

SES

SOCIETY FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

IS TECHNOLOGY THE END OF EDUCATION?

Oriel College
10-11 SEPTEMBER 2026
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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CONTENTS

Welcome	3
Programme	5
Keynote Speakers	6
Seminar Sessions	
Seminar Session 1	8
Seminar Session 2	9
Seminar Session 3	9
Seminar Session 4	10
Seminar Paper Abstracts	11
Delegate List	22





Dear *Colleagues and Friends*,

A very warm welcome to all our distinguished guests, colleagues, and friends who join us for the 9th Society for Educational Studies Annual Colloquium, here at Oriel College, Oxford.

The theme for this year poses the question *Is Technology the End of Education?* This intentionally open and provocative question seeks to challenge what we understand by the purpose of education and its interaction with industry and the world of work.

The Colloquium brings colleagues together to discuss the current state of education, broadly, and whether or not technology is a disruptor or an aide to delivering a purposeful and meaningful education at all levels. Following on from the 2025 Colloquium, that considered the short term future of Higher Education in the United Kingdom, this year's Colloquium seeks to interrogate whether technological evolution and advancement is a main purpose of a good education, or if it is an inhibitor to what a good educational experience brings.

This creates a tension which poses multiple quandaries for educators. Where technology advances and becomes more readily available, so access to such technologies offer students of all ages educational experiences that keep pace with the technologies they use at home; however, should educators be concerned with where the control of many of these platforms lie? Many are in the hands of global corporations, which may well provide schools with the hardware and software, but, more challengingly, create ethical dilemmas over how data is stored and accessed, or where the funding for technology comes from.

This Colloquium will see papers given by both optimists and pessimists with regards to technological interventions and technology-led teaching. Our hope is that each paper, seminar presentation and keynote, will prompt delegates to reflect on their own stance(s) and practice(s) and encourage rigorous debate on the ways in which technology is shaping and re-shaping education in school, college and university.

As with all SES events, we encourage delegates to enter into the spirit of discussion and debate, and appropriate time is given in each seminar session to ask questions and engages in respectful intellectual discourse on the topics that each paper raises.

We have created a programme that seeks to fulfill the aims of the Society, build on discussions held at previous Colloquia and advance arguments around aspects of technology in education that educators are grappling with. We see this as a timely and essential event that can help shape the agenda for technological disruption in education at all levels.

Speakers who deliver papers at the Colloquium are encouraged to submit them as articles for peer review in the *British Journal of Educational Studies*.

We very much look forward to the discussions and debates over the two days of the Colloquium.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Professor James Conroy.

Professor James Conroy

University of Glasgow

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Dr Aidan P Thompson.

Dr Aidan P Thompson

University of Warwick



PROGRAMME

Thursday 10 September 2026

11:45 - 12:00

Arrival and Registration

Porter's Lodge

12:00 - 12:45

Lunch

Hall

12:45 - 13:00

**Welcome: James Arthur, Chair,
SES**

Senior Library

13:00 - 14:00

Keynote 1: Michael Grove

Senior Library

14:00 - 15:00

Seminar Session 1

15:00 - 15:30

Afternoon Tea

Bar

15:30 - 16:30

Keynote 2: Rebecca Eynon

Senior Library

16:30 - 17:30

Seminar Session 2

17:30 - 18:30

Check Into Bedrooms

18:30 - 19:30

Drinks

Champneys Room

19:30

Dinner

Hall

Friday 11 September 2026

08:00 - 09:00

Breakfast

Hall

09:00 - 10:00

Keynote 3: Emma Darcy

Senior Library

10:00 - 11:00

Seminar Session 3

11:00 - 11:30

Morning Coffee

Bar

11:30 - 12:30

Seminar Session 4

12:30 - 12:45

Plenary

Senior Library

12:45 - 13:45

Lunch

Hall

14:00

Close

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Thursday 10 – Friday 11 September 2026

Professor Michael Grove

University of Birmingham, UK

Chair: Professor Tom Harrison

IS AI THE END OF EDUCATION, OR ONLY THE END OF CONTENT TRANSMISSION?

Generative AI has forced higher education to confront an uncomfortable reality: it can reproduce many of the visible products we have traditionally treated as evidence of learning. Yet this may reveal less about the power of AI than about the limitations of an educational model centred on transmitting content and assessing its reproduction. The central challenge is therefore not simply how to secure assessment or regulate students' use of technology, but to decide what a university education should develop in students and how those outcomes can be made visible through educational design and practice.

In an AI-enabled world, education must cultivate thoughtful judgement, responsible agency and the qualities of character that enable students to use technology well without becoming dependent upon it. Drawing on work in the mathematical sciences, education policy and character education, this keynote will explore how teaching can make disciplinary thinking more visible, how assessment can reveal learning rather than surface fluency, and how universities can design intentionally for the judgement and human formation that AI cannot provide. The question, then, is not whether technology marks the end of education, but whether it offers an opportunity to recover its deeper purpose.

Professor Rebecca Eynon

University of Oxford, UK

Chair: Professor James Conroy

CHANGING THE FRAME: TOWARDS A JUSTICE ORIENTATED APPROACH TO THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

Across the globe education policies promote digital technologies as an important way to address inequities in schooling (e.g. via the provision of additional resources, personalisation for those who need more support, or saving teachers time). Drawing on extensive ethnographic work in secondary schools in England this talk demonstrates how these assumptions are not supported in practice. Existing inequities in the school system are at best maintained, and often made worse by the use of technology, whilst the commercial sector becomes ever more powerful. Despite this bleak picture, technology need not be the end of education. The design and use of technologies in schools are not fixed nor the impacts inevitable. This talk offers an alternative frame that centres the actions of teachers, young people, and the wider education community to support a democratic and justice-oriented approach to the use of technology in schools.

Emma Darcy

Denbigh High School, UK

Chair: Dr Aidan P Thompson

DOES TECHNOLOGY REPRESENT A NEW HORIZON FOR EDUCATION OR IS IT A THREAT TO ITS CRITICAL, HUMAN AND DEMOCRATIC PURPOSES: REFLECTIONS FROM A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly embedded in young people's everyday lives, this presentation asks whether technology represents a new horizon for education or a threat to its critical, human and democratic purposes. It draws on Teaching for Digital Citizenship: Digital Ethics in the Classroom and Beyond, a University of Glasgow-led research project undertaken in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh. Working with secondary schools across the UK, the project explored how digital citizenship is understood and enacted across the curriculum and wider life of the school. Using this work as a lens, the session will examine the skills, values and forms of agency young people may need in an increasingly AI-saturated world. It will also introduce the Digital Citizenship Enhancement Tool and consider how it might help educators reflect on what it means to prepare young people not only to live with emerging technologies, but to understand, question and participate in shaping them.

SEMINAR SESSIONS

SEMINAR SESSION 1

14:00 - 15:00 Thursday 10 September 2026

Senior Library

Chair: Shane McLoughlin

Aline Nardo

Is AI the End of Bildung?

Shane McLoughlin

*Virtue for Nobody in Particular: Why
Character Education May Need AI*

Robert Beddard Room

Chair: Gurpinder Lalli

Hiren Nisar

Beyond the Machine: Transforming
Generative AI from a Shortcut into a
Cognitive Scaffold

John-Paul Riordan

Artificial Intelligence Pedagogy Analysis

Owen Walker Room

Chair: Hazel Bryan

Hazel Bryan & Bob Bowie

Brave New Research: AI, Reflexivity and
the Formation of Scholars

David Lewin

Frictionless Education in the Age of AI

SEMINAR SESSION 2

16:30 - 17:30 Thursday 10 September 2026

Senior Library

Chair: Stephen Parker

Jim Hordern

Educational knowledge and the rise of GenAI: some initial reflections

Sam Holdstock

Artificial Intelligence and Everyday Oracy

Robert Beddard Room

Chair: Aidan Thompson

Gebing Wang

The Vending Machine of Learnification: Generative AI, Infantile Desire, and the Hidden Cost of Subjectification

Aidan Thompson

How Do We Keep a Character-First Philosophy In An Education That Is Becoming More Reliant on Technology?

SEMINAR SESSION 3

10:00 - 11:00 Friday 11 September 2026

Senior Library

Chair: Hazel Bryan

Louise McGowan

Online learning, online living: the impact of AI upon teachers and students in an inner London school; an ethnographic tale from the field.

Mike Cole

Developing Science Teaching Efficacy in Primary Teacher Training: A Cross-Sectional Study with Reflections on the Role of AI

Robert Beddard Room

Chair: Richard Race

Nicola Robertson

AI and the 'Levelling' of Higher Education

Helen Hooper

Recruitment materials could help perpetuate the gender disparity in educational leadership: the role of technology in gender fair recruitment.

Owen Walker Room

Chair: Sally Power

Claire Burdfield

Designing Accessibility into VR Pedagogy:
The Spectrum of Immersive Engagement

Bev Hancock-Smith

Impact of text-generative artificial
intelligence tools on students' approach
to assessment: a case study of a UK
institution

SEMINAR SESSION 4

11:30 - 12:30 Friday 11 September 2026

Senior Library

Chair: Gurbinder Lalli

Enze Guo

Whose AI, Whose Education? Student
Voice, Inequality and Performativity in a
UK BA Programme

Ramesh Kapadia

Teaching Probability and Statistics using
Artificial Intelligence

Robert Beddard Room

Chair: Shane McLoughlin

Vanessa Cui

Sociodigital practices in English Primary
Education: a critical examination of what
this means to teachers

Jennie Mills

Not for AI. Not against AI.* —
dis/intoxication and the conditions under
which thinking happens

Owen Walker Room

Chair: Richard Race

Georgia McCrone

Asimov, Le Guin and Adams: Reframing
Conversational AI Beyond Educational
Decline Narratives

Graham Nutbrown

William Godwin: Is Education the End of
Technology?

SEMINAR PAPER ABSTRACTS

Seminar Session 1

Thursday 10 September 2026 14:00 – 15:00

SENIOR LIBRARY

Aline Nardo

IS AI THE END OF BILDUNG?

Using the German Enlightenment concept of Bildung as a lens, this paper argues that AI not only transforms educational institutions and pedagogical practices, but further destabilises the already precarious conditions under which autonomous, critical and responsible subjects are formed today. In doing so, AI intensifies tendencies Adorno described as Halbbildung (half-education) rather than Bildung.

While debate surrounding AI in education tends to focus on learning within schools and universities, Bildung directs attention to wider processes of human formation that occur beyond formal educational contexts. Bildung describes the open-ended and non-predetermined formation of the self through reflective engagement with the world. Crucially, this process involves not merely the internal transformation of an isolated individual, but encounters with difficulty, uncertainty, and resistance emerging through active engagement with a world that remains irreducibly other.

This paper argues that Bildung depends on these experiences of alterity in interaction with a world that cannot be fully predicted, personalised, or consumed, whereas contemporary AI increasingly mediates experience as frictionless, anticipatory, and already interpreted. Drawing on Adorno's *Theorie der Halbbildung* (1959), it suggests that AI substitutes open and reflective engagement with technologically pre-mediated forms of experience. For Adorno, Bildung is grounded in a critical tension between self and world; Halbbildung, by contrast, erodes this tension through socially pre-structured forms of world-relation oriented toward conformity, uncritical appropriation of thought and culture and passive consumption. Using Large Language Models (LLMs) as an example, this paper seeks to demonstrate how contemporary AI technologies intensify the tendencies towards Halbbildung observed by Adorno. LLMs mediate everyday world-relations through frictionless access to information, personalised interaction, and standardised forms of expression. By removing struggle and uncertainty from processes of knowing and interpretation, they risk displacing the formative encounters with alterity upon which Bildung depends, thereby threatening the very conditions that make it possible.

Shane McLoughlin

VIRTUE FOR NOBODY IN PARTICULAR: WHY CHARACTER EDUCATION MAY NEED AI

Character education commonly assumes that familiar virtues can be justified teleologically: virtues such as perseverance, honesty, courage, or self-control tend to contribute to flourishing, and schools should therefore cultivate them in children. This paper argues that the ergodicity problem complicates this justification substantially. Population-level associations between virtues and desirable outcomes do not imply that the same relationships hold within every individual across time. Across correlations from $r = .10$ to $r = .50$, approximately 47% to 33% of individuals may still fall on the incongruent side of the association; at $r = .25$, around the magnitude commonly observed between virtues and flourishing, the figure is approximately 42%. Average tendencies can therefore characterise particular lives surprisingly poorly. Consequently, virtues that appear beneficial nomothetically may indeed be neutral, maladaptive, or require importantly different expressions for substantial numbers of children.

I argue that character education therefore requires greater attention to idionomic virtues: person-specific configurations of character whose value depends upon the individual, their circumstances, and their sociological contexts. Yet genuinely person-centred character education presents a logistical problem. Teachers cannot continuously provide one-to-one assessment, feedback, and adaptation for every pupil. AI may make such personalisation possible at scale. I therefore argue that AI is not merely an optional enhancement to character education, but may become necessary to maintain its core justification. AI-enabled personalisation could align character education more closely with the individual-level flourishing claims on which its teleological rationale ultimately depends on educational practice within the practical realities of contemporary schooling.

Hiren Nisar

BEYOND THE MACHINE: TRANSFORMING GENERATIVE AI FROM A SHORTCUT INTO A COGNITIVE SCAFFOLD

The rapid adoption of Generative AI (GenAI) presents a dual challenge for economics educators: while GenAI offers efficiency, they risk undermining independent critical thought and fostering cognitive atrophy. However, with 95% of students self-reporting using ChatGPT as their default academic interface, the pedagogical challenge has already shifted from banning the tool to moving students from passive consumers to critical evaluators.

This paper presents findings from a study of 40 students (approximately 20 percent response rate) participating in an AI-critical assessment intervention. Moving beyond traditional essay drafting, this task required students to engage in active auditing, critiquing an AI-generated essay through targeted prompts before producing their own revised work along with a reflective piece on the process. This approach revealed a "Surface vs. Substance" model: while students recognized AI's strength in relevance (70% agreement) and structure (69% agreement), the students aptly identified deep flaws in substance/depth, with 46.2% noting a lack of credible evidence and 40% citing a deficiency in analytical depth.

The findings challenge the premise that AI restricts critical dialogue. Instead, 69% of students reported a better understanding of AI's epistemic limitations, and 64% enhanced their ability to critically analyse written work. Rightly, their main concerns were about hallucinations and skill atrophy. Furthermore, the intervention drove significant gains in confidence, with 82% of students feeling prepared to critically assess AI content in future academic settings. We conclude that technology is not the end of education, but the beginning of a new evaluative literacy. By strategically sequencing AI feedback and shifting learning objectives from writing to auditing, educators can ensure AI remains a cognitive scaffold rather than a substitute for thought. The future of assessment in this AI world lies in intentional assignment design to grade the thinking, not just the text, and ultimately teaching students to out-think the machine.

John-Paul Riordan

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PEDAGOGY ANALYSIS

The Artificial Intelligence 'Russian Doll' encompasses machine learning (ML), deep learning (DL) within ML, and GenAI within DL (Banh and Strobel, 2023:62). AI pedagogy is an emerging field (Bearman and Ajjawi, 2023). "[AI] is the capacity of an information-processing system to adapt to its environment while operating with insufficient knowledge and resources." (Wang, 2019:17). In contrast "[human] Intelligence is a very general mental capability that, among other things, involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience." (Gottfredson, 1997). How can AI be used to nurture human intelligence? GenAI models are 'taught' using semi-supervised 'learning', but have those pedagogical words been usurped? Other GenAI problems include, misuse, environmental harm, bias, and 'hallucinations'. Pedagogy analysis is not only concerned with truth, but also with what participants believe to be true, even when they're wrong (e.g., humans sometimes anthropomorphise GenAI; Clarke, 2026). Teacher AI 'misconceptions' include believing they can already replace human educators, overestimation of AI 'emotional intelligence', and underestimating human oversight requirements (Kotsis, 2025). We demonstrate how theoretical models to support teacher reflection aid AI pedagogy analysis. The models emerged in studies over 17 years involving 159 pupils (7-to-16-years-old), twelve teachers, and fourteen educational researchers (Riordan, 2020; Riordan, Hardman and Cumbers, 2021; Riordan et al., 2021; Riordan et al., 2023, Riordan, 2023, Riordan et al., 2024; Riordan and Hardman, 2026). Video-based methods were lesson analysis, teacher verbal protocols, pupil group verbal protocols, and focus groups. This Straussian Grounded Theory research was underpinned by Symbolic Interactionism and Performative New Materialist ontoepistemology. The 'pedagogical interactions model' and an illustrated vignette are used to demonstrate AI pedagogy analysis. The models are useful in understanding and explaining AI pedagogy. Is 'robot proof' education (Aoun, 2017) possible or even desirable with these fascinating, ubiquitous and abstruse technologies?

Hazel Bryan & Bob Bowie

BRAVE NEW RESEARCH: AI, REFLEXIVITY & THE FORMATION OF SCHOLARS

This is a conceptual paper that brings educational philosophy into dialogue with current debates in research methodology and scholarly publishing. For Postman, the educational threat of technology was Huxleyan, not Orwellian: a quiet displacement of serious intellectual labour by frictionless pleasure. This paper applies that lens to AI in the university research ecosystems — such as the educational setting in which doctoral and early-career researchers are formed. AI now performs literature searching, argumentation structuring, and, for qualitative research, transcript analysis and output shaping — each a function through which junior researchers have traditionally learned the craft. When AI codes text and assembles themes in Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), for instance, is the human author of the reflexive process preserved, or merely simulated? Does the speed of AI-driven analysis tempt researchers, pressed by underfunding and productivity demands, to devolve rather than oversee analysis, eroding the apprenticeship through which the next generation of scholars is made? The paper then turns to equity. Will the displacement of juniors now visible in management consultancy, insurance and finance migrate into universities — and if so, what becomes of the university as a site of educational formation? Conversely, might these same tools liberate poorly resourced institutions and Global South contexts, redressing the historic concentration of research capital in the wealthy North and widening participation in knowledge production? Finally, the paper interrogates resistance to AI in journal review: an Arendtian defence of human responsibility against unaccountable, value-laden corporate algorithms — or an entrenched effort by holders of research capital to protect their dominance? Drawing on Postman and Arendt, and recent work on the AI-Enabled Scholarship Divide, the paper asks whether AI ends, or remakes, educational research.

David Lewin

FRICTIONLESS EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF AI

Some say that the technological age aspires to frictionlessness (Kemper 2024; Woodcock 2023). Uber, Netflix, Amazon, just work, don't they? Foregrounding useful functionality while minimising complexity, interruption, and frustration might well characterize the present age in which technologies mediate the world through interfaces (Lewin 2010).

But how is the valorization of frictionlessness to be squared with education as a process of growth, challenge and formation? What if education is not just sometimes frictional, but is constitutionally concerned with designed friction: entailing encounters with complexity, interruptions of patterns and habits, or working through frustrations? The idea that education is oriented towards discontinuity, disruption, or alienation is by no means new (English 2013; Kenklies 2022). Consequently, frictionlessness could look rather like the 'end' of education as in its termination rather than its fulfillment.

This paper will address the issue of frictionless education through the lens of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). The GenAI interface that users generally employ is the prompt. The so-called engineering paradigm that defines contemporary approaches to AI tends to assume an instrumental attitude to GenAI prompting: that through prompt optimization, prompt engineering is about sharpening AI tools in order to get the most out of them (Lee and Palmer 2025). This paper questions that instrumentalist assumption, arguing that the prompt is better understood as a site of hermeneutic engagement than technical optimization; a place where friction, interpretation, and formation remain possible. So rather than avoiding friction, this paper asks: what kinds of pedagogical friction can our encounters with GenAI offer?

Seminar Session 2

Thursday 10 September 2026 16:30 – 17:30

SENIOR LIBRARY

Jim Hordern

EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE RISE OF GENAI: SOME INITIAL REFLECTIONS

This paper reflects on the potential impact of the rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) on educational knowledge and our collective and individual 'knowing' or knowledgeability, drawing primarily on work in the sociology of knowledge (as applied to education and disciplinary communities) with some brief illustration from recent DfE policy in England. It is suggested that GenAI provides an acceleration and embedding of what Bernstein described as 'the divorce of knowledge from the knower', and specifically the separation of knowledge from notions of individual and collective inwardness, commitment and identity. Nevertheless, the current rise of Gen AI and its inroads into education is less a dislocation from a benign order but rather the latest step in a longer trajectory of the separation of (official) educational knowledge from educational purposes (and processes), and a further challenge to the sociality of knowledge production and recontextualisation. What GenAI offers is an acceleration of the distancing of 'knowledge' from formation of the self, underpinned by a notion of the 'inevitable obsolescence' of disciplinary thought in the interests of convenience and instrumentality. This can thus enable the greater malleability or 'trainability' of professionals and young people (as can be seen in some recent DfE suggestions around AI use). In essence, GenAI offers us a parody of knowledge and has the potential to undermine knowledgeability and knowledgeable practice. While there may be non-educational uses for a regulated GenAI, there may well be detrimental implications for education and individual/collective formation exacerbated by its rise.

ROBERT BEDDARD ROOM

Gebing Wang

THE VENDING MACHINE OF LEARNIFICATION: GENERATIVE AI, INFANTILE DESIRE, AND THE HIDDEN COST OF SUBJECTIFICATION

AI Education has widely discussed the benefits and concerns of Generative AI (GenAI) (Dainys, 2024; Peng et al., 2026; Piazza et al., 2025), while limited studies focus on GenAI's influence on epistemic beliefs (Urban et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2025). This autoethnographic study argues that heavy reliance on AI transforms the educational process from one of critical becoming into a consumerist transaction. Through reflexive thematic analysis of self-interviews and AI interaction logs, this study conceptualises the epistemological anxiety induced by my reliance on GenAI in the past. One theme emerged through analysis: Generative AI and Compulsive Interactive Loop. I interacted with GenAI to satisfy my desire to research and write. However, operating this frictionless vending machine carries a profound hidden cost. The implicit currency required to gain these instant answers is the learner's own epistemic agency. By outsourcing the cognitive load and ethical responsibility of academic writing to a black-box algorithm, I sacrifice the process of subjectification, the emergence of an autonomous, independent subject capable of taking a stand in the world. I do not become a researcher; I merely consume the aesthetic costume.

By providing an environment of frictionless, instant gratification, GenAI actively influenced my educational development. Biesta (2001) argues that a central task of education is to encourage students to move from an infantile state, where they desire the world to instantly satisfy their needs without resistance, toward a grown-up existence, where they act responsibly in a world that pushes back. GenAI restricts the development of critical thinking not through misinformation but by eliminating the educational friction necessary for a student. This paper argues that GenAI's most serious ontological threat lies in the restriction of critical thought and the subtle erosion of the learner as a responsible, thinking subject.

Sam Holdstock

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EVERYDAY ORACY

Much attention is currently being paid to the status of oracy within school-based education, with the UK government set to publish 'a new primary oracy framework, and a new combined secondary oracy, reading and writing framework' (Department for Education, 2025). Similarly, researchers and educators are exploring the various roles that Artificial Intelligence can play in education (EEF, 2025; Garner-Richardson et al., 2026). Drawing upon data emerging from two small-scale sociomaterialist studies, each focusing upon the relationship between AI and the teaching of English in secondary schools in England, this paper considers the ways in which AI is affecting everyday oracy education in schools.

Barton and Gaunt argue that, in the post-GenAI age, oracy skills are becoming more important (Barton & Gaunt, 2025). Moorghen, writing for Voice21 (a national oracy education charity), suggests that 'structured, educator-mediated discussion of ChatGPT's output' can be beneficial, supporting students to think critically about AI-generated content (Moorghen, n.d.). Researchers have begun to explore the relationship between AI and classroom talk (Wang et al., 2024). However, little research has explored how AI is affecting everyday oracy practices occurring in the classrooms of teachers who have had little access to AI training or specialised AI systems.

This paper demonstrates that AI-generated content is being used to facilitate classroom talk. However, it also finds that AI is not only shaping what is discussed in lessons, but also how it is discussed. I consider, for example, the ways in which AI-generated voices can participate in classroom talk; the different forms of hardware that can form part of classroom oracy assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003; Mulcahy, 2012); the ways in which AI can influence classroom listening and interpersonal relationships, and the role of AI-generated questions and materials within oracy education.

Aidan P Thompson

HOW DO WE KEEP A CHARACTER-FIRST PHILOSOPHY IN AN EDUCATION THAT IS BECOMING MORE RELIANT ON TECHNOLOGY?

If we are to retain a moral purpose to all forms of education, instruction and schooling, then we must ask not only 'where are the ethics?' in any adoption of technology, but also 'is technology supporting or detracting from the moral development of our students?' You will hear elsewhere at this Colloquium the question posed 'what can AI do for character education?' This paper intends to reverse this focus and ask 'what can a character-first philosophy in education do for AI and other technological advancements?'

This paper posits that the adoption of technology in the classroom (at all stages of education), is done in order to deliver 'better' educational practices and experiences for students. Yet, there is little interrogation or accountability as to what we mean by 'better'. 'Better' can mean keeping pace with the world around us and ensuring that students are provided with a safe space in which to practice using the technology that fills their non-schooling lives. 'Better' can mean appeasing and acquiescing to student and parent expectations of what a modern education is. It can also mean lightening the burden felt by teachers where workload is overwhelming and time is precious.

I argue that whilst all of these may well be true and valid, it is essential that 'better' reflects a moral dimension of what is 'good' for students and that we do not lose sight of our moral responsibilities as educators when seeking to adopt and explore new technological aides.



Seminar Session 3

Friday 11 September 2026 10:00 – 11:00

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Louise McGowan

ONLINE LEARNING, ONLINE LIVING: THE IMPACT OF AI UPON TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN AN INNER LONDON SCHOOL; AN ETHNOGRAPHIC TALE FROM THE FIELD

We can either marvel at how quickly a new phenomenon becomes ubiquitous, or we can be alarmed by it. As a secondary school teacher of 32 years in the field of state-funded education, all of which have been spent working in challenging inner-city or urban high schools in areas of deprivation, and the past 15 of which have been spent as a serving Headteacher, the growth of AI has been both rapid and startling. As a practitioner-researcher it has been fascinating to observe and, equally, be increasingly immersed in.

This paper will explore, through the medium of an ethnographic tale from the front line, how AI has weaved into academic life, planning, pedagogy and policymaking in schools, positively impacting the lives and workload of teachers and leaders, and upon the ways that students learn. There has been much to hail in welcome as well as academic caution to ensure it does not become a substitute for human critical thinking and reasoning. However, there is a much darker side to AI emerging from the shadows, impacting the welfare and safety of children and young people whose lives are increasingly lived online. Left unchecked, AI may have a lasting and damaging impact on their ability to separate reality from the virtual, to form healthy and meaningful social relationships and to shape their understanding and ability to navigate life in the real world. AI may have revolutionised human life in many positive ways but there are very serious implications for embracing its virtues without acknowledging the hidden consequences and dangers that it poses for children and young people at an age of acute vulnerability.

Mike Cole

DEVELOPING SCIENCE TEACHING EFFICACY IN PRIMARY TEACHER TRAINING: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY WITH REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF AI

The preparation of primary teachers who are confident and capable in teaching science is an important aspect of initial teacher education. Translating subject knowledge into effective classroom practice requires not only competence but genuine belief in one's ability to teach. This study examines science teaching efficacy among primary trainee teachers across three successive cohorts of a teacher training programme, exploring how efficacy beliefs differ at each stage of training.

This repeated cross-sectional study gathered data from trainees at each year of the programme using a validated Science Teaching Efficacy Belief Instrument (STEBI), developed by Riggs and Enochs (1989), which measures both personal science teaching efficacy and science teaching outcome expectancy. This was supplemented by qualitative accounts illuminating the experiences of those navigating what is, for some, a challenging subject domain. Findings to date reveal a nuanced picture: whilst outcome expectancy beliefs appear to strengthen over time, personal science teaching efficacy shows signs of fluctuation at certain points, suggesting the two dimensions may develop at different rates. Key programme features associated with stronger efficacy include mentoring, opportunities for collaborative science teaching, and subject-specific pedagogical input.

In discussion, the paper tentatively considers whether educational technologies - from simulation tools to AI resources - might offer supplementary scaffolding, particularly for trainees with limited prior science confidence. Rather than positioning technology as a transformative solution, the paper argues for a measured perspective: technology may serve as one thread within a broader network of support, but cannot substitute for the relational and experiential dimensions of teacher development.

Claire Burdfield

DESIGNING ACCESSIBILITY INTO VR PEDAGOGY: THE SPECTRUM OF IMMERSIVE ENGAGEMENT

The increasing integration of immersive and digital technologies in higher education has intensified debates about whether technological advancement enhances or constrains educational practice. While tools such as Virtual Reality (VR), Mixed Reality (MR), and generative AI are frequently positioned as transformative, their adoption raises critical questions regarding accessibility, ethics, and the future direction of pedagogy. This paper responds directly to these tensions by examining the barriers and enablers of immersive technology in teaching, and questioning whether innovation is being driven by pedagogical need or technological possibility.

Drawing on a longitudinal case study of immersive teaching within a postgraduate Digital Cultural and Creative Industries module, the paper explores how immersive technologies shape participation through their affordances and constraints. Extending the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, it introduces technological affordances as a mediating layer, demonstrating how embodied, sensory, and cognitive demands can limit accessibility, particularly for students affected by motion sickness, mobility constraints, or visual impairments. These findings raise broader concerns about widening participation, suggesting that technological progression may, in some cases, sit in tension with inclusive educational practice.

The paper also engages with ethical considerations, including data privacy, user safety, and the potential for immersive and AI-driven environments to prioritise efficiency over critical dialogue. In response, it proposes the Spectrum of Immersive Engagement, a framework that reconceptualises participation as a continuum, foregrounding the role of the “Active Observer” as a legitimate and critical mode of engagement. Rather than signalling the end of education, the paper argues that emerging technologies expose fundamental questions about its purpose and practice. Through critically informed and inclusive design, immersive technologies can support meaningful learning; however, without such frameworks, they risk reinforcing exclusion and narrowing, rather than expanding, educational possibility.

Bev Hancock-Smith

IMPACT OF TEXT-GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL ENGAGEMENT TOOLS ON STUDENTS' APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT: A CASE STUDY OF A UK INSTITUTION

This paper examines how students are using text-generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) when responding to assessments in Higher Education. It presents findings from a qualitative study, and discusses the role that AI could play at transitional moments in student learner identity formation. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were undertaken with students studying a range of disciplines and levels to understand behaviour and emerging practices. This study supports previous findings on students' motivation for using text Gen AI such as developing understanding of curriculum content and getting started with assignments. In addition, it provides a unique contribution to understanding the motivation for students to use Gen AI and their ability to build a secure learner identity. Participants report valuing immediacy and privacy above other factors such as accuracy and depth of response. It was also clear that the homogenising and simplifying nature of the Gen AI response was seen by students as a useful way to bridge the learning gap between their level of entry and the level of tuition. This paper provides a contribution to debate surrounding the impact that use of Gen AI could be having on the development of learner identity.

Nicola Robertson

AI AND THE 'LEVELLING' OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the public release of Chat-GPT in November 2022, education discourse has been awash with speculations on whether, and how, it and subsequent generative AI models can be leveraged for use in education. Such discourse attempts to address immediate concerns of teaching and learning while negating conceptual discussions that foster richer speculations on AI's practical, and ethical, use in education.

This conceptual paper, therefore, will attempt to do just that. It will seek to frame generative AI as a "levelling" technology, building upon Kierkegaard's (1962) notion of levelling as a means of stifling and hindering individual thought and action. Levelling technologies in education are not new; indeed, it can be suggested that education systems themselves function as levelling technologies. The argument here rests on the threat of generative AI, and its adoption as a kind of cognitive outsourcing (Hopkin, 2025), to the potential of (particularly) higher education to cultivate exceptional individuals, rather than the dissolution of such individuals into a student body. Outsourcing our cognition to a hive mind such as the gen-AI technologies in question (Lieb, 2023) is a step for Higher Education to become, as Kierkegaard terms it, "the manifestation of emptiness" (1962, 50).

Gen-AI will not spell the end of higher education as a commercial enterprise, nor as a statutory means of qualifying individuals for professional posts. If it can be accepted as a levelling technology, however, then it may well sound the death knell for the notion of the innovative, brave, critical scholar – an already endangered species, indeed, and one that we will certainly be poorer for having lost.

Helen Hooper

RECRUITMENT MATERIALS COULD HELP PERPETUATE THE GENDER DISPARITY IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN GENDER FAIR RECRUITMENT

There is a persistent 'leaky pipeline' to leadership in both Schools and Higher Education; Despite females making up the majority of both workforces, as the seniority of contract levels increase, the proportion of female staff decrease. A minority (40%) of secondary school headteachers are female, despite a majority (63%) female teaching workforce¹. A quarter (26%) of primary headteachers are male, despite representing only 15% of the teaching workforce. Women represent 55% of HEI staff, but lead only a third (33%) of institutions and there are disproportionate number of male professors, compared to female professors (69.2% male, 30.8% female).

Despite its importance in gender (in)equality, recruitment is a relatively under-researched area, and investigation of the role that recruitment materials may play in sustaining inequality in leadership roles has not been extensively researched. This is an important gap, as previous studies demonstrate that small changes to the content of recruitment materials can influence an applicant's perceived fit with the role being advertised and has analysed the effects of specific features on women e.g. subtle word changes that specifically deter women from an advertised role.

This paper will report on research which demonstrates recruitment materials could act as an institutional mechanism that may help sustain gender inequality in both School and HEI leadership. Use of 'gender decoder' technology to analyse recruitment materials for wording that may specifically deter women will be discussed as both a research tool and an inclusive recruitment practice. Synthesis of a gender in(ex)clusive research framework and its use to critically assess n=45 primary headteacher applicant packs (n=112 documents), n=59 secondary headteacher applicant packs (164 documents) and n=140 senior academic job adverts will be presented alongside recommendations for gender fair educational leadership role recruitment materials.

Seminar Session 4

Friday 11 September 2026 11:30 – 12:30

SENIOR LIBRARY

Enze Guo

WHOSE AI, WHOSE EDUCATION?

Drawing on Neil Postman's critique of technological culture and Aldous Huxley's dystopian warning of passive adaptation, this paper critically interrogates AI-driven reforms within a UK university BA programme. While AI is frequently framed as enabling innovation and diversifying assessment, this study asks whether such reforms are better understood as manifestations of performativity and audit culture, where educational practices are reshaped to satisfy institutional accountability rather than pedagogical need.

The paper draws on a collaborative auto-ethnographic project involving both teachers and students, capturing lived experiences of AI policy implementation. The findings suggest that recent reforms—particularly rapid transformations in assessment formats—were introduced with minimal consultation and limited empirical grounding. As a result, students were positioned as passive subjects of reform, navigating ongoing uncertainty while preparing for high-stakes assessments in an unstable learning environment.

Crucially, the study highlights how these changes exacerbate existing inequalities. Student voices, especially those of non-native English-speaking students, were marginalised in decision-making processes. These students reported disproportionate pressure and heightened challenges in adapting to new assessment regimes, revealing how AI reforms risk reproducing structural inequities under the guise of innovation. Simultaneously, teachers experienced intensified labour conditions: increased marking time, greater evaluative ambiguity, and heightened accountability demands associated with AI-informed assessment practices.

In this context, AI reform emerges not merely as a technological shift but as a mode of governance that reconfigures agency, responsibility, and control within higher education. By foregrounding auto-ethnographic insights, this paper argues that current approaches risk privileging institutional metrics over educational justice. It calls for a re-politicisation of AI in education, advocating for participatory, context-sensitive policy development that re-centres both student and teacher voices and reclaims education as a space for critical thought rather than passive compliance.

Ramesh Kapadia

TEACHING PROBABILITY AND STATISTICS USING AI

This paper asserts that artificial intelligence (AI) can and will play a major role in teaching statistical ideas in school and university, affecting disciplines where statistical ideas are used, including but not limited to mathematics, the humanities and the sciences. At school level, the underlying ideas would mainly use inferential statistics, while at university level, more complex ideas such as confidence intervals and tests of significance can be taught more effectively by using artificial intelligence. A statistical question to explore with AI would be whether mass screening for cancer is worthwhile. For probability teaching, AI opens entirely new possibilities. It can solve problems step by step, explain alternative solution strategies, act as a personal tutor, and design simulations that illustrate probabilistic phenomena. We will show that AI can generate dynamic GeoGebra applets for a teacher/lecturer with no prior knowledge of GeoGebra—for example, to visualise hypothesis tests, sampling distributions, or the law of large numbers—allowing key probabilistic ideas to be explored interactively. These ideas have been demonstrated at a recent workshop for teachers prior to the International Conference on Teaching Statistics in Brisbane, Australia in July 2026.

There are dangers in the sources used by AI to explain the ideas as the sources may be biased or unreliable. There are several AI models available, including ChatGPT, Deepseek etc. The responses from these systems will vary depending on the data used to generate answers. These ethical concerns need careful analysis.

Vanessa Cui

SOCIODIGITAL PRACTICES IN ENGLISH PRIMARY EDUCATION: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF WHAT THIS MEANS TO TEACHERS

In recent years, digital technology adaption in the society and in education has accelerated and schools as the main site of education for the majority of children and young people are dealing with such demand of change while also undergoing digital transformation within the schooling system itself. This paper addresses the colloquium's core question by examining how digital reconfigure educational practice. Drawing on Shove's (2023) social practice theory and Southerton and Halford's (2025) framework of "sociodigital practices," this paper argues that digital technologies are not passive instruments but dynamic entities that actively reshape the educational practices over time, fundamentally altering how primary school students and educators navigate these emerging frameworks.

Drawing on literature from the last 20 years and a small scale case study, this study explores how contemporary digital systems became embedded in the everyday educational practice in schools. The study applies Shove's notions of "infusing", "circulating", "merging and emerging", "cross-referencing" and "interweaving" to examine the material, discursive and practical sensemaking by teachers navigating the increasing complex web of digital tools, platforms, policies and terminologies. The array of software applications and digital tools schools are adopting to manage everyday administrative, pedagogical, and communicative functions has formed a new "platformisation" that research shows is actively altering traditional schooling ecosystems in secondary schools (e.g. Gouseti, 2026). However, there is limited research on this topic in the primary education context and this paper is aiming to address this current gap in knowledge.

This paper will contribute to the colloquium topic by arguing that technology does not signal the "end of education", but rather the end of the human-centric approaches to pedagogical agency. To understand the future of education, researchers and educators need to look beyond immediate classroom interactions and critically engage with the wider socio-digital environment and practices schools are situated in. This paper will conclude by questioning what these findings and analysis mean to teacher education moving forward to actively address teacher's roles and engagement with such rapid changes.

Jennie Mills

NOT FOR AI, NOT AGAINST AI.* - DIS/INTOXICATION AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THINKING HAPPENS

Does AI advance educational delivery, or restrict critical thought and dialogue? This paper's wager is that the "or" is itself thought-terminating. Andreotti and colleagues (2026) map AI cheerleading and AI abstention as differing less about the danger than about assumptions of power, leverage, and complicity, and locate a third position in the contaminated middle, where innocence is unavailable. From that middle, and building on a series of mapping workshops, this project has designed a first set of posters for a campaign addressed to students, staff, management and parents at the University of Warwick. Drawing on Save the AI (Just Sustainability Design Lab, Toronto, 2025), each poster borrows the register it diagnoses - and turns on an asterisk. The organising metaphor is dis/intoxication: intoxication and toxicity are the same substance, differently conditioned. The metaphor's limit is where it becomes useful - a drinker chooses a dose, and nobody in a university chooses theirs. AI arrives as infrastructure. What the campaign is for are the conditions under which its arrival can be thought about at all. The seminar will share the posters and the reasoning that produced them: what it takes to design a stimulus rather than a statement, and what it costs to make a campaign with AI, about AI, from no clean outside. The campaign itself is imminent rather than complete; the seminar is an early site of it, and delegates will be asked to do what the posters ask of a corridor - read the small print and notice what the reading does.

Georgia McCrone

ASIMOV, LE GUIN & ADAMS: REFRAMING CONVERSATIONAL AI BEYOND EDUCATIONAL DECLINE NARRATIVES

Current discourse around technology and specifically generative AI is frequently framed in a narrative of intellectual and academic decline. It is tempting to extend appropriate academic distrust of the influence of large corporate engines through commercially driven platforms to total disengagement, with strong theoretical and literary arguments to support this negativity. Drawing on an alternative literary tradition, however, reframes the argument in a simultaneously more optimistic and yet cautious tone.

The paper argues for the potential of conversational AI platforms to operate as supported reflexive and discursive environments that can encourage metacognition and reflexivity through academically informed dialogue. It reflects on iterative interactions informed by Critical realism, Bourdieusian analytics and Critical Discourse Analysis. Drawing on data generated through iterative reasoning by the user and AI mediated reflexive elicitation, I suggest that for individual academics and research teams, conversational AI may be able to act as an interlocutor within different academic disciplines and methodologies.

I will argue that there appears to be scope for highly literate, postgraduate or postdoctoral users to engage with generative AI for academic purposes within this reflexive/ discursive environment. This does not negate the very legitimate concerns about reductive cognitive engagement, reinforced epistemic shaping nor the risks of symbolic power and social inequalities.

Historically, our engagement with new technologies has contributed to shaping their development and use. This paper argues that it is necessary for the social, philosophical and ethical concerns they raise to be addressed from a cautious position of knowledge and familiarity.

This paper embraces uncertainties inherent in engagement with generative AI environments. It recognises the challenge of finding the right 'prompts' to construct an ethically acceptable and intellectually rigorous role for conversational AI platforms in higher education and optimistically imagines constantly available reflexive and discursive research environments that mirror without replacing academic discourse.

Graham Nutbrown

WILLIAM GODWIN: IS EDUCATION THE END OF TECHNOLOGY?

The philosopher William Godwin (1756 – 1836) is most often remembered today as the father of anarchist political philosophy, the husband of Mary Wollstonecraft, and, with her, the parent of Mary Shelley. During the 1790s, after the French Revolution, he was not only the leading British political philosopher (*An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1793) but also a leading novelist (Caleb Williams, 1794; St Leon, 1799). He was also a significant philosopher of education (*The Enquirer*, 1798), whose ideas have a special relevance today in the epistemic environment in which young people are forming their beliefs and dispositions.

Godwin's is a radical child-centred educational theory, but, like Wollstonecraft, he was a critic of key aspects of Rousseau's philosophy. Unlike most other radicals of the day, including Wollstonecraft, he rejected the idea of a national system of education. In his view, states and institutions of all kinds are bound to be hierarchical, to promote vested interests, and to inhibit original thought. His anarchistic alternative is education determined by individual egalitarian democratic communities.

Mocked in his day for his technological predictions, we can appreciate him today as sharing (and influencing) his daughter's capacity for imaginative speculation. His philosophy anticipates some of the tendencies of 20th century theory. An education built on Godwin's principles could not be satisfied with a few lessons in critical thinking or AI literacy. Rather, it would make independent judgment, achieved through open-minded discussion, the cornerstone of learning. Differences of opinion would be respected. In this way, young people would acquire resistance to the technology-generated dangers of the current, and, quite likely, future, epistemic environments.

Godwin's philosophy demonstrates how technology cannot be, in either sense of the term, the end of education, but education can be the end of technology.

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