Educating for Human Flourishing in a World with Artificial Intelligence

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Introduction

The "Bhutan National AI Strategy" from 2025 makes education one of its eight key focus areas. It rightly identifies a need to address the many challenges that the AI revolution has brought to the education sector, including internet bandwidth, student-device ratios, inclusivity in the student experience, teacher development, and the updating of traditional curricula and assessments. These issues are all urgent and important.

In this article, we want to focus specifically on what students themselves can and should be learning about the AI revolution. We believe that the classroom is a place where students should learn about these evolving technologies and the impact they are having on our society.

We also believe that students should be learning about AI in connection with some long-standing goals of a liberal education more generally, a kind of education that has been in decline since the early days of the computer revolution but which is now increasingly being called for as a counterbalance to the changes brought about by AI.

The authors of this article are both teachers. Greg Watkins taught for 20 years in a liberal education programme at Stanford University, called Structured Liberal Education (SLE), which is a year-long, residence-based programme that introduces students to models of human flourishing through a largely chronological study of many of the important works of art, philosophy, and religion in the Western tradition.

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Mike Taubman, a graduate of the Stanford Teacher Education Programme, has spent his career as a teacher for Uncommon Schools. This is a nonprofit charter school organisation with 53 public schools that serve economically disadvantaged communities with the goal of increasing college completion rates for those students.

Recently, Mike has been pioneering a particular approach to teaching his students about their own use of AI tools, called the "AI Driver's Licence" framework, and Greg has started working with the Pelsung Innovation Lab in Thimphu to bring a liberal education experience to the 15 members of the Innovation Lab cohort.

We think this combination of the driver's licence framework and the comparative study of models of human flourishing is a powerfully useful way to prepare young people for the AI age and, indeed, to help put them in a position to intentionally shape the future they will be stepping into.

Liberal Education and Models of Human Flourishing

The idea of a liberal education precedes the computer age. It was founded on the idea that a freely democratic society needs an approach to education that develops a citizenry that is prepared for the responsibilities of democratic culture. So the word "liberal" has the sense of "liberated", of being free to think for oneself and to be acculturated to the free exchange of ideas in a democratically deliberative society.

In American education, liberal education typically included the studying of the Ancient Greeks, because the Ancient Greeks were, themselves, undergoing a revolution to a democratic culture, and the art and philosophy from that period was found to be useful for educating a modern democratic citizenry.

Over time, a liberal education has evolved into a comparative study of models of human flourishing more generally, drawing material from many world cultures and from many periods of history. For example, study of the Wheel of Life would work well in the comparative model.

Of course, the concept of flourishing is already built into Bhutan's GNH policies, and its value for the education sector has been richly discussed in

the pages of this journal. In "Humanity and Technology" – a conversation between The Druk Journal and European futurist, Gerd Leonhard – Leonhard said the following: "I think the first objective should always be human happiness, human flourishing and human progress and then the second objective should be efficiency, security and things like that" (2020, Spring, p. 145). We think Leonhard's priorities are equally important when it comes to AI; AI education should be framed from the perspective of human flourishing more generally.

Preparing Students to be Responsible Users of AI Technologies: The AI Driver's Licence

The "AI Driver's Licence" framework would enable Bhutan to approach AI in education aligned with Bhutanese culture and national goals.

Created and piloted by one of the authors in the United States, and featured prominently in the New York Times, the framework pairs proven structure with flexibility for local adaptation. With Thimphu students already studying with AI, and their teachers asking for guidance, it also supports a standing commitment in Bhutanese education: Media literacy and critical thinking, arguably the least developed of Educating for GNH's five pathways.

The framework rests on four pillars, which students and educators spiral through:

- **Choose a Destination**
  Students decide on a real world problem to solve that is meaningful to them and their community. This process, importantly, is done without AI.

  As students choose their destinations, learning for GNH becomes something lived, foregrounding the voice and choice Bhutanese youth equate with happiness, and can aim at cultural production itself; their Bhutanese-specific interests will organically become a part of the process.

- **Learn to Drive**
  Students learn the hands-on skills of AI use: Model selection, prompting, context, iterating, verifying outputs. In particular, we have found it powerful for students and educators to focus on the fine-tuning required to use AI effectively.

  The first step in that process is putting clearly into writing what you want the AI to help you accomplish (this becomes your first prompt) and giving the AI helpful context about your goals (for example, files you attach to your prompt or websites you tell the AI to reference as it works).

  The second step is to iterate, which involves telling the AI how its initial responses are helpful and how they are not, to align it more and more closely with your goals and preferred working style.

- **Open the Hood**
  Students build a mental model of the "engine" powering generative AI: Transformer architecture, training data, energy and water use. Each of these can resonate uniquely in Bhutan: A carbon-negative hydropower nation might imagine better data centres; Dzongkha's near absence from training data raises the cultural stakes; and, more philosophically, the Buddhist concept of dependent origination could help frame outputs as arising from causes and conditions, rather than thinking of AI as an oracle.

- **Discuss the Rules of the Road**
  Students collectively debate how Bhutanese society could and should engage AI via norms, regulations, and laws. This would not be hypothetical. The National AI Strategy 2025 and the AI standard in the MoESD (Ministry of Education and Skills Development) digital literacy plan make it a live policy process students can potentially join and inform.

After spiralling through this sequence, students and educators complete a capstone assessment to earn their "licence" to operate AI effectively and ethically. Built with both Bhutanese exams and with the lessons of past education reforms in mind, the licence would make human agency central. By the end, students and educators have become AI drivers – not

passengers being driven by others – who know when and how to use AI, and when and why not to.

This approach to AI literacy also helps build two crucial mindsets. First, students and educators come to realise that the same four steps can be applied no matter how AI develops or which new models get released. For example, "world models" are on the horizon, in which AI generates not words but three-dimensional worlds the user can move through and interact with.

But even if we soon find ourselves working with world models instead of LLMs, the same four questions will still apply: What do I want to accomplish? How can I use this AI tool to help me accomplish that? How is this AI tool working? How do we collectively think this AI tool should be used, regulated, etc.?

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, approaching AI in this way centres educators' judgement and experience. Whether they are teaching this framework to students or studying it themselves, educators are called to bring their wealth of expertise to the table at this important moment.

The central question this framework implies – What is AI, and what should we do with it and about it? – is a pedagogical question at heart. The invitation here is for educators to take their rightful seat at the table, bringing the theoretical insights and practical wisdom they are uniquely equipped to provide, so that the conversation about AI in education is grounded in the voices of teachers and, by extension, their students.

Education for Flourishing, With and Without AI

As AI machines increasingly replace workers, there is an opportunity for education to emphasise the importance of the kinds of thinking that machines cannot do: Making judgements about what we want to value, in both our personal lives and as a society.

In her recent NY Times opinion piece, "What AI Kant Do", Maureen Dowd quotes Daniela Amodei, a founder of Anthropic, as saying "studying the humanities is going to be more important than ever. A lot of these [AI] models are actually very good at STEM. But I think this idea that

there are things that make us uniquely human – understanding ourselves, understanding history, understanding what makes us tick – I think that will always be really, really important."

Indeed, technology companies themselves are appreciating this distinction in their own evolving hiring practices, as seen in a recent Forbes article, "Why Humanities Majors are 2026's Stealth Power Players in Tech".

The social changes being driven by the adoption of AI technologies forces questions of human flourishing: Who am I in relation to this technology? What purposes should it be put to? What would it mean to do well, personally and communally, in a world where such powerful tools are being put to use?

The classroom should be a place where students develop their capacity to think about those kinds of questions, and it should happen both with and without AI in the room.

The comparative study of models of human flourishing puts our humanity at the centre, and when AI itself is the subject matter of the class, the framework of human flourishing helps put our students in the driver's seat, which is better for our future and for theirs.

Declaration: Our use of generative AI in preparing this article

Greg Watkins: 1) I created a Notebook LM that was populated with pdf files of all Druk Journal articles. I was then able to query the database in order to find articles that talked about humanities education generally and the idea of human flourishing in particular. I did not ask for any analysis or summaries but used it only to find relevant articles. 2) I used Claude to track down sources that might help me make the case for the growing demand for humanities majors in the tech industry.

Mike Taubman: I used Claude to help me find Bhutanese-specific examples for the Drivers License methods, since I don't know a lot about the Bhutanese context. The reference to dependent origination in particular was discussed with my co-author, who has studied Buddhism in an academic setting, and we decided to include it.

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