AI AND NARRATIVES OF THE SELF

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ABSTRACT

The integration of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational contexts raises profound questions about the nature of knowledge and learning processes. This contribution explores, through a distinctly Brunerian lens, the possibility of understanding AI not as a mere tool of automation, but as a narrative mediator capable of supporting the negotiation of meaning within the classroom-as-community-of-inquiry.

Through the analysis of an exploratory study involving 127 primary school and lower secondary school teachers, the research highlights a significant polarization: while AI is widely accepted as a support for creativity and logistical efficiency, there remains a marked resistance toward its reflective and emotional dimensions, especially at the primary school level.

To address this critical issue, the article proposes the pedagogical device of the "Impossible Interview," a workshop aimed at fostering self-projection and historical empathy through simulated dialogue with figures from the past or future projections of the self.

The results suggest that the effectiveness of AI in educational settings depends not on technical competence, but on the teacher's ability to act as a "director of dialogue," transforming algorithmic output into an opportunity for scaffolding the development of critical thinking and narrative resilience.

KEYWORDS:

Artificial intelligence (AI), narrative thinking, educational mediation, teacher resistance, reflective practice

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1. Introduction

The integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) within contemporary educational systems represents far more than a mere technological shift; it constitutes a deep epistemological challenge. This challenge interrogates how knowledge is created, validated, and interpreted within formal learning environments, pushing educators, learners, and policymakers toward reconsidering foundational frameworks of education.

Luciano Floridi (2017) conceptualizes modern life as an "onlife" condition — a hybrid reality intertwining online and offline experiences, digital and physical worlds, where individuals live embedded within algorithmic infrastructures. In this context, educational processes are driven by demands for efficiency, scalability, and adaptability. However, the challenge lies not only in embracing efficiency but in asserting a human-centered agency that ensures learners and educators maintain interpretative autonomy and meaningful engagement within an often invisible algorithmic ecosystem. This realm is defined by complex data flows and probabilistic predictions which invisibly shape decision-making, access to information, and social interaction.

Consequently, the introduction of AI in education excites enthusiasm for its opportunities — from personalized learning pathways to administrative support — but also sparks resistance and tension. These tensions reflect profound cultural shifts and identity negotiations related to the teacher's and learner's roles in mediating knowledge. AI emerges not only as a tool but as a new form of cognitive and communicative mediator, prompting a reconsideration of education's cultural foundations and ethical orientation.

This paper aims to explore these complex dynamics through the theoretical lens of Jerome Bruner's cultural psychology, which foregrounds narrative as the essence of human cognition and identity formation. It connects this perspective with Vygotskian mediational theory and contemporary AI, investigating how generative AI might facilitate or hinder narrative meaning-making and the construction of the Self in educational contexts.

2. Bruner's Perspective and AI Mediation

Jerome Bruner's scholarship provides a crucial interpretative framework for understanding education as a culturally situated negotiation of meaning, where narrative plays a central role in organizing experience and constructing identity.

2.1 Paradigmatic vs. Narrative Thought

Bruner (1991, 1992, 2002) distinguishes between two modes of thinking: paradigmatic and narrative. Paradigmatic thought seeks to explain phenomena through abstract, logical rules, fostering scientific rigor and universal laws. In contrast, narrative thought crafts coherent stories that render chaotic lived experiences intelligible and meaningful, enabling individuals to construct a sense of selfhood and agency within a shared cultural world.

Narrative thinking allows learners to compose "landscapes of action" where intentions, motives, and contexts are woven into meaningful plots. This process is essential in education, where knowledge is not merely transmitted but actively constructed through dialogue and interpretation. Culture, therefore, is not a static heritage but a set of symbolic tools deployed to order the world and configure subjectivity.

2.2 AI as a Cultural Mediator

Generative AI, trained on vast linguistic datasets, functions not just as a repository of static information but as a dynamic interlocutor capable of reflecting and expanding human narratives. From automated story generation to dialogic interaction, AI systems instantiate a new form of mediation.

This aligns with Lev Vygotsky's (1990, 2006) theories of cultural mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where tools — including language and cultural artefacts — mediate cognitive development by scaffolding learners' emerging capacities. AI enters this domain as an interactive artifact producing probabilistic responses shaped by human prompts, thus facilitating a dialectical process wherein intention and machine output co-construct meaning.

However, AI's role as mediator must be critically examined. As Bruner emphasizes, narrative is deeply embedded in identity and ethical responsibility. AI systems lack intrinsic intentionality and emotional insight — qualities fundamental to authentic narrative mediation. Therefore, integrating AI in education requires pedagogical strategies that respect these limitations while leveraging AI's generative potentials to enhance, rather than displace, human interpretative agency.

3. Research Methodology

To empirically ground the theoretical framework outlined above, an exploratory mixed-methods study was conducted involving 127 primary and lower secondary school teachers. The study was designed to investigate teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and reported uses of generative Artificial

Intelligence (AI) in educational contexts, with particular attention to the relationship between AI-mediated practices and processes of creativity, reflection, narrative construction, and professional identity.

The research focused on three main dimensions. First, it examined teachers' acceptance of generative AI and their perceptions of its educational usefulness, drawing conceptually on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Second, it explored teachers' perceptions of AI as a possible mediator of narrative, introspective, and creative processes. Third, it investigated teachers' attitudes towards the potential impact of AI on conceptions of learners, learning, and the teacher's professional role.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire combining closed-ended Likert-scale items with qualitative open-ended questions. The quantitative section included items concerning teachers' attitudes towards the educational use of AI, its perceived capacity to support creativity and idea generation, its possible role in emotional and metacognitive processes, and concerns relating to professional credibility and teacher-student relationships. Responses were collected using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from [1 = strongly disagree] to [4 = strongly agree].

The qualitative section consisted of open-ended questions intended to allow participants to describe their experiences, expectations, concerns, and perceived opportunities related to the use of generative AI in educational practice. This component was particularly relevant to the exploratory nature of the study, as it enabled participants to articulate aspects of AI use that could not be fully captured through predefined response categories.

The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively in order to identify the main patterns of agreement across the different dimensions investigated. In

particular, percentages of agreement and mean scores were calculated for the relevant items. Where appropriate, the results were considered comparatively across the different dimensions of AI acceptance, creative support, affective engagement, professional concerns, and metacognitive use.

The qualitative responses were examined through thematic content analysis. The analysis focused on recurring themes concerning perceived opportunities and risks associated with AI integration, including creativity, reflection, emotional engagement, professional identity, teacher authority, and the preservation of human relationships within educational contexts. The qualitative findings were subsequently considered alongside the quantitative results in order to identify convergences and tensions between teachers' reported attitudes and their descriptions of AI-mediated practices.

The mixed-methods design was therefore adopted not to establish causal relationships, but to provide an exploratory account of how teachers interpret and integrate generative AI within their professional and pedagogical experience. Particular attention was given to the coexistence of positive attitudes towards AI's cognitive and creative affordances and more cautious positions concerning its relational, affective, and identity-related implications.

If available, this paragraph should also report the main characteristics of the sample, for example: participants' age range, gender distribution, teaching level, years of teaching experience, geographical area, and previous experience with generative AI. These details would substantially strengthen the methodological transparency of the study.]

[If applicable, information concerning the administration of the questionnaire should also be added here, including the period of data collection, recruitment

procedure, questionnaire platform, informed consent, and any relevant ethical approval or institutional authorization.

4. Results

The analysis revealed an overall positive orientation towards the educational use of generative AI, accompanied by more cautious attitudes when AI was considered in relation to affective processes, professional identity, and the relational dimension of teaching. The quantitative findings therefore suggest a differentiated pattern of acceptance rather than a uniformly positive or negative attitude towards AI.

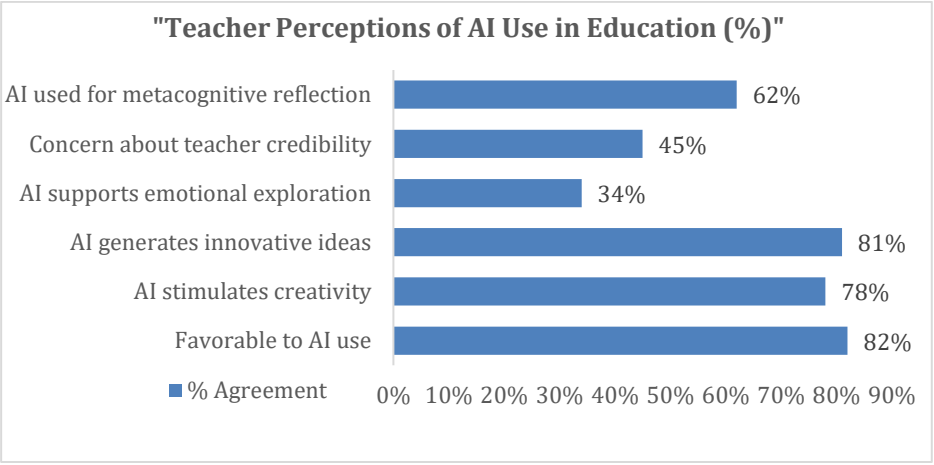


Figure 1: Teacher Perceptions of AI Use in Education (% Agreement)

Caption:
Figure 1 illustrates key teacher perceptions of generative AI in education. While high agreement exists around AI's creative and utilitarian uses, significant reservations remain about its emotional support role and potential impact on professional credibility.

4.1 AI Acceptance

Teachers' overall perception of the educational usefulness of AI was generally positive. The mean score reported for the relevant Likert-scale items was 3.12 on a four-point scale, while 82% of participants expressed moderate to strong favorability towards the integration of AI into school settings.

This result suggests that, at the level of general attitudes, the participants did not predominantly perceive generative AI as incompatible with educational practice. Rather, the findings point towards a willingness to consider AI as an additional resource within teaching and learning processes. However, the positive orientation towards technological integration should be interpreted together with the reservations that emerge in relation to the relational and ethical dimensions of education.

The results therefore appear to indicate that acceptance of AI is not necessarily equivalent to unconditional adoption. Teachers may recognize the practical and cognitive affordances of generative AI while simultaneously questioning the extent to which its use should intervene in processes traditionally associated with professional judgment, interpersonal relationships, and the construction of meaning.

4.2 Creative Support

The strongest positive responses concerned the creative and generative functions of AI. Seventy-eight percent of participants agreed that AI can stimulate creativity in writing activities, while 81% reported that generative AI can produce ideas that extend beyond those they would generate independently.

These findings suggest that teachers primarily recognize the value of AI in relation to processes of ideation, exploration, and the production of alternative perspectives. In this sense, AI is perceived less as a replacement for human creativity than as a possible stimulus or cognitive resource capable of expanding the range of ideas available to learners and teachers.

From a Brunerian perspective, this finding is particularly relevant because narrative construction requires the exploration of alternative possibilities and the organization of experience into meaningful configurations. Generative AI may therefore function as a dialogic stimulus through which users are encouraged to reconsider, reorganize, and elaborate their own ideas. At the same time, the data do not in themselves demonstrate that AI produces greater creativity; rather, they document teachers' perceptions of its potential to support creative processes.

4.3 Affective Dimension

A substantially different pattern emerges when AI is considered in relation to emotional exploration. Only 34% of respondents agreed that AI can support the exploration of emotions that might otherwise remain unexpressed.

The gap between this result and the higher levels of agreement observed for creativity and idea generation is noteworthy. It suggests that teachers distinguish between cognitive or expressive functions, which are more readily attributed to generative AI, and affective functions, which remain more closely associated with human relationships and interpersonal understanding.

This finding is consistent with the broader concerns expressed in the qualitative responses regarding the limits of technological mediation in contexts where

empathy, trust, emotional recognition, and relational continuity are central. Rather than rejecting AI altogether, participants appear to draw a boundary around those dimensions of educational experience that they consider particularly dependent on human presence and interpretation.

From the perspective adopted in this study, this distinction is especially significant because narrative meaning-making is not exclusively a cognitive operation. Personal narratives are embedded in emotions, relationships, intentions, and culturally situated interpretations. The relatively low level of agreement concerning AI's affective role therefore points to an important limitation in conceptualizing generative AI as a comprehensive mediator of educational experience.

4.4 Professional Resistances

The qualitative findings further highlighted concerns regarding the possible effects of excessive reliance on AI on the professional identity and authority of teachers. Forty-five percent of participants expressed concern that the use of AI could diminish teacher credibility.

The qualitative responses provide additional insight into this concern, particularly through references to the possible "dehumanization" of teacher-student interactions and to the risk of losing control over the processes through which knowledge is interpreted and communicated. These concerns appear particularly relevant in primary education, where teaching is strongly embedded in relational and communicative practices.

The findings should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of a generalized rejection of AI. Rather, they indicate the presence of a tension between

recognizing the usefulness of AI and preserving the teacher's role as a human mediator of knowledge. In this sense, resistance may be understood as an element of the negotiation process through which teachers attempt to redefine their professional role in response to the introduction of a new technological mediator.

4.5 Metacognition

A further relevant finding concerns the reported use of AI for metacognitive purposes. Sixty-two percent of participants indicated that they use AI to clarify their own thinking and to revisit or reconsider professional beliefs.

This result suggests that teachers may employ generative AI not only for the production of educational materials or the generation of ideas, but also as a means of supporting reflective processes. In this context, the role attributed to AI differs from that of a conventional information-retrieval tool: the interaction may become a form of dialogic prompting through which users articulate questions, compare perspectives, identify assumptions, and reorganize their own reasoning.

The finding is particularly relevant to the theoretical framework of the study because it points towards a possible relationship between AI mediation and processes of self-narration and reflection. Nevertheless, the quantitative result should be interpreted cautiously. Reporting the use of AI for metacognitive reflection does not necessarily demonstrate that such use produces deeper reflection or changes professional beliefs. It indicates, more specifically, that a substantial proportion of participants perceive AI as useful in supporting these activities.

Taken together, the results reveal a differentiated pattern of teacher attitudes. Generative AI is predominantly perceived as useful for creativity, idea generation, and, to a lesser extent, metacognitive reflection, whereas its role in emotional exploration and its potential consequences for teacher credibility are viewed more cautiously. The findings therefore support an understanding of AI acceptance as a multidimensional phenomenon in which cognitive usefulness and relational legitimacy do not necessarily develop at the same level.

5. Pedagogical Implications

5.1 Maieutic Application of AI

To overcome the divide between AI as passive tool and active reflective agent, novel didactic strategies are needed. For instance, the “Impossible Interview” workshop invites learners to engage in simulated dialogues with historical or future selves mediated by AI, stimulating narrative meaning-making and existential inquiry, consistent with Bruner’s emphasis on the educative power of storytelling.

5.2 Self-Narration

AI can act as a reflective surface for the Self, generating coherent, personalized narratives that contribute to identity formation and empower learners to critically examine their experiences. Here, the teacher’s role shifts toward facilitating creative dialogue between the learner and technological interlocutor.

5.3 Inclusion

The Brunerian view also suggests AI's potential to enhance inclusion by providing tailored narrative scaffolding for students with special educational needs or linguistic challenges. However, achieving equitable access demands attentive design and training to bridge the "prompt gap" — the skill disparities in crafting effective AI interactions.

6. Teacher Training and AI Agency

The study underscores a critical training gap: effective AI integration necessitates pedagogical reflection beyond technical operation to encompass mediation strategies that preserve human agency and ethical responsibility. Developing "AI agency" involves empowering teachers to orchestrate interactions that harness AI's generative power while foregrounding human values.

Action-research methodologies and experiential learning are recommended to cultivate these competences, thereby supporting hybrid learning environments where AI provokes cognitive exploration and transitions teachers from content transmitters to facilitators of critical, divergent thinking.

7. Discussion

Teacher resistance should not be interpreted as a barrier but as a manifestation of the underlying tension between innovation pressures and the need to safeguard professional and human identity. When appropriately incorporated,

AI can decentralize cognition and enrich self-narratives without supplanting them.

Bruner (1997) poignantly reminds us that schools remain sacred spaces of meaning negotiation; AI must be conceptualized as a technology interrogating the subject's identity. Hence, algorithmic efficiency must be balanced with narrative depth, maintaining the "human bridge" essential for meaning, care, and empathy within classroom relationships.

Digital culture and training must thus foster a pedagogy of care that merges algorithmic logic with human interpretative nuance, critically addressing and mitigating implicit biases and stereotypes encoded in AI systems.

8. Conclusions

Viewed through the lens of Brunerian narrative psychology, generative AI promises to be a transformative cultural mediator in education, fostering emancipatory knowledge construction when embedded within reflective, critical, and creative pedagogical frameworks. Its potential rests on teachers' capacity to integrate AI while preserving professional identity and nurturing educational relationships.

Rather than fueling rejection, the articulated resistances invite profound cultural dialogue that repositions AI from alien intruder to partner in an ongoing collaborative research community—one capable of cultivating complex knowledge and narratives that enable conscious coexistence with technology and the evolving future.

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