

How School Leaders Can Pave the Way for Productive Use of AI

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ChatGPT & Generative AI

Leveraging technology to advance teaching and learning promotes a culture of inquiry at school.

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Matt Chinworth / The iSpot

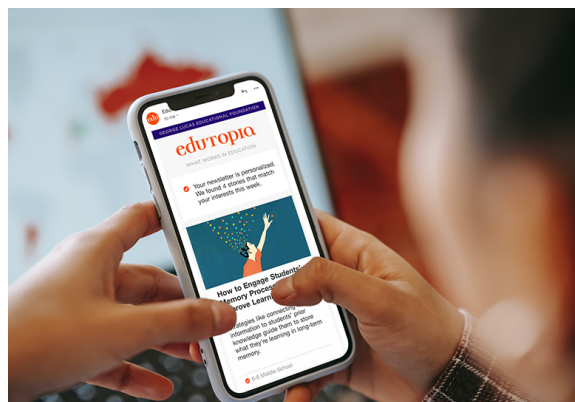
Leading in an era of rapidly advancing artificial intelligence (AI) requires that leaders articulate a clear vision, build consensus around it, communicate effectively with the school community, and allocate support and resources for their policies.

This is no small challenge: As school leaders, you must pave a path forward in uncharted educational terrain and make decisions that will impact the role of AI in schools. Doing so requires consideration of the following questions: How can AI help schools embrace innovative instructional practices? What policies and supports

are required to ensure responsible use of AI? How do we communicate AI policies to staff, students, and families to foster understanding?

Grappling with these questions, I encourage you to do three things. First, don't think of AI in a vacuum—consider how it can serve existing school initiatives. Prioritize professional learning that focuses on elevating the quality of teaching and learning through AI, not on the tools themselves. And give teachers permission to experiment, take risks, and be innovative in their approaches.

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1. Think About How AI Can Support Existing School Initiatives

School initiatives vary widely in their focus. Some target literacy development, social and emotional learning, project-based learning, personalized learning pathways with blended learning, or equitable and inclusive learning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The challenge is that initiatives demand a clearly articulated vision and sustained support to see results.

As you think about the role of AI in your community, consider how it can advance any of these existing initiatives. If your school is focused on providing equitable learning experiences for all students, AI may provide invaluable support to teachers who are designing lessons to ensure that all students get the inputs they need to reach a particular output or learning objective.

For example, AI-powered education tools reduce the time required to design lessons that more effectively differentiate instruction, models, and supports for students at different skill levels. Teachers using an adopted curriculum can generate additional options in the lesson to remove barriers, or they can generate additional

scaffolds to ensure that all students progress toward firm, standards-aligned goals.

Instead of presenting AI to the school community as a new and separate issue, school leaders who frame AI in relation to the school's existing values and priorities are more likely to garner support.

2. Invest in Professional Learning that Leverages AI in Service of Strong Pedagogical Practices

School leaders make decisions about how financial resources are allocated. If the goal is to utilize AI to elevate teaching and learning, professional learning must focus not simply on how to use AI tools but on how AI can support teachers in designing lessons grounded in strong pedagogical practices.

Training sessions focused on using AI to generate a lesson, unit, or assessment often fail to incorporate a strong pedagogical foundation. Instead of showing teachers how to copy and paste a content standard into an AI tool, professional learning can focus on how these tools can help teachers bring a higher level of intentionality to their design work, even if they are using an adopted curriculum.

Schools focus on different instructional models and strategies, so the focus of this work will depend on the individual institution. When I work with educators using AI, I show teachers how to utilize these tools to support backward design, implement UDL guidelines, and make time for small group differentiated instruction using blended learning models, like station rotation.

Professional learning should challenge teachers to consider the following questions: How can AI help me provide students with more agency, meaningful choices, and flexible pathways through the learning experience? Can AI generate examples, scaffolds, and other supports to ensure that all students can access the learning experience? How can I use AI to make learning more relevant or interesting?

The goal is to help teachers understand how AI can help them design learning experiences for a diverse group of students more effectively and efficiently, and in a fraction of the time it took before AI. AI can make an intentional educator almost superhuman in their ability to design effective and equitable lessons, but they must stay mentally engaged in the design process.

3. Encourage a Culture of Experimentation and Iteration

In a rapidly changing technological landscape, the role of the teacher is shifting. As AI, and technology in general, becomes more advanced and permeates our society, educators must be encouraged to experiment as they design and facilitate student-centered learning experiences.

Instead of spending the bulk of a class period at the front of the room transferring information, teachers can embrace their role as designers of equitable learning experiences and facilitators, sitting alongside students and supporting their individual progress toward learning objectives.

Teachers can position themselves as “lead learners” in a classroom, especially in this era of advancement. They can model for students what it looks like to take risks, hit bumps, and continually iterate and improve. When teachers become that lead learner, they make it less scary for students to take academic risks and try out new ideas.

By giving teachers permission to be creative and creating opportunities for them to connect, share successes, and troubleshoot issues with colleagues, you cultivate—as school leader—a culture of learning at every level, helping all stakeholders adapt in changing times.

Aligning AI with existing school initiatives, prioritizing professional learning that emphasizes strong pedagogical practices, and proactively cultivating a culture of innovation position school leaders to pave the way for more dynamic, inclusive, equitable, and student-centered learning at school.

If you have begun setting up school-wide policies to support teachers and students in using AI, please add any advice you have gained from your experience in the comments section.

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