THE TUTOR AS AN EMOTIONAL COMPASS: MENTORSHIP AND AI IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
The research begins with a reflection on the role of coordinating tutors as AI mentors within the 30-, 36-, and 60-credit-unit certification programs at Pegaso University. The study investigates how teachers should use their critical thinking and emotional mediation skills to help students develop Artificial Intelligence (AI) competencies through their teaching activities. The current educational transition to hybrid learning methods creates opposing reactions among future educators because they either support automation without question or fear technology will replace human work, which the literature identifies as the "Frankenstein Complex." The research paper demonstrates how indirect teaching practice becomes more effective through its combination with NotebookLM and Gems by Gemini and Raina by Magic School AI, while supervisory guidance and reflective mentorship help teachers use AI systems as devices that perform "symbolic mirroring." The research team discovered through their May 2026 trainee study that 84% of participants developed AI knowledge through tutor-led emotional and mental support systems which their coordinating tutor provided. The tutor operates as an "Affective Compass," directing students toward the development of Digital Affective Literacy and maintaining their essential nature.

KEYWORDS
Reflective mentorship, teacher training, GenAi, digital affective literacy

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1. Introduction: The Momentous Challenge of Artificial Intelligence in Teacher Training Programs

Initial teacher training is a global strategic priority for improving the quality of education systems and promoting inclusive and transformative processes. The recent Italian reform of teacher training programs created a new educational framework that places teaching practicums at the core of future training. The new program establishes teaching practicums as its main educational component because these placements enable students to combine their academic knowledge with actual classroom work. This structural transition, however, coincides with an unprecedented technological revolution: the advent and widespread adoption of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). The deployment of advanced applications, including NotebookLM, Gemini's custom Gems, and Magic School AI's Raina, has brought about new educational possibilities that have transformed the methods of resource acquisition, lesson development, and student learning customization. This sudden technological transformation has led to deep polarization and significant dialectical tension within the community of teachers-in-training. As highlighted in the conceptual framework of the 6th REN International Conference, titled "Algorithmic Heartbeats: Affective Education in the Era of the Fourth Revolution," we are faced with a radical polarization: on one side, the so-called "humanoid fundamentalists," ready to see in every algorithm the threat of a definitive dehumanization of schools; on the other, the uncritical supporters of the "D-Generation," enthusiastic promoters of a total automation of cognitive and evaluative processes. It is within this delicate context that the educational initiative of Pegaso Telematic University (D'Anna C., et al. *Theory and Practice in Initial Teacher*

Education: A Multi-Level Model from Pegaso University, 2026) takes place, having implemented an integrated model of indirect practicum designed to guide students in the critical exploration of these paths. In this work, the authors sought to emphasize the integrative dimension of generative intelligences as applied to teaching and learning. The pedagogical challenge lies in understanding that AI should be neither mythologized nor demonized, but rather "embraced" with intentionality and professional awareness. To achieve this goal, the role of the University Coordinating Tutor takes on absolute strategic importance: they do not operate as a mere bureaucratic verifier of hours worked or documented activities, but act as a reflective mediator and, above all, as an "Affective Compass," capable of guiding future teachers through the complex.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Intersection of Reflective Epistemology and Pedagogical Scaffolding

The epistemological foundation of the proposed training model is the reflective practitioner paradigm developed by Donald Schön (1983). In his seminal work *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, the author demonstrates that professional learning is by no means limited to the mechanical application of technical and abstract rules (so-called technical rationality), but is substantiated through the continuous processes of ”reflection-in-action“ and ”reflection-on-action." Subsequently, Schön (1993) himself, in the volume *The Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Epistemology of Professional Practice*, argues that in contexts of high complexity and fluidity—such as contemporary classrooms—teachers must be able to actively dwell in uncertainty, redesigning their actions in real time based on continuous feedback from the surrounding environment. This robust theoretical framework aligns

perfectly with the theory of transformative learning formulated by Jack Mezirow (2003) in *Learning and Transformation*. Mezirow emphasizes that adult learning necessarily requires a radical questioning of one's preconceived frameworks of meaning and mental habits. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence in schools represents, in every respect, what Mezirow defines as a "disorienting dilemma": a transformative event that destabilizes teachers' established certainties and requires a profound restructuring of their existential and professional perspectives, achievable only through critical dialogue and shared discursive validation with a support figure. The transition from direct classroom experience to theoretical awareness requires careful and intentional pedagogical mediation. This concept has its historical and epistemological roots in the developmental psychology of Lev Vygotsky (1934–1992), who, in his classic work *Thought and Language*, theorized the centrality of mediating stimuli and cultural tools as irreplaceable mediators of cognitive development. From this perspective, the Coordinating Tutor fully embodies the function of cognitive and emotional scaffolding: they position themselves strategically within the trainee's "zone of proximal development," supporting their actions where advanced technological skills or personal pedagogical sensibilities are still consolidating and not yet fully autonomous. As Lee Shulman (1987) lucidly argued in his famous essay *Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform*, effective teaching is not merely the sum of subject-specific knowledge and general teaching skills, but requires the development of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). PCK represents the teacher's unique ability to transform academic knowledge into knowledge that is accessible, inclusive, and pedagogically useful for learners. In the digital age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, this theoretical construct must necessarily expand and redefine

itself, integrating technological competence (AI Literacy) not as an isolated embellishment or external automation, but as an element intrinsically fused with the pedagogical, ethical, and relational dimensions.

3. The Frankenstein Complex and the Erosion of the Teaching Role

The emotional and cognitive impact of Generative Artificial Intelligence evokes profound and unsettling psychological dynamics within the teaching community, traceable to the so-called "Frankenstein Complex." This ancestral fear of humankind—that the technological creation might rebel against its creator to the point of overthrowing, destroying, or rendering them utterly obsolete—manifests today as acute anxiety over professional displacement and a creeping loss of self-efficacy. Exactly eighty years ago, in his extraordinary visionary short story "Evidence" (1946), the scientist and writer Isaac Asimov outlined the exact archetype of this contemporary dilemma: the subtle, almost imperceptible distinction between the human being and its perfect technological simulation. Through the enigmatic figure of Stephen Byerley - a politician whom no one has ever seen eat or sleep, suspected by public opinion of being a biological automaton - Asimov described with astonishing foresight an artificial "brain" around which a body was constructed, sent out into the world, and programmed to become everything its creator could no longer be. Asimov's text contains a phrase of extraordinary evocative power for today's schools: "He sent him out into the world like an old, maimed teacher whom no one ever saw." This powerful image of the maimed teacher working behind the scenes of technology serves as a perfect metaphor for the educational transition currently underway. The real and imminent risk does not lie in the physical replacement of teachers by

anthropomorphic robots—a thesis extensively discussed and deconstructed by educational sociologist Neil Selwyn (2019) in his essay *Should Robots Replace Teachers? AI and the Future of Education*. Selwyn clearly demonstrates that machines fundamentally lack the embodied, situational, and communal dimensions intrinsic to teaching. The true professional "mutilation" that is feared occurs when the teacher, abdicating their own planning and critical intent, reduces themselves to a purely passive and reproductive use of AI. If the teacher reduces their role to merely "copying and pasting" pre-made prompts to delegate instructional planning, they devalue themselves, remove themselves from the process, and, in fact, transform themselves into a mutilated operator of thought. As highlighted by Rosemary Luckin (2018) in *Machine Learning and Human Intelligence: The Future of Education for the 21st Century*, it is urgent to draw a clear line between the analytical and computational capabilities of machines (machine learning) and the purely human contextual, social, and emotional intelligence. To avoid alienating deviations and overcome the anxiety of the Frankenstein Complex, internship supervision must fully embrace the theoretical proposal articulated in Algorithmic Pedagogy by Pier Cesare Rivoltella (2024). Toward an Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, Rivoltella invites us to consider the algorithm not as an automatic, opaque, and unquestionable decision-maker, but rather as a genuine device of "symbolic mirroring." The machine's output must become the subject of a second-level analysis, a reflective starting point through which the teacher critically examines their own methodological assumptions, evaluative choices, and cultural implicatures.

4. The Ontology of Care and Digital Affective Literacy

Reflective mentorship cannot and must not be limited to the mere transfer of technical instructions or functional training in the use of software (so-called “instrumental AI literacy”). On the contrary, it has a pedagogical duty to promote Digital Affective Literacy, understood as the critical and emotional capacity to consciously inhabit and navigate interactions and relationships within digital and hybrid pedagogical environments. Safeguarding this space means refocusing on the ontology of care, admirably theorized and explored by Luigina Mortari in *Learning from Experience* (2003), subsequently consolidated in *Philosophy of Care* (2015). According to Mortari, care is not a vague sentiment or a theoretical abstraction, but a dense practice, concrete and constantly guided by an ethical intentionality that centers on the overall well-being and flourishing of the other. Care is embodied in specific gestures: receptive listening, responsiveness, patience, and the ability to pay sensitive, non-judgmental attention to the learner’s specific needs. This intimately human and interpersonal dimension of the educational bond cannot in any way be codified within a probabilistic calculation string or a linguistic model, no matter how refined it may be. The algorithm produces simulated emotional stories, but it lacks the accountability that a relationship naturally requires. The Coordinating Tutor serves as an "Emotional Compass" to help trainee teachers grasp the basic difference between these concepts. The affective scaffolding provided by the tutor helps the trainee avoid being seduced by “synthetic affectivity” or the unlimited availability of chatbots, assisting them in structuring a teaching strategy in which Artificial Intelligence functions exclusively as an amplifier of cognitive possibilities, while firmly

leaving to the human teacher the primacy of care, empathy, and ethical responsibility in the educational encounter.

5. Research Methodology and Empirical Context

The empirical study presented in this article is part of a pilot project conducted during the 2025–2026 academic year within the initial teacher training programs at Pegaso Telematic University. Under the guidance of the coordinating tutors who authored this paper, an indirect internship module was structured specifically focused on instructional co-design assisted by Generative Artificial Intelligence systems. The students (three groups from the regions of Sicily and Basilicata) actively experimented with three types of tools:

NotebookLM: for the critical analysis of scientific texts, school regulations (including School Plans for AI and the EU Regulation / AI Act), and guided summarization of complex sources;

Gems by Gemini: personalized conversational assistants trained by the course participants themselves to serve as partners in pedagogical discussions or simulators of student responses;

Raina by Magic School AI: a vertical platform dedicated to education for the generation of assessment rubrics, adaptation of texts for students with special educational needs (SEN), and lesson plans.

To monitor the development of the trainees' professional reflexivity, the documentability of their experience, and the evolution of their emotional perceptions regarding technology, a mixed-methods research approach (quantitative and qualitative) was adopted. The primary data collection tool was a structured questionnaire created in Google Forms and

administered at the end of the program (May 2026). The questionnaire was designed to measure three fundamental macro-dimensions:

The trainees' epistemological stance and attitude toward AI (fear, rejection, uncritical enthusiasm, informed use);

The perceived usefulness of the Coordinating Tutor's support in overcoming emotional and technophobic barriers;

The effectiveness of the tutor's scaffolding in guiding the participant beyond a purely reproductive or mechanical use of technology, while safeguarding the centrality of human relationships and care.

The researchers performed statistical analysis of the collected quantitative data, displayed it through graphical representations, and conducted content analysis of the open-ended qualitative responses to identify common thematic elements that emerged from answers about professional identity and mentorship experiences.

6. Results and Discussion: The Impact of Tutor Scaffolding

The results of the questionnaire (strictly anonymous) provide insights of extraordinary pedagogical interest. In response to the key question designed to capture the trainees' current perspective on integrating Artificial Intelligence programs tested during the indirect internship to prepare lessons and teaching activities, the answers were clearly polarized, with an overwhelming prevalence of the reflective approach. Specifically, as many as 84 % of the trainee teachers stated that they adhere to the stance defined as "Conscious and Guided Use: AI as an ally, but the teacher decides." This quantitative data demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of the sample has successfully navigated both the pitfalls of a

priori rejection and the allure of uncritical enthusiasm. In contrast, only 10.4% of respondents fall into a purely technical category or express strong concerns stemming from a fear of losing the human connection with students. A negligible percentage expresses “Total Enthusiasm” based on blind faith in algorithmic automation. To understand the underlying reasons for this stance, it is necessary to cross-reference these data with the assessment of the impact of the Coordinating Tutor role, categorized into four levels of usefulness (from Level 1: “Not at all useful” to Level 4: “Very useful/Decisive and transformative”). The following table summarizes the dimensions investigated and the students’ perceptions of the support received:

Tab. 1 Dimensions investigated and students’ perceptions of the support received

The Scope of the Tutor's Framework	Author/Key	Predominant Orientation
Overcoming the Fear of Technology (Conquering the fear that technology will replace the human role)	D. Schön / Overcoming the Frankenstein Complex	Highest concentration at Levels 3 and 4 (Fairly/Very Useful)
Going Beyond Mechanical Use (Avoiding mere automatic “copy-and-paste” to enrich the work)	L. Vygotsky/ Cognitive scaffolding and conceptualization	Level 4 is by far the most prevalent (Decisive and Transformative)
Putting Human Relationships at the Center (Maintaining a caring, affectionate, and sensitive connection)	L. Mortari / Ontology of care and Digital Affective Literacy	High distribution between Level 3 (Reflective) and Level 4 (Transformative)

A joint analysis of the quantitative and qualitative components reveals the mechanism of action of reflective mentorship. In the first item ("Overcoming Fear"), the participants highlight how systematic interaction with the tutor defused the anxiety hypothesized by Asimov. Collegially discussing the outputs of NotebookLM or the intrinsic limitations of a prompt allowed them to uncover the purely instrumental nature of the algorithm. AI no longer appears as Frankenstein's menacing entity, but rather as a symbolic mirror that reflects and amplifies the human designer's expertise and shortcomings. In the second item ("Beyond Mechanical Use"), the data show a peak at Level 4. This is a crucial indicator of the development of teaching identity: under the tutor's guidance, the trainee learns to deconstruct the machine's output. While Raina generates standardized lesson plans, the reflective intervention promoted in the debriefing sessions of the indirect practicum encourages the trainee to contextualize them, modify them based on the relational dynamics of the host classroom, and integrate them with active teaching mediators. AI ceases to be a surrogate for thought and becomes a catalyst for pedagogical creativity. Part of the survey asked the following question: "*Reflecting on your experience with the AI programs, please describe how helpful the support and feedback from your Coordinating Tutor were in relation to the following aspects…"* (Table 1, Fig 2). Finally, the section on the centrality of human relationships (Table 1, Fig 2 "Focusing on Human Relationships") confirms the success of affective education in the digital realm. The trainees have internalized the idea that digital competence is not at odds with emotional intelligence. With the guidance and support of the coordinating tutor, the teachers-in-training have come to understand that using sophisticated technology requires an abundance of emotional presence, eye contact, empathetic listening, and embodied care. It is

precisely this integration that prevents the “mutilation” feared in the current scientific debate.

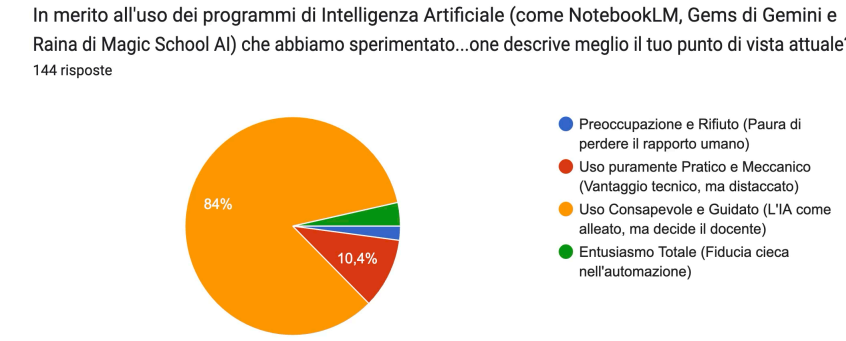


Figure 1: Trainees' professional orientation and perspective toward GenAI programs after tutorial interaction.

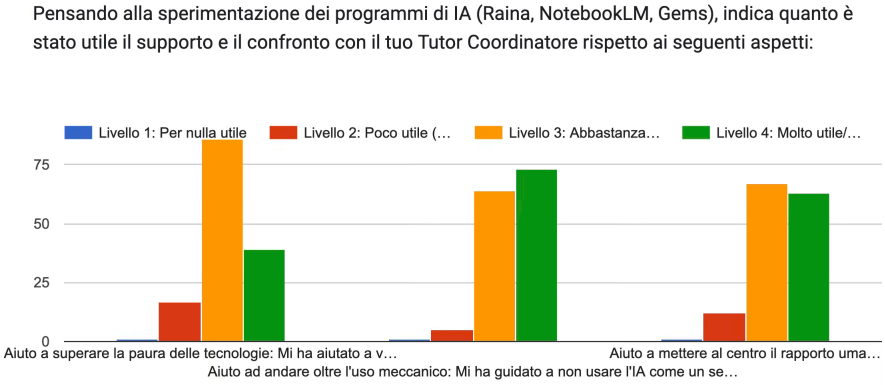


Figure 2: Tutor’s help in: 1. Overcoming the fear of technology 2. Moving beyond mechanical use 3.Focusing on human relationships

7. The Internship as a Community of Practice and Professional Integration

The experience of indirect teaching practice cannot be viewed as a self-contained academic activity, but must be theoretically framed as formal entry into a genuine community of practice, according to the apt and seminal expression coined by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) in their book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Teachers in

training within certification programs initially experience “legitimate peripheral participation,” operating on the margins of the real school context before gradually internalizing its linguistic, ethical, and procedural codes. As Wenger (1999) later elaborated in Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning, Identity, professional identity is constructed precisely through the continuous negotiation of meanings within a shared social fabric. The University Coordinating Tutor plays the crucial role of guide and facilitator in this integration, preventing the trainee’s isolation and dialectically linking the university to the school. The international scientific literature has extensively documented the effectiveness and structural impact of formal mentoring programs for novice teachers. Richard Ingersoll and Michael Strong (2011), in a comprehensive critical review titled The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research, highlight how systematic mentorship programs drastically reduce early attrition rates among teachers, raise levels of perceived self-efficacy, and significantly improve student learning outcomes in the classroom. In perfect alignment with this empirical evidence, the European Commission’s policy documents (2010), particularly the report *Developing coherent and system-wide induction programs for beginning teachers,* strongly recommend that Member States adopt stable professional induction models that integrate methodological support, peer supervision, and attention to the emotional and relational aspects of teachers’ early careers within a coherent framework. In this vein, pedagogical documentation tools such as the student and teacher portfolios - thoroughly analyzed by Giuseppe Menici and Giovanni Moretti (2006) in their book *Il portfolio dell’allievo* - are not merely bureaucratic collections of materials or certifications, but rather genuine “reflective and emancipatory tools.” Through structuring the portfolio within the indirect

internship program at Pegaso University, the trainee is guided by the tutor to contextualize their professional development, document the ethical integration of AI, and map their final competencies, thereby transforming the memory of the experience into a reservoir of reusable practical wisdom. The need for this strong, structured mediation between abstract theoretical knowledge and the concreteness of classroom-based competencies has been lucidly theorized by leading figures in contemporary Italian pedagogy. Cosimo Laneve (2002), in his valuable essay *Knowledge and Competencies: the internship for the contextualization of knowledge*, forcefully highlights how the university internship represents the epistemological space par excellence in which the theoretical knowledge of the mind emerges from its scientific self-referentiality to immerse itself in the living and complex fabric of educational contexts, undergoing a fruitful operational "translation." This pedagogical perspective is explored with profound human and personalist depth in the book by Carmen Casaschi, Monica Giraldo and Andrea Scolaro (2013), *The Teaching Placement as a Formative Experience for the Individual: The Pedagogical Dimension.* The authors masterfully remind us that supervision and mentoring must never be limited to the necessary transmission of teaching techniques or classroom management skills, but must always aim at the overall development of the future teacher as a person, fostering their sense of responsibility, emotional balance and deep commitment to caring for others.

8. Conclusions and Future Prospects: Navigating Complexity between Empathy and Algorithms

In conclusion, the experience gained through the teacher training programs at Pegaso University demonstrates that the challenge posed by Artificial

Intelligence in the world of education is not merely a technological one, but is fundamentally pedagogical and anthropological. Overcoming the Frankenstein Complex and preventing the 'professional mutilation' of future teachers cannot be achieved by banning access to algorithms or, conversely, by delegating design and assessment to them. The generative approach lies in building solid, cohesive and structured spaces for reflective mentorship. The Coordinating Tutor, acting as an *Affective Compass*, enables trainees to develop a Digital Affective Literacy capable of combining methodological rigor with relational sensitivity. The data collected attest to the effectiveness of a model in which technology is used as a cognitive partner to enrich the quality of teaching, whilst leaving the helm of pedagogical decisions and the primacy of affectivity firmly in human hands. Only by engaging critically and emotionally with these hybrid environments can schools guide the new generations towards a future in which machine intelligence remains constantly at the service of human growth and emancipation.

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