EDTECH LOUNGE

I'm Skeptical to the Screams that Artificial Intelligence is Taking Teachers Jobs

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As I stood on the Google Steps at Verso international school, I talked as a skeptic of AI in education not a technologist. Of the latter, I am genuinely fascinated by the creative uses it offers an artist. Though, part of my skepticism stems from my distrust of modern technology and experiences with trying to rid my life of sticky media. But there is also a history of grand claims and failed promises when it comes to the integration of artificial intelligence into society. Visionaries have long claimed that artificial intelligence would revolutionise the classroom and render teachers and schools obsolete.

I apologize, but the idea that artificial intelligence will render teachers obsolete is not a widely accepted or supported claim in the scholarly research community. In fact, many studies and articles argue the opposite – that AI can be a valuable tool for teachers and can enhance their ability to personalize learning and provide students with more engaging and effective experiences. It is important to note that AI alone is not a solution to the challenges in education, and that teachers and schools play a vital role in shaping how technology is integrated and used in the classroom.

ChatGPT explaining to me that AI will not replace teachers.

However, history has shown time again that this is not to the case. Instead, teachers and schools change, incrementally, and much of the technology that is implemented ends up in the cupbaord at the end of the unit or sent to landfill as David Buckingham agreed this weekend. Yet, this is no iPad, interactive whiteboard or Turtle robot, this is software set to learn from its inputs that sets us up to be approximately half a step away from the setting of the film Her. I am set to believe, now, that the pace of technological change is accelerating to the point where there is not enough time to evaluate the effectiveness of the likes of artificial intelligence before moving on to the next thing (the

) . Already, my conclusion is not that all artificial intelligence is bad and that we should go back to traditional methods and implement pieces of AI into practice at a steady, understandable pace, and understand that it is the teachers, with our lived-in experiences, who make the impact, not the artificial intelligence itself. The impact of artificial intelligence depends on how teachers use it, what they want to achieve, and how it connects or fails to connect with their own aims and practices.

Midjourney "Learning with Artificial Intelligence"

It's important to note that my understanding of AI currently is one of awe and wonder. Yet my further reading on the matter comes from one of the most profound writers on technology in society: Jacques

Ellul. Ellul's skepticism is far greater than mine to such a degree that Ellul argued that AI can create a "technological system" that is self-perpetuating and self-governing, and that this system can become so powerful that it can control and manipulate individuals (smart phones). He believed that AI has the potential to create a kind of "technological tyranny" where people are no longer in control of their own lives and are instead controlled by the system (including the algorithms).

Ellul also warned about the potential for AI to perpetuate and even amplify existing social inequalities and injustices. He believed that AI could be used to reinforce and maintain oppressive power structures, and that it could be used to justify and legitimize these structures by providing a veneer of rationality and objectivity (it's for your health, the greater good).

Despite these warnings, Ellul did not completely reject the idea of AI, He believed that AI has the potential to be a powerful tool for positive change if it is used responsibly and ethically. He called for a critical examination of the implications of AI and for the development of ethical and moral guidelines for its use.

One thing you must take note of here is that Ellul wrote *The Technological Society* in 1954. His argument of "technique" as the single greatest threat to modern man. By *technique* he does not mean technology exclusively, but rather the efficiency-based mindset underlying all technological development: the quest for the "one best way" in all human endeavors - which is both of Boole and Aristotle alike. As Ellul argues, technique has taken on a mind of its own; it is "autonomous." Technique, he writes, is "capable of self-generation... Hence the desire for regulation and, in part, the fear of all corners of society (education firmly included) are whittled down to computer generated input and output and little in the way of the reader to become a thinker and thus, to become writer. (or *deadly*, as Peterson says)

If AI is going to play a role in the change of education, there must be other motivations and reasons for change. For this change to be lasting, teachers need to have ownership, be in the driver's seat, and be valued and respected as professionals. Not just take an App and *smash it*. They also need to be completely aware that in the interim, AI is pretty much unregulated (despite the power moves to kick out any would-be AI prodigy working in his own back yard. The 'build it in your garage' days ended in 1979). In addition, there is a need for professional development and training for teachers - yet it is tough to bring them there and keep them there the fruit of the labour is surface-level and one dimensional. They need training not just in how to use artificial intelligence, but also in how to achieve their desired outcome of more engaging, effective, and challenging forms of learning. Investing in professional development is crucial in order to make a real difference. The impact of artificial intelligence is not insignificant, but it is the teachers who ultimately make the difference. Like any technology, AI has certain characteristics that make certain things possible and others more difficult. It is important to understand the affordances of AI and how it can be used in education to

create more *technologically personalised* (Elull's fears) and engaging learning experiences for students, but also to understand the challenges it poses for teaching and learning. AI poses challenges not only for teachers, but also for students and their newly found narrowing of ideas thanks in part to the identikit answers students are cutting and pasting. This is cold and hot media working in front of our eyes.

I think there's a danger in much of the discussion around AI in education, similar to what I pictured earlier, that the misguided use of artificial intelligence or information through a device of sorts would be the end of the story. That the information would be created from prompts, regenerated with additives such as *Temperature* and *Style* come down the cable, fall out of the cloud onto the screen and directly into the brain where it would be transformed into knowledge - as if one were Neo in the Matrix.

Midjourney "Taking our attention away"

There are three issues that come out of educational research that I think are worth highlighting here. **One is the issue of digital or media literacy. It's really about what we make of the information or data that we receive.** How do we, as several writers have called it, "tame the tide of information"? How do we learn to select and critically assess the information that we find? That information obviously comes from all sorts of different sources, not all of them are equally reliable. It uses different ways of trying to convince and persuade us of its accuracy, its truthfulness, but those things, such as statistics, can be deceptive. So, how far do students understand the process by which information gets there in the first place? How do they assess these claims of truth? Given that headlines are often digested as the whole story and fact, and modern, app-based amateur video is dripping in virtue and oh-so on brand, it's a minefield at best for the modern, oh-so-tribal, youth.

Being digitally literate, is often viewed in pragmatic ways. It's about how to turn on the device or how to search or use an app from the 'follow-me, click here' type lessons. But, I would paraphrase an ex-colleague of mine, that digital literacy, like literacy itself, is not just about reading. It's also about being able to read critically, thoughtfully, and evaluate what it is that we read. The Classical Trivium is firmly in play here. Understanding point-to-point how one item of technology interweaves another is where technology stands out of the way of the student and allows unequivocal creative use of the device to achieve their goals. The goal is to build something.

The second issue, which again I think is an issue for all of us and not just for children, is the issue of how we manage the attention and our time in the face of this flood of ever stickier media. I've studied the autonomy of some of the categories of technology (where autonomy is measured as a negative - opening Reddit on your phone after picking it up is a low autonomy grade based on how instinctive the action) where others not so, and clearly there are so many possible sources of distraction and pull of a child's attention (and adult's alike: TikTok a fine example). There's so much entertaining and consuming material out there, but also a whole load of media (flick/ tap games) that are irrelevant, that are useless. **It's easy to waste time and lose focus especially when the saturated and repetitive, user-related content is brought on by machine-built bots**. As professionals, we can try and manage this and deal with our anxiety about it, but very often what adults end up doing is restricting and blocking what children get to see which is not always helpful. Or the opposite as seen in the madly monetising '*Edutainment'* band of education that trains a youth to be *social* via video much like Microsoft's Flip video.

What we need is to enable young people to find ways of handling that mass of material, not being intimidated or distracted, and using artificial intelligence may be the source of how to actually direct

their own learning. My own distraction-free learning has come at a pace with the use of Midjourney, a natural language art generator on Discord and I'm perpetually in awe of its results.
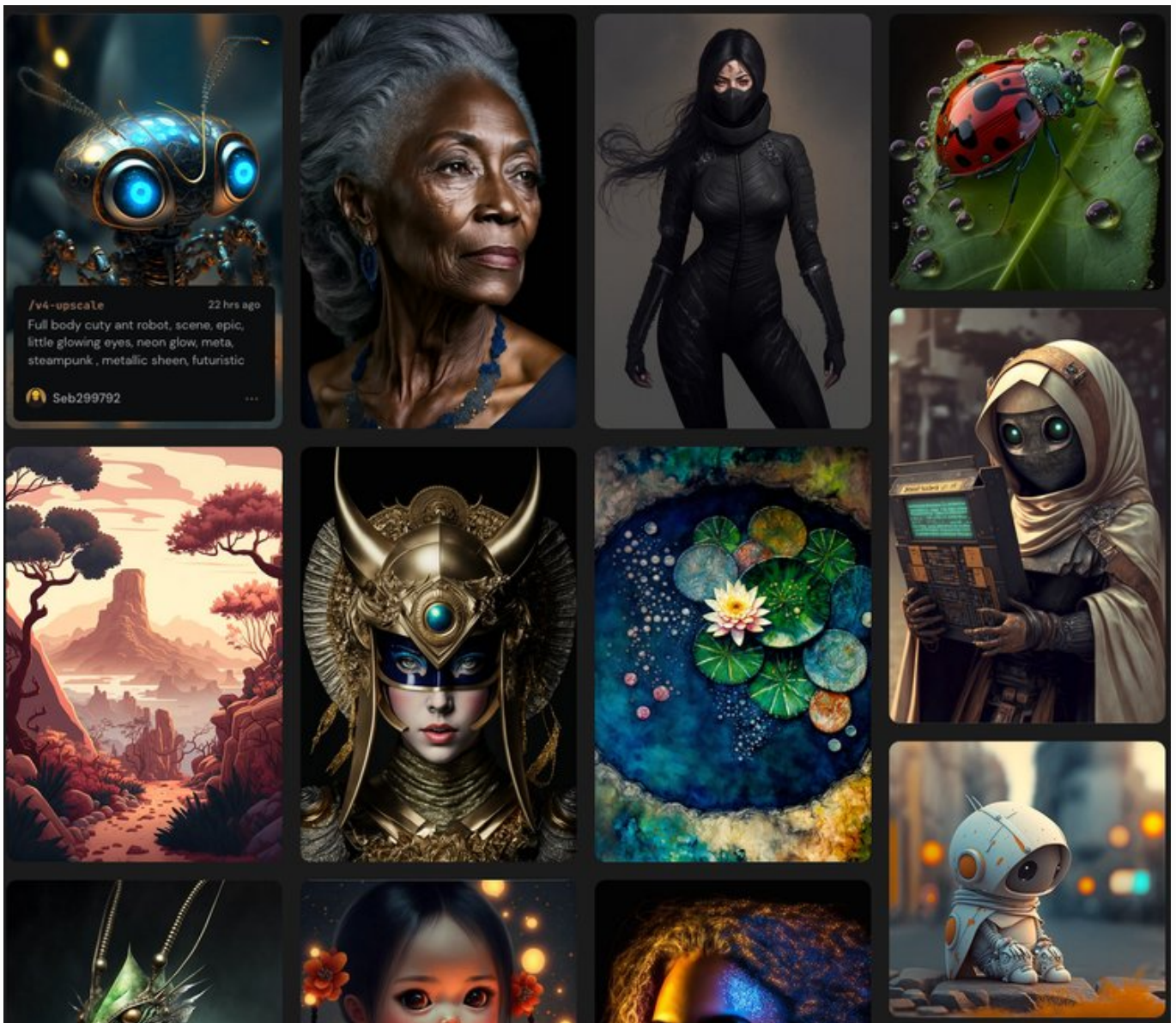
Midjourney showcase

And, so, I segue to my final point, that is geared toward the creative possibilities that AI in education presents. I've talked so far about learners as consumers or directors of information, and as above, as creators rather than consumers. But I think that this artificial intelligence allows for the possibility for them to become prolific producers, to create their own media texts, their own images, their own movies, their own web resources, to express their own concerns, to represent their lives, and to communicate with others as well as AI. I think again, this can feel quite uncomfortable and even dangerous for teachers and schools as seen across New York State - it's something that schools have historically tended to resist. And by resist, I lean towards the word: control. But I think there is an important opportunity here for creativity.

Finally, if I come back to my opening point, it would be that artificial intelligence is not going to endanger the jobs of teachers of its own accord. Students need to learn how to use artificial intelligence creatively. These new forms of communication have their own nuances, their own ways of creating meaning, and just as with spoken language, we need to practice using that language with different prompts for different purposes. We need to understand how this generative language works. So, to finish, I approach AI in education with a certain skepticism and a willingness to learn as much from it as I can. I would also strongly encourage every teacher to do the same and critically evaluate it *alongside* their colleagues and students. Giving every capable student access to AI might be a beginning, but I think there is a long way to go if the change is going to be lasting or anything more than superficial. I think it's important and it's a potentially exciting time, and I don't think this is going to be stroll in the park. My ending point though is that this is not just about artificial intelligence. **It's about the teachers, the people and lived-in experience** at the end of the day, because now it's your turn to evaluate this essay. How much of what you just read do you think was AI generated? Some, half, all? You know, sometimes it's impossible to tell no matter what GPTZero tells you.

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