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THE DEN · ESSAY SERIES

I wish artificial intelligence did not exist. Students need to be taught to use it anyway

An essay from The Den, the Fox Curriculum series on AI, writing, and learning.

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That's not the sentence people expect from someone who talks this much about AI in education, but it's the honest starting point.

For most of human history, understanding something hard required sitting with it. Working it out. Getting it wrong, trying again, and building the kind of reasoning that only comes from struggle. AI has made that struggle optional. Ask a question, get an answer, move on. I watch what that instant access is doing to critical thinking, and it worries me.

A mind that never has to wonder is a mind that is losing practice at wondering.

That's one half of what I believe. Here's the other half.

I'm a historian before I'm anything else, and history has taught me that resisting the direction something is moving in is rarely the winning strategy. Technologies that fundamentally reorganize how people think don't ask permission first. AI isn't going away, and it isn't slowing down. It's getting stronger, spreading faster, and operating with remarkably few guardrails around it, which is its own kind of dangerous.

Wishing it away isn't a strategy. Understanding it well enough to shape how the next generation uses it is.

So yes, I believe AI belongs in the classroom. Not as a replacement for thinking, but as something students are taught to use deliberately, the way you'd teach someone to use any powerful tool: with a clear sense of what it's good for, what it costs when it's overused, and where the line sits between using it and outsourcing your own mind to it.

Students need to leave school knowing how to use AI to benefit the people around them, not just to finish homework faster.

That distinction is going to define this generation the way literacy defined the last several.

What I keep coming back to is that we're not just watching a new tool enter the classroom. We're standing at a genuine precipice, one where AI is going to change how people process information at a cognitive level we don't fully understand yet. That's not hyperbole. That's a research problem, and an enormous one.

Educators are going to need new studies, new frameworks, and a willingness to be wrong and adjust as we learn what actually happens to a developing brain that grows up with an answer engine in its pocket.

I don't think the answer is optimism or alarm. I think it's rigor.

History doesn't wait for anyone to be ready for it, and neither will this. I'd rather be one of the people figuring out how to move forward with it than one of the people still arguing about whether we should.

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