the evolving relationship between human learning and technological innovation across the lifespan.*

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.

AT THE EDGE OF CHANGE

LEARNING IN THE AGE OF SINGULARITY TECHNOLOGIES

EXCLUSIVELY WITH PROF. SERAP SISMAN-UGUR

EduVerse: Welcome to **Ask the Experts**, our exclusive EduVerse interview series where we spotlight the voices shaping the future of education. Today, we are delighted to feature **Prof. Serap Sisman-Ugur,** an internationally recognized scholar in transhumanism and Technological Singularity, and the editor of *Transforming Education with Singularity Technologies: Lifelong Learning from Childhood to Adulthood.* With expertise spanning AI, VR, the metaverse, and human–computer interaction, she brings a powerful and future-oriented perspective to how technology is reshaping education.

In our conversation today, she takes us beyond the surface of innovation to explore what these changes truly mean for education. Blending research with vision, she reflects on the evolving role of learners and educators, and invites us to consider a central question: how do these technologies shape us as learners and teachers?

Dr. Serap Sisman-Ugur is an academic at Anadolu University, Türkiye, and an internationally recognized scholar in technological singularity, transhumanism, and the future of learning. Her work explores the intersection of education and emerging technologies, with research interests spanning artificial intelligence, VR and the metaverse, brain–computer interaction, e-learning, gamification, digital storytelling, and instructional design.

Dr. Uğur has led and contributed to numerous national and international research projects, including EU- and COST-funded initiatives, and has published widely in the fields of educational technology and digital learning. She also serves in leadership and editorial roles related to digital security, media, and online education. She currently serves as the Vice Manager of the Anadolu University Social Media and Digital Security Education, Research and Application Center (SODİGEM).

In 2021, she was recognized internationally as the only woman from Türkiye featured in the "Futurist" category of The Elite 50 Exemplary Women special issue published by Career Beacon magazine.

1 UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT
WHAT IS CHANGING?

1

Welcome, Prof. Serap Sisman-Ugur. Let's begin with your inspiration – what led you to bring together this collection of work on Singularity Technologies in education at this particular moment in time?

Thank you. This book emerged from a growing realization that we are no longer approaching a distant technological future – we are actively living inside it.

Over the past decade, I have observed a critical shift. AI, immersive environments, neurotechnologies, and agentic systems are no longer isolated innovations. They are converging into a transformative ecosystem that is directly reshaping how we learn, teach, and even think.

What makes this moment particularly significant is the collapse of traditional boundaries – between human and machine cognition, formal and informal learning, and even between learning and living itself. Yet despite this transformation, educational research and practice often remain fragmented, addressing these technologies separately rather than as part of a broader systemic shift.

That was one of the main motivations behind this edited volume. I wanted to bring together diverse perspectives that could help us reframe education not as a static system, but as an evolving, adaptive, and increasingly hybrid human–technology ecosystem.
And honestly, the timing feels critical. The conceptual, pedagogical, and ethical decisions we make today may shape the trajectory of learning for decades to come.

2

I have to say, that idea of education becoming a hybrid human–technology ecosystem is both exciting and a little unsettling at the same time. Your edited volume also explores the idea of the Technological Singularity in education. For educators who may be encountering this term for the first time, how would you define it?

In educational contexts, the Technological Singularity should not be understood simply as a moment when machines become superintelligent. I think that interpretation can sometimes oversimplify the concept.

For me, in education, the singularity represents a threshold of transformation where learning systems become deeply integrated with intelligent, adaptive, and increasingly autonomous technologies.

In other words, we are moving from *technology-enhanced learning* to *technology-integrated cognition.* In this paradigm, AI systems do not merely support learning, but they participate in it, co-construct it, and increasingly orchestrate it.

This means learning environments evolve into dynamic ecosystems where human cognition, machine intelligence, and data-driven adaptation continuously interact. So, the singularity in education is not really about replacing the human learner. It is about redefining the boundaries of learning itself.

3

What really struck me in your answer is the idea that technology is no longer just supporting learning from the outside, but actually participating in cognition itself. That redefinition of learning becomes even more profound in the opening chapters of the book, where you explore ideas such as transhumanism and Human + AI. These concepts challenge some very traditional assumptions about education. How do you think they reshape our understanding of what it means to learn – and even what it means to be human?

Yes, I think this is one of the deepest and perhaps most uncomfortable questions emerging from these technologies.

Transhumanism and the Human + AI paradigm fundamentally challenge the anthropocentric assumptions that have traditionally shaped education. For a very long time, learning has been understood as an internal cognitive process that happens within the boundaries of the human mind.

However, emerging developments suggest that cognition is becoming not only distributed and extended, but increasingly integrated with technological systems.

We can already see this happening in multiple ways. One example is the rise of AI agents—systems that do not simply respond to prompts, but can act autonomously, set goals, coordinate learning processes, and adapt to learner behavior.

At the same time, advances in neurotechnology, including brain–computer interfaces, point toward the possibility of more direct interactions between human cognition and digital systems.
This creates powerful new possibilities. Learning may no longer be only something we experience through study and practice, but something supported directly by technology at the brain level. In the future, people may learn certain skills with the help of intelligent systems that guide thinking, movement, or decision-making in ways that feel faster, more assisted, and more integrated with the human body and mind.

In this context, the learner becomes a co-evolving, hybrid entity.

Learning is no longer defined only by what resides in the human mind, but by how effectively humans interact, delegate, and co-adapt with intelligent and potentially neuro-integrated systems.

4

Very interesting! Now learners shouldn't be seen as isolated individuals, but as part of a much larger human–technology system. Your book also brings together perspectives from different researchers and contexts around the world. As you worked across these contributions, what common patterns or shifts did you notice emerging about technology in education?

Several important patterns emerged quite consistently across the chapters.

First, there is a clear shift from content delivery to adaptive orchestration. Instead of giving all students the same lessons in the same way, future learning systems will increasingly adjust activities, support, and pathways based on students' needs, progress, and responses.

Second, we see the growing influence of data-driven personalization, where learning pathways are shaped continuously through real-time analytics and predictive systems.

There is also a strong emphasis on lifelong and life-wide learning. Learning is no longer confined to schools or universities. it is becoming continuous, distributed, and embedded across different dimensions of life.

But perhaps the most striking pattern was actually a paradox.

While technologies are advancing extremely rapidly, the conceptual frameworks guiding their use remain underdeveloped. In many cases, technological capability is progressing faster than our pedagogical, ethical, and governance readiness.

I think this gap may become one of the defining challenges of education in the coming years.

2 THE HUMAN QUESTION
WHAT MIGHT AFFECT US?

5 **That gap between technological capability and educational readiness raises an important human question. Several chapters in the book explore AI-driven learning systems, from intelligent chatbots to emotional learning analytics. As these systems become increasingly responsive and predictive, what aspects of human learning do you think risk being reduced or overlooked?**

I think one of the biggest risks is that learning may gradually shift from being an internal transformation to becoming an externally optimized performance.

AI-driven systems – and especially agentic AI architectures – introduce a new layer of mediation into learning. They offer remarkable levels of personalization and efficiency, but they may also reduce some deeply human dimensions of learning.

For example, we risk overlooking human struggle as a meaningful part of learning. We may also undervalue embodied experience and the slow, gradual formation of expertise that often develops through uncertainty, repetition, and reflection.

If, in the future, learning can be partially offloaded to AI agents – or even externally supported through neuroadaptive or brain–computer interfaces – we may face a critical shift: **Learning may move from internal transformation to externally optimized performance.**

And this creates an important tension. Is learning about becoming, transforming, and developing human understanding? Or does it become increasingly about execution, efficiency, and performance?

That tension is something educators will need to confront very carefully.

6 **That distinction between learning as "becoming" and learning as "execution" is very powerful. It also connects to another challenge many educators are already facing today: the rise of AI-generated and synthetic content. In such environments, how can learners maintain a genuine sense of originality and intellectual ownership in their work?**

I believe maintaining originality in the age of AI requires us to rethink what originality actually means.

Traditionally, originality was often associated with producing content completely on your own. But in AI-rich environments, I think originality may increasingly depend on how intentionally and responsibly people use AI.

In other words, learners should not simply accept or reproduce AI outputs. They need to to question them, evaluate their accuracy, and combine them with their own ideas, interpretations, and judgment.

So originality becomes less about working alone and more about thoughtfully combining human thinking with AI support. I think this is a very important shift because the future may not be defined by whether people use AI or not, but by how thoughtfully and responsibly they engage with it.

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>
> Dr. Serap Sisman-Ugur

7

I think that's such an important shift – from asking students simply to find answers toward helping them ask better questions. But that also creates another fascinating tension in AI-mediated learning. When intelligent systems can provide immediate answers and solutions, what happens to the value of not knowing – of uncertainty, curiosity, and exploration – in the learning process?

Actually, I would argue that the value of not knowing becomes even more important in AI-rich environments.

When answers are instantly available, the educational challenge shifts from finding answers to formulating meaningful questions.

Curiosity, uncertainty, and exploration are no longer temporary stages that learners simply move through on the way to correct answers. They become central competencies.

If education fails to preserve these qualities, learners may gradually become passive consumers of solutions rather than active constructors of knowledge. And I think that would fundamentally change the nature of learning.

8

You know, listening to your reflections, it becomes clear to me that these technologies are not simply changing educational tools. They are reshaping the structure of learning itself. So, in your view, are these technologies extending human learning, or fundamentally redefining what it means to learn?

I think these technologies are not simply extending learning, but they are fundamentally redefining it.

With the emergence of AI agents, learning is no longer just a student interacting with content. Instead, it becomes a more dynamic process where intelligent systems can guide, adapt, support, and respond to learners in real time.

When combined with developments in neurotechnology and human–machine interfaces, the change becomes even deeper. We are beginning to see learning environments that can respond to learners' cognitive states, AI systems that support thinking and decision-making, and technologies that help people develop skills through guided practice and feedback.

As a result, learning is evolving from a mainly individual mental activity into a more connected process involving human intelligence, artificial intelligence, and even biological interaction.

3 DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

9

As these technologies continue reshaping learning, the question becomes not only what technologies can do, but how humans should engage with them. Your book highlights AI literacy for all. Beyond technical skills, what kinds of mindsets or competencies should educators and learners develop to engage thoughtfully and responsibly with AI – and emerging technologies more broadly?

This is a great question. Beyond technical skills, I believe both learners and educators must develop a much broader set of competencies.

One of the most important is epistemic awareness – the ability to understand how knowledge is constructed, validated, and influenced within AI-mediated environments.

We also need prompt and interaction literacy, which means engaging effectively and critically with intelligent systems rather than using them passively. Another thing is ethical reasoning. It's equally essential because these technologies constantly raise questions about fairness, responsibility, transparency, and human agency.

In addition, adaptive thinking becomes increasingly important in environments shaped by rapid uncertainty and continuous change. And finally, learners must maintain cognitive autonomy. Even in highly intelligent environments, individuals need to preserve independent judgment and critical thinking.

Most importantly, I do not see these as optional future skills, but as foundational competencies for future learning environments.

10

Another important theme in the book is the shift toward lifelong learning and microcredentials. How do you see these emerging models reshaping the way we think about learning across the lifespan?

First of all, thank you for your contribution to the book. Your chapter on lifelong learning and microcredentials offered a compelling lens through which we can understand this shift – not merely as a structural change or a new certification model, but as a rethinking of what learning itself means in a rapidly changing world.

What stands out is how microcredentials are presented not just as short-term qualifications, but as part of a broader movement toward more flexible, personalized, and continuously evolving learning pathways. This strongly connects with the wider vision of the book, where learning is no longer limited to schools, universities, or fixed stages of life, but becomes an ongoing process across the lifespan.

From this perspective, microcredentials reshape learning in several key ways:

- First, they decentralize authority in education, moving away from institution-bound validation toward distributed recognition systems.
- Second, they enable just-in-time and just-enough learning, allowing people to develop skills quickly in response to changing professional and technological demands.

- And finally, they support the emergence of learner-driven pathways, where individuals actively construct their own learning journeys across different stages of life.

At the same time, when combined with AI-driven personalization and intelligent learning systems, microcredentials may eventually become more dynamic and adaptive. Instead of being static certificates, they could continuously reflect a learner's evolving knowledge, competencies, and experiences.

In this sense, your chapter does not simply describe a trend. It helps us imagine the future structure of lifelong learning itself. I'd also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for your valuable support and contribution to this book.

11

The pleasure is mine. It was a great honor to be part of such an important conversation about the future of education. Now, the final section of your book addresses ethics, risks, and governance. From your perspective, what are the most urgent ethical dilemmas that educators and institutions can no longer ignore?

I think the ethical dilemmas are no longer theoretical. They are already shaping how learning happens today.

One major concern is algorithmic bias. When AI systems are used in assessment, recommendation systems, or educational decision-making, they can unintentionally reproduce existing inequalities.
Another critical issue is data privacy and surveillance. Increasingly, learning environments collect not only academic data, but also behavioral and emotional information. This raises important questions about ownership, control, and consent.

We also face the growing risk of cognitive dependency. As AI agents become more capable, learners may gradually begin outsourcing thinking itself, which directly challenges intellectual autonomy.
And finally, there is the issue of transparency. Many AI systems operate as black boxes, making it difficult to understand how decisions are made, and whose values are embedded within those systems.
Ultimately, I think the central challenge is this: Who controls the architecture of learning in AI-mediated environments?

Because the future of education is not only about technological capability. It is also about preserving human agency, fairness, responsibility, and trust.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Before we conclude, I'd love to end with a broader reflection. If readers take away one key message from your book, what would you hope stays with them as they navigate the future of education?

I hope readers recognize that we are entering a phase where learning is no longer confined to the human brain as an isolated system.

With the rise of AI agents, learning becomes distributed. With neurotechnologies, it becomes increasingly integrated. With immersive and embodied systems, it becomes experiential and extended.

So the real question is no longer whether technology will change education; it already has.

The deeper question is this: How far are we willing to redefine learning, cognition, and even human capability itself?

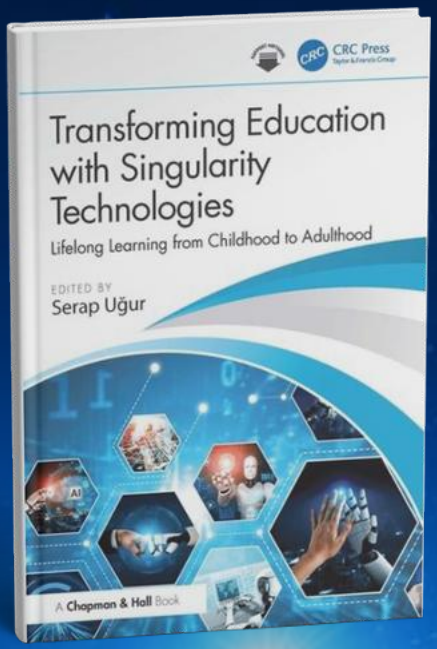
And perhaps even more importantly, how do we navigate that transformation responsibly?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Technological Singularity in education** refers to a future where learning becomes deeply integrated with intelligent, adaptive, and increasingly autonomous technologies.
- **Agentic AI** is shifting learning from passive interaction toward systems that can guide, adapt, and orchestrate learning autonomously.
- **Learning is increasingly becoming a hybrid process** shaped by both human thinking and AI-supported cognition.
- **Neurotechnologies may eventually allow technology** to interact directly with human cognition and learning processes.
- **Future skill development** could become more assisted and technology-guided through intelligent and embodied systems.
- **AI-driven efficiency** may improve performance, but it also risks reducing deep reflection, struggle, and meaningful learning.
- **The future of learning** may not only be digital, but increasingly biological, immersive, and hybrid.
- **Education must proactively redefine** learning and human agency before technology reshapes them by default.

The future of education is not only about technological capability. It is also about preserving human agency, fairness, responsibility, and trust.

Dr. Serap Sisman-Ugur



Available on Amazon and Routledge website

AI IN THE CLASSROOM

ENHANCING THINKING WITHOUT REPLACING IT

Dr. Alaaeldin Mostafa

There is a quiet tension playing out in classrooms around the world right now. On one side sits an extraordinary suite of AI tools – adaptive tutors, conversational agents, intelligent feedback systems – capable of personalising instruction at a scale no human teacher could match. On the other side sits something far more complex and fragile: the developing mind of a learner.

The question educators are urgently wrestling with in 2025 is not whether AI belongs in classrooms. That debate, for most institutions, is settled. The real question is whether AI is being used in ways that sharpen human cognition – or quietly erode it. The answer, as it turns out, is *both*. And the difference lies almost entirely in *how* the tool is used.

BY THE NUMBERS:
AI IN EDUCATION TODAY

The scale and speed of AI adoption in education help explain why these questions have become increasingly urgent. Across schools and universities, educators are experimenting with AI tools at a pace rarely seen with previous technologies, often before clear pedagogical frameworks are fully established.

92% of students globally now use AI tools for learning (up from 66% in 2024)

2x more learning achieved by students using a pedagogically-designed AI tutor vs. traditional active learning (Harvard RCT, 2025)

85% of teachers feel unprepared to manage generative AI use in their classrooms (RAND, 2025)

88% of UK university students used AI tools in assessments in 2025 — up from 53% in 2024 (HEPI, 2025)

71% of teachers and 65% of students view AI as essential for learning and workforce preparation (World Economic Forum, 2025)

Sources: HEPI Annual Survey 2025; Kestin et al., Scientific Reports (2025); RAND Corporation (2025); World Economic Forum (2025); DemandSage / Stanford AI Index (2025)

THE COGNITIVE PROMISE:
WHAT WELL-DESIGNED AI ACTUALLY DOES

Let's begin where the evidence is genuinely encouraging. A growing body of research confirms that AI, when thoughtfully integrated, can provide real cognitive benefits – particularly in helping learners understand and retain new information.

A 2025 systematic review published in the *Journal of Cognition, Emotion & Education* found that AI-based visualisation tools helped learners manipulate abstract concepts without overwhelming working memory capacity (Rokhsari, 2025). This matters because working memory – our mental workspace – has a well-documented capacity limit. When AI reduces *extraneous* cognitive load (unnecessary effort caused by poor instructional design) while preserving *germane* load (the productive effort of actual learning), it becomes a powerful support for deeper understanding.

Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) offer one of the clearest examples of this potential. A systematic review by Xu et al. (2025) examining ITS implementation across K–12 settings found that platforms incorporating self-regulation features – such as learner journals, progress dashboards, and reflection prompts – helped strengthen metacognitive skills. These include a learner's ability to plan, monitor, and adjust their own thinking. One study involving 300 high school students using an ITS for mathematics over eight weeks showed measurable improvements not only in content knowledge, but also in problem-solving, logical reasoning, and critical thinking. In other words, the AI was not simply helping students complete tasks faster – it was helping them think more effectively.

This is what AI at its best looks like: not a system that performs thinking for learners, but one that scaffolds the conditions in which thinking becomes more productive.

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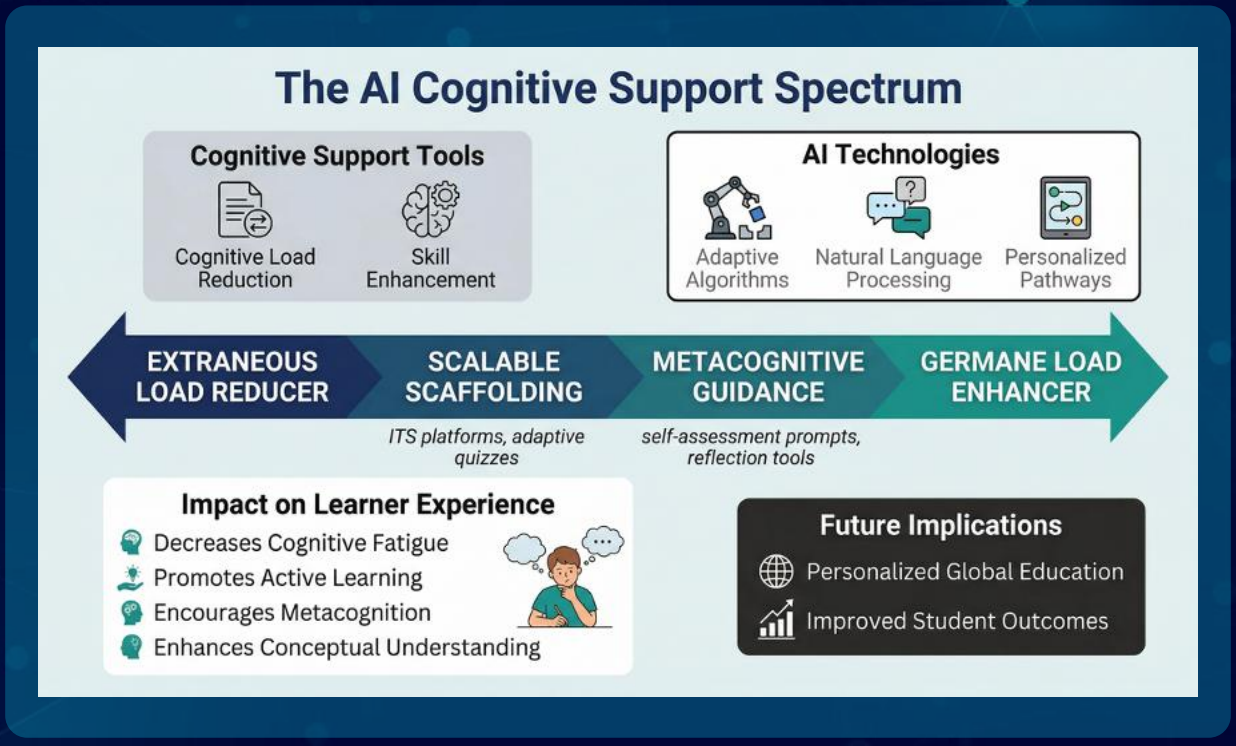


THE COGNITIVE PARADOX: WHEN EASE BECOMES THE ENEMY

Yet the research is far from uniformly optimistic. Alongside these promising findings sits a growing body of evidence pointing to a specific and worrying cognitive pattern: **cognitive offloading**.

Cognitive offloading is not new. Humans have always extended cognition through external tools – writing lists, using calculators, searching Google. What makes generative AI different is the level of intelligence being outsourced. When learners use a notebook, they still have to generate the thought themselves. With generative AI, the thought itself can be produced externally.

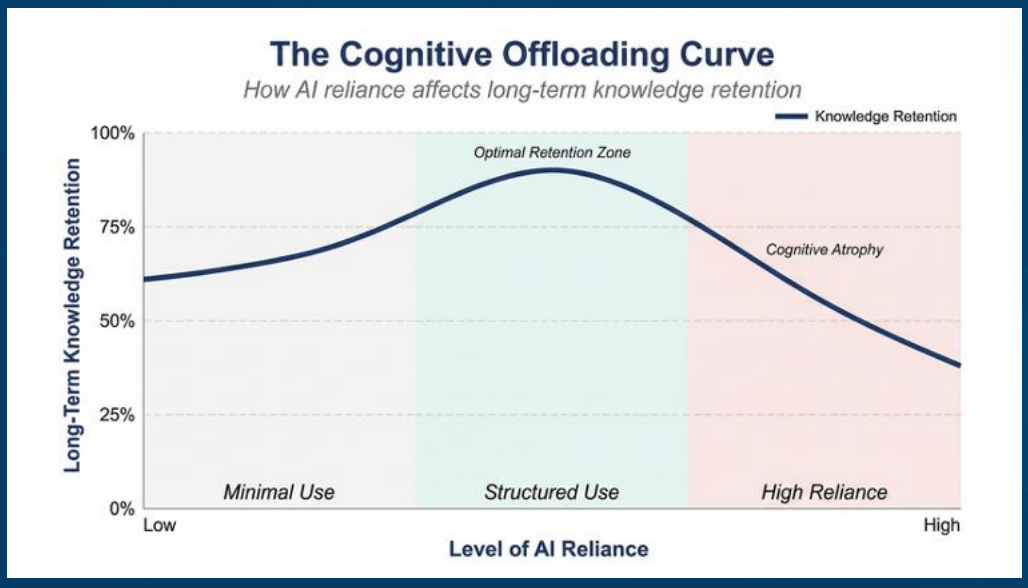
A recent study by Akgun and Toker (2025) examining the impact of ChatGPT, Google, and e-textbooks on student learning found an important pattern: while students using AI tools often performed better in immediate assessments – especially for lower-order tasks such as remembering and understanding – their advantage weakened over time. In higher-order cognitive tasks involving synthesis, evaluation, and creation, students working without AI support demonstrated the strongest long-term retention. Drawing on cognitive load theory and Dr. Robert Bjork's concept of **"desirable difficulties"** – the idea that productive struggle strengthens memory formation – the study suggests that excessive AI support may reduce the mental effort required for durable learning.

The concept of desirable difficulties describes the idea that students need tasks that challenge them to the right degree in order to learn best.

How to use Desirable Difficulties to Enhance Learning

In practice, this often looks deceptively successful. Students feel confident because the AI explanation is fluent, organised, and convincing. But fluency is not the same as understanding. Cognitive scientists describe this as an **illusion of competence**: learners believe they understand the material because it was explained clearly, even when they cannot later explain or apply the idea independently.

This is where the real danger lies. AI can make learning feel easier while quietly weakening the deeper cognitive processes required for retention and transfer. When assessment day arrives without the AI, the knowledge simply isn't there.



AI can make learning feel easier while quietly weakening the deeper cognitive processes required for retention and transfer.

Dr. Alaaeldin Mostafa

THE METACOGNITION PROBLEM
AND ITS HIDDEN OPPORTUNITY

Perhaps the most under-discussed dimension of AI's cognitive impact is its effect on **metacognition**: our ability to think about our own thinking, monitor understanding, and regulate learning strategies accordingly. Across decades of educational research, metacognition has consistently been linked to stronger academic achievement.

Recent research suggests a concerning disconnect. Fernandes et al. (2024, as cited in Lin et al., 2026) found that while AI assistance often improves immediate task performance, it does not necessarily improve learners' metacognitive accuracy – their ability to *know* what they know. In other words, students may perform better with AI while becoming less accurate at recognising their own learning gaps. This matters because a learner who succeeds only with AI support is not necessarily becoming more cognitively independent.

A 2025 topic-modelling analysis found that many AI-powered educational tools still focus primarily on lower-order cognitive processes such as recall and basic comprehension, with far fewer tools designed to support higher-order thinking like analysis, evaluation, or synthesis (Lin et al., 2026). From the perspective of Bloom's Taxonomy, this creates an important imbalance. We are building AI that is excellent at helping learners *remember*, but less effective at helping them *reason*.

Importantly, this is not an inherent limitation of AI itself. It is largely a *design* problem – and that creates *opportunity*.

[...] students may perform better with AI while becoming less accurate at recognising their own learning gaps.

Dr. Alaaeldin Mostafa

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Importantly, this is not an inherent limitation of AI itself. It is largely a *design* problem – and that creates *opportunity*.

The protégé effect is a psychological phenomenon where individuals learn, retain, and understand information more effectively when they teach – or prepare to teach – it to someone else.

Tomisu, Ueda, and Yamanaka (2025) introduce what they call the **"Cognitive Mirror" framework**, where AI does not act as an answer-giving expert, but as a "teachable learner." Instead of simply providing solutions, the AI asks clarifying questions, expresses confusion, and prompts students to explain their reasoning. This approach leverages what cognitive psychology calls the **Protégé Effect**: the well- established finding that teaching a concept to someone else is one of the most powerful ways to strengthen one's own understanding (Tomisu, Ueda & Yamanaka, 2025). In practice, this might involve students correcting an AI-generated explanation, teaching a concept to a chatbot, or identifying weaknesses in an AI response. In these moments, the learner – not the AI – does the real cognitive work.

THE ATTENTION ECONOMY
INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

There is another cognitive dimension that receives less attention in the education research but deserves a place in this conversation: **sustained attention**.

Many AI-powered learning environments are intentionally designed to optimise engagement. Adaptive difficulty curves, gamified reward systems, personalised content feeds are highly effective at capturing attention in the short time. However, there is a meaningful difference between *captured* attention and *sustained, effortful* attention – the kind required for deep reading, extended problem-solving, and deliberate practice.

The concern emerging among educators is that learners may gradually become accustomed to rapid-response learning environments that prioritise speed, stimulation, and immediate feedback. Increasingly, teachers in secondary and post-secondary education report that students struggle with longer analytical tasks – not necessarily because they lack ability, but because they are less accustomed to slower forms of cognitive effort.

This is not an argument for removing AI from the classroom. Rather, it is an argument for more deliberate cognitive pacing within AI-integrated learning environments. Students still need opportunities for unassisted thinking, extended writing, and collaborative reasoning – spaces where AI is intentionally *absent*.

WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO RIGHT NOW:
FIVE EVIDENCE-BASED PRINCIPLES

The research points to something important: AI's cognitive impact is not fixed. It is determined by pedagogical design. Here are five principles grounded in the evidence reviewed above.

1 *SEQUENCE AI ACCESS STRATEGICALLY.*

Research on desirable difficulties suggests that productive struggle before receiving assistance strengthens long-term learning. Whenever possbile, assign tasks without AI first. Learners should attempt tasks independently before turning to AI support for review, verification, and extension. Think of AI as the *second* draft, not the first attempt.

For example, in a writing class, students first draft their own introduction paragraph without AI support. Only after completing the draft do they use AI to compare structure, identify unclear areas, or receive suggestions for improvement. This preserves the initial cognitive effort while still benefiting from AI feedback.

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2 *DESIGN FOR THE UPPER LEVELS OF BLOOM'S.*

If most AI tools currently address recall and comprehension, educators must consciously design tasks that require learners to *analyse, evaluate*, and *create* – using AI as a thinking partner, not an answer machine. Ask learners to critique AI-generated content, identify its assumptions, and argue against its conclusions.

In practice, instead of asking students to summarise a historical event, a teacher provides an AI-generated explanation and asks students to identify bias, missing perspectives, or weak arguments. Students then revise or challenge the AI response using evidence from multiple sources.

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3 *BUILD METACOGNITIVE CHECKPOINTS INTO AI INTERACTIONS.*

Before a learner accepts an AI output or explanation, require them to reflect – in their own words, without AI – what they already believed about the topic and what in the AI output surprised them. For example, in a math lesson, after AI produce a solution to a math problem, students make a short reflection explaining which step they understood and which step still feels unclear. This encourages learners to monitor their own understanding rather than assuming comprehension because the AI explanation appeared convincing.

This simple intervention can help preserve metacognitive awareness and reduce illusions of competence.

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4 *REVERSE THE TEACHER-STUDENT DYNAMIC.*

Leverage the Protégé Effect. Design activities where learners must teach the AI – explaining a concept, correcting a misconception, or generating questions for it to answer. These activities position learners as active cognitive agents rather than passive recipients.

In a science lesson, students ask the AI to explain photosynthesis, then intentionally challenge or correct parts of the explanation. Alternatively, students might design follow-up questions the AI should answer, such as *What would happen to a plant if it had sunlight and water but no carbon dioxide?*, requiring them to think more deeply about the topic themselves

PROTECT UNASSISTED THINKING TIME.

Teachers should intentionally build AI-free zones into learning sequences – not as punishment, but as cognitive training. Deep reading, independent writing, and unscaffolded problem-solving remain essential for developing durable thinking habits. Cognitive skills, like muscles, weaken when they are no longer exercised. For instance, teachers may designate the first 20 minutes of a lesson as an "unassisted thinking zone," where students read, annotate, brainstorm, or solve problems independently before any digital or AI support is introduced. This helps learners build stamina for sustained attention and deeper cognitive effort.

A FRAMEWORK WORTH HOLDING ONTO

The distinction that anchors this entire conversation is one that cognitive scientist Robert Bjork emphasised for decades: desirable difficulties – the conditions that make learning feel *easy* are often the conditions that make learning least effective. AI, by design, makes intellectual work feel easy. That is both its greatest strength and its greatest risk.

The educators who navigate this moment well will not be those who blindly adopt AI, nor those who reject it entirely. They will be those who understand what cognitive work looks like, and who design AI integration in ways that preserve productive struggle, metacognitive monitoring, and sustained attention that genuine learning requires.

> *AI should make thinking sharper.*
> *That only happens when human thinking*
> *is still doing the heavy lifting.*
>
> *Dr. Alaaeldin Mostafa*

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Beyond the AI Hype: 5 TAKEAWAYS FROM 32 YEARS IN THE CLASSROOM

Robert Martínez

THE 32-YEAR PIVOT

In late 2022, the educational landscape shifted beneath our feet. For many, the arrival of generative AI felt like a threat to the very foundations of the profession. But for those of us who have spent decades in the trenches – in my case, 32 years teaching across 10 different countries – this wasn't the first "revolution" we've experienced.

What changed for me was the moment I realised that AI had become a **two-way street**. It was no longer a static resource; it could respond, iterate, and adapt in real time. Having spoken at 25 conferences last year, I've seen the anxiety firsthand. But I see AI not as a replacement for the educator's wisdom, but as an evolution of it. The shift is simple: from being disrupted by technology to mastering it through a human-centric lens

Working with teachers and reflecting on my own practice over the past years, a number of patterns have become clear. The following five takeways capture what I believe matters most right now.

TAKEAWAY 1:

THE END OF THE 'WESTERN-CENTRIC' COURSEBOOK

> If AI changes anything first, it is not assessment or methodology – it is representation.

Traditional coursebooks are often excellent roadmaps, but they are frequently limited by a Western-centric vacuum. Over three decades, I've seen how these materials often feature a world that is exclusively white, abled, and affluent. When your students don't see themselves in the pages, engagement drops. This applies not only to students—I often do not see myself represented either.

AI changes this.

It allows us to **differentiate and localise** content without reinventing the wheel. It gives us the power to take a core pedagogical idea and adapt it to a specific cultural context in seconds. Whether it's ensuring gender balance or representing a student in a wheelchair, we can create materials where every learner feels seen.

In practice, this might mean:

- adapting a coursebook activity to reflect local contexts
- rewriting examples to match students' realities
- generating alternative versions that include diverse perspectives

AI supports teaching and learning, but teachers, inspire it. We don't just take what it gives us; we use it as a kickstarter to make our lessons more inclusive and representative of the lives our students. When used thoughtfully, it can make our lessons more inclusive, relevant, and meaningful.

TAKEAWAY 2:

THE 'CALCULATOR' PARADIGM (WHY AI ISN'T A THREAT)

> Much of the fear around AI is not new – it's a familiar story in education.

The fear surrounding AI is not new. It mirrors the panic that greeted calculators in maths classrooms or interactive whiteboards in the early 2000s. Technology only becomes a threat to the profession when we refuse to upgrade our own literacy.

Across my career – as both teacher and lifelong learner – I have seen that tools themselves matter less than the decisions behind them. A teacher who understands *why* they are using a tool to support a specific learning outcome will never be replaced by an algorithm.

AI is a support mechanism. The pedagogy, the empathy, and the decision-making remain human. In practical terms, this means:

- starting with the learning objective, not the tool
- asking how AI adds value, not just efficiency
- focusing on learning outcomes rather than features

Used this way, AI does not replace teachers—it amplifies what we already do well.

> ***A teacher*** *who understands why they are using a tool to support a specific learning outcome* ***will never be replaced*** *by an algorithm.*
>
> Robert Martínez

TAKEAWAY 3:

DETECTING THE 'JAGGED PROFILE' IN ASSESSMENT

> If AI is disrupting anything most visibly, it is assessment.

Assessment is where AI is creating one of the biggest challenges. Last year, I had three 15-year-old students submit essays at a C2 Proficiency level. They were B2 students. The syntax was perfect; the grammar was polished. But something did not match. This is what I call a **'jagged profile'**—a clear mismatch between high-level written performance and actual speaking and vocabulary skills.

Instead of confronting them, I turned it into a learning moment. I wanted a lesson they would remember. I told them: 'These are excellent. Tomorrow, you will write the same essay live in class. If the results are the same, I'll move you up two levels.' The results were, predictably, different. The issue was not ability – it was cognitive offloading. The mental processes required to build understanding never took place, leaving their knowledge superficial. They could not explain their ideas or the decisions behind their writing because they had not engaged in the process themselves.

This highlights the need to rethink assessment. If AI is part of learning, then we must focus less on the final product and more on the process. This means observing how students think, asking them to explain their choices, and creating opportunities for live performance and interaction. When used responsibly, AI can support learning – but only if students remain actively engaged in the thinking behind it.

TAKEAWAY 4:

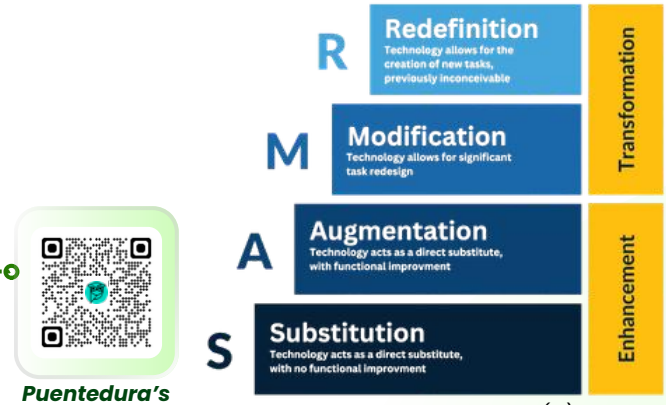
THE 'BACKWARD DESIGN' OF AI INTEGRATION

> The biggest mistake teachers make with AI is surprisingly simple: trying to fit a tool into a lesson.

A common pitfall for educators is starting with a cool AI tool and trying to force it into a lesson. This is the opposite of effective teaching. We must embrace backward design: start with the learning outcomes, then find the tool.

For example, if the goal is to teach the present simple for daily routines, the question is not "Which AI tool can I use?" but "How will this tool improve learning, memory, or collaboration?" to ensure it serves the pedagogy rather than dictates it.

We all know Puentedura's (2006) SAMR model – Substitution, Augmentation, Modification and Redefinition. The key idea is simple: technology should not just replace what we already do; it should enhance or transform learning.



Puentedura's SAMR model

For example, if students type a movie review using Google Doc instead of writing it by hand, technology is only substituting. If they use tools like spellcheck or a thesaurus, it supports their work—augmentation. If I ask them to work together on the Google Doc and collaborate to write the review together, then peer edit it, comment on it, and share their work online, the task is redesigned—modification. And when they turn that review into a podcast or video with added media, the task is redefined in ways that were not possible before.

The goal with AI is not substitution, but meaningful transformation.

TAKEAWAY 5:

THE THREE PILLARS OF MODERN TEACHER LITERACY

> If we are to work confidently with AI,
> we need to rethink what it means to be "literate" as educators.

In my experience, we must cultivate three specific literacies to lead an AI-integrated classroom:

PROMPT LITERACY

Prompting is not just about getting better answers. It is about shaping the direction of learning. If we ask AI for a "manager," most systems will return a narrow, stereotypical image like a white man. We must use precise prompts to break these innate biases and ensure diverse representation. The way we frame prompts influences not only the output, but the perspectives our learners are exposed to.

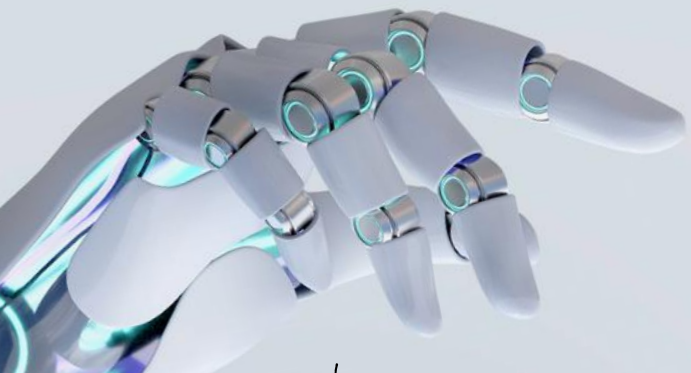
Check Robert's series of DEI-focused Prompt Writing short videos on his YouTube channel: @LearningTogetherWithRobert.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

We cannot follow AI blindly. Large language models (LLMs) are trained on vast amounts of data, much of it shaped by dominant cultural perspectives. This means they can reproduce bias, generate inaccuracies, or present information with unwarranted confidence (such as men as managers and women as secretaries). This is not only a risk, but also an opportunity. We must question outputs, cross-check information, and model this critical stance for our learners. Developing this habit turns AI into a tool for deeper learning rather than passive consumption.

TRANSPARENCY AND AI STATEMENTS

Perhaps most importantly, we need to make our use of AI visible, especially modelling ethical use. In my own practice, I include AI statements in materials to show where and how AI has supported the process. This removes the sense of secrecy and helps normalise responsible use. I also have an AI classroom agreement approach which means co-creating it with the students to raise their level of AI awareness about ethical and responsible use.



> ***We must question outputs**, cross-check information, and model this critical stance for our learners.*
>
> Robert Martínez

CONCLUSION

THE DISAPPEARANCE TEST

If AI disappeared tomorrow, would your teaching still hold weight? This is the ultimate test of our value as educators. Teachers who use AI to cognitively offload their responsibilities – delegating their brainpower to the machine – will find their skills 'frozen' and their ability to adapt withered. But those who use AI as a supplement while prioritizing the core human skills of motivation, feedback, and connection will remain the primary inspiration in their classrooms. Remember: AI supports learning, but teachers inspire it!

AI can draft a lesson, but it cannot understand a student's emotion or the cultural nuances of a specific neighborhood. We are the architects of the learning experience. So, use the tool, but never delegate the soul of your own learning and teaching to it.

Robert is celebrating 31 years in ELT! He's passionate about language assessment, technology, and teacher education. He's a CELTA Tutor & Assessor, IHWO & Eaquals Inspector & Board Trustee, TESOL-SPAIN AC, TESOL CONFERENCES and EduVerse Ambassador. He's a language assessment specialist for Cambridge & IDP IELTS. He can be found on LinkedIn @https://www.linkedin.com/in/robertmartinez1/ and he has a YouTube channel for teachers @LearningTogetherWithRobert.

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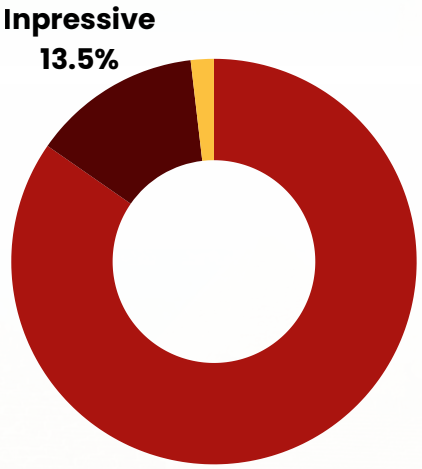
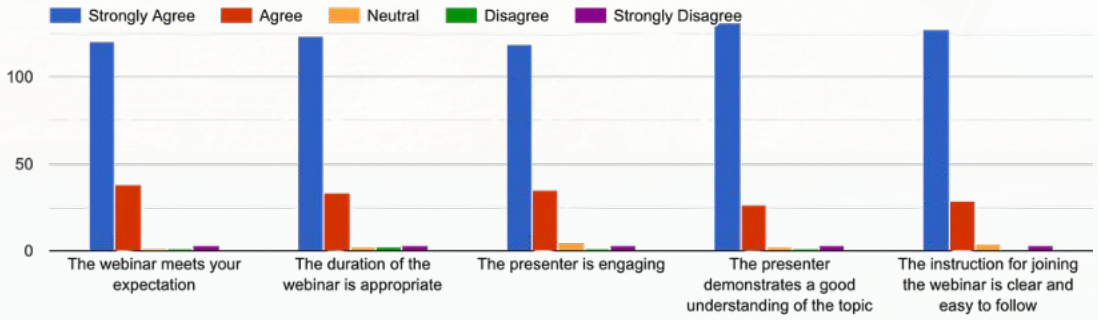


82.9% ***(NPS Score)***

It was a joy to see the chat filled with warm welcomes from 400+ registrants across 50 countries. While we can't share every message, please know how much we appreciate all the thoughtful feedback and engagement throughout the session.

A huge thank you to our speaker, **Barnaby Griffiths**, for sharing such valuable insights on effective communication, and to our wonderful host, **Gülbin Özdemir**, for guiding such a dynamic and practical conversation.



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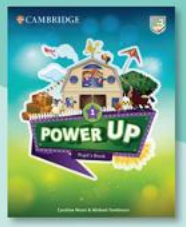

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