

Philosophy of education in the age of AI

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Stephanie Schneider from SUNY Old Westbury explores philosophy and practice, focusing on building future-ready education in the age of artificial intelligence

When I started this series, I argued that [understanding the philosophy of education](#) is not just an abstract luxury; it is a practical necessity for creating meaningful, just, and effective educational systems. In the second article, I looked at the [transformative power of dialogue in the classroom](#) through the ideas of Martin Buber and Paulo Freire. In the third, I explored [how artificial intelligence is changing our very understanding of knowledge](#), raising new challenges for education in the 21st century.

Here, I connect these ideas: as Buber reminded us, education relies on genuine dialogue, and as Freire emphasized, dialogue must also raise critical awareness and social change. These principles are not only crucial for human-to-human teaching but are also essential for guiding how we bring artificial intelligence into education.

Philosophy as the compass for reform

Education reform too often reacts to the latest test scores, technology trends, or political shifts – lacking a steady guiding framework. Philosophy of education provides the guide.

It prompts us to ask:

- What is the purpose of education?
- What values should shape our teaching and learning?
- How do we prepare learners not only for work but also for life in a democratic society?

Without these essential questions, education risks becoming a series of disconnected initiatives driven by short-term metrics. A philosophical foundation ensures reforms are coherent, ethically grounded, and aligned with long-term societal goals such as equity, sustainability, and the common good.

Dialogue as the method for integrating AI

Buber's concept of I-Thou relationships and Freire's vision of dialogic, problem- posing education provide a critical counterbalance to the impersonal, efficiency-driven logic that can come with [artificial intelligence \(AI\) adoption](#).

Buber shows us that education must always affirm the full humanity of both teacher and student, while Freire emphasizes that dialogue is inseparable from the pursuit of justice and liberation. In AI-rich classrooms, dialogue should remain the primary mode of learning – not just as an optional addition, but as the environment where AI tools operate. This means:

- Teachers and students co-construct meaning, using AI outputs as conversation starters rather than unquestionable answers.
- Learning activities encourage students to question, verify, and build on AI-generated information.
- Classroom culture fosters mutual recognition and critical engagement, ensuring that technology supports human connection instead of replacing it.

By embedding AI within a dialogic pedagogy, we maintain the relational and ethical aspects of education that machines cannot replicate.

Epistemology as a policy guide

As discussed in the third article, AI challenges traditional ideas of knowledge. It can give correct answers without human-like understanding, act as an opaque 'black box,' and reflect biases from its training data. Policymakers need to consider these facts when creating curricula and governance frameworks.

Educational policy should, therefore, include:

- Epistemic literacy:
Teaching students how knowledge is created, validated, and challenged – by both humans and machines.
- Algorithmic transparency:
Requiring AI providers to reveal limitations, data sources, and error margins in educational tools.
- Critical AI engagement:
Incorporating practices that encourage learners to compare AI outputs with human reasoning, helping them develop judgment and independence.

A roadmap for governments and institutions

Drawing from the insights of philosophy, dialogue, and epistemology – anchored in the dialogic visions of Buber and Freire – here is a practical framework for AI-integrated education:

1. Create national guidelines for AI in education –
Base them on humanistic principles that emphasize agency, equity, and transparency, aligning with Freire's call for education as a practice of freedom.

2. Invest in teacher training –
Prepare educators to use AI tools thoughtfully and creatively, incorporating them into dialogic and inquiry-based learning that reflects Buber’s idea of authentic human encounter.
3. Integrate epistemic and digital literacy into the core curriculum –
Ensure all students graduate with the skills to evaluate sources, understand AI systems, and participate in informed public discussion.
4. Promote research on human–AI collaborative learning –
Fund pilot projects that assess how AI can improve – rather than undermine – critical thinking, creativity, and social-emotional skills.
5. Set up oversight mechanisms –
Develop independent review bodies to evaluate AI tools for bias, privacy, and educational effectiveness.

Goal: A human–machine partnership that strengthens democratic values, critical thinking, and the common good

- Independent oversight –
Audit AI tools for bias, privacy, and educational impact to ensure human agency remains central.
- Pilot programs and research –
Measure how AI can enhance – not diminish – critical thinking, creativity, and social-emotional skills.
- Curriculum reform –
Make digital and epistemic literacy core competencies, enabling students to evaluate AI outputs critically.
- Teacher training for AI integration –
Prepare educators to sustain Buber’s vision of authentic human encounter, even when AI tools are present.
- National AI-in-education guidelines –
Embed equity, agency, and transparency in policy, reflecting Freire’s commitment to education as a practice of freedom.

Five Actions for governments and institutions

- Epistemic literacy –
As Freire emphasized, learners must develop critical awareness of how knowledge is created, validated, and challenged – including AI systems.
- Dialogue at the core –
Following both Buber and Freire, education must remain dialogic, fostering human connection and critical consciousness.
- Human dignity first –
As Buber urged, students must be treated as full subjects, never as objects.

Guiding Principles (Anchored in Buber and Freire)

To operationalize these insights, governments and institutions need a clear policy framework that keeps Buber's and Freire's dialogic visions at the center. The following principles and actions provide a roadmap for future-ready education in the age of AI:

Conclusion: Building a human-machine partnership for the common good

The integration of AI into education is inevitable, but its impact is not predetermined. As Buber urged, students must never be treated as objects, but always as full subjects engaged in meaningful encounters. And as Freire insisted, education must awaken critical consciousness so that learners can question, resist, and transform unjust systems. By grounding reform in philosophical clarity, fostering genuine dialogue, and applying epistemological insight, we can ensure that AI becomes a tool for empowerment rather than dependency.

The task before policymakers is straightforward: design education systems that harness technological innovation while safeguarding what makes human learning unique – our capacity for understanding, creativity, and moral reflection. The future of education will be shaped not just by the tools we adopt, but by the values and principles that guide their use.

If we get this right, we will not only prepare students for the challenges of the AI age. We will also strengthen the democratic, humanistic foundations upon which education and society itself depend.

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