

Reclaiming the Next Question: A Human-Centered Framework

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UNE CETL Symposium, 2026

WORKSHOP ARC

01 What feels less trustworthy as evidence of learning?

02 Our online & asynchronous design perspective as a lens

03 Reframe AI through the question of learner participation in a domain

04 When does support become bypass?

05 Apply four design moves: reduce, scaffold, delegate, preserve

06 Re-center to the learner's ability to ask the next question in two collaborative exercises

Where, in your courses or learning activities, do students most often *surrender the next question?*

- Where do students seem to default to AI?
- What watermarks or indicators make you immediately say “AI”
- What activities, products, or performances no longer feel authentic or reliable?
- What have students told you about how they use AI?

Our Design Perspective

In online courses, fewer moments of informal diagnosis and real-time mentorship happen by default.

So, particularly in an asynchronous environment, the course has to be deliberately architected as a space learners move through

- Embedded supports and models
- Wayfinding at decision points
- Guidance where students are likely to hesitate
- Differentiated pathways or options
- Practice points and feedback loops
- Realistic moments to measure skill acquisition
- A map of the territory

What a Submission Cannot Show

It tells us that something was produced, but cannot show us how students:

- Interpreted the task
- Made choices inside the work
- Worked through uncertainty
- Used feedback or revision
- Practiced the judgment the activity was meant to develop
- Are able to skillfully carry the process into another context

Not Simply:

"Was AI involved?"

Instead:

"Which parts must students directly inhabit ... and where will we see that happening?"

Our Proposed AI Posture

We are **not** starting from the premise that AI can simply be kept out.

We are **also not** assuming that every task should be redesigned around AI.

We are asking where AI belongs inside the learning architecture.

At its best

AI can deconstruct a task, differentiate support, offer models and feedback, or help a learner enter complexity and return to prerequisites with new questions.

At its worst

AI can create an illusion of fluency that masks whether genuine competence has formed.

Human learner as interpreter and architect

A learner does not enter a domain empty-handed. They bring assumptions, inherited language, habits, questions, partial understandings, and confusion.

A discipline then asks something of them: not only to absorb content, but to learn how the field sees, argues, tests, values, and practices.

The goal is an emerging practitioner: someone increasingly able to make judgments that once required heavier guidance.

An Old Problem with a New Face?

AI drags a very old learning problem back into our field of vision

Ideally, we invite students to become willful participants in a domain — a discipline, a field of practice, with its own questions, standards, tools, language, and forms of judgment.

An assigned task is not the whole object of the learning experience.

This is not really a question about AI at all. We should instead ask:

What is this encounter, this learning experience, designed to provoke?

Bridging Frameworks

Lev Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development

Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory

Vygotsky's ZPD

What can the learner do without help?

With support?

What is the learner not ready for?

AI can widen the range of support available.

But support is only scaffolding if it allows the learner to move meaningfully through the difficulty.

Otherwise, it becomes bypass



Cognitive Apprenticeship

Method

how expertise is taught

Modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, exploration

Sequencing

the order the work comes in

Increasing complexity, increasing diversity

Sociology

the setting the learning happens in

Situated learning, intrinsic motivation, collaboration

Content

what a practitioner has to know

Domain knowledge, learning strategies

Adapted from: Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989

“The application of AI in learning has a paradoxical character because it has the capability to be both a ***cognitive amplifier and inhibitor.*** In order to be maximally beneficial, AI must be designed as an enabler, rather than a substitute, fostering intellectual autonomy, problem-solving, and deep learning”

– The cognitive paradox of AI in education: Between enhancement and erosion. Jose et al., 2025

AI as amplifier and inhibitor

Amplifies when it supports

feedback, comparison, rehearsal, deconstruction, differentiated pathways, and return trips to prerequisite ideas with better questions.

Inhibits when it replaces

confusion, explanation, judgment, decision-making, practice, or transfer.

The dividing line is whether AI helps students practice and engage in ways that help them develop genuine capability, or whether it takes that work over.

Adapted from: Jose et al., 2025

Beyond prompting: the next question

Anthropic's Economic Index (March 2026 Report) suggests that sophisticated AI responses tend to follow sophisticated human inputs: *with a roughly 0.92 correlation* between the education level of user and the AI response.

Our take:

If students have not developed the internal architecture for asking nuanced, purposeful questions, AI may produce fluent work *for them* without building true capability.

AI collaboration is not only prompt craft; it is a broader relational posture involving the learner, the domain, the tool, and the learner's own uncertainty and judgement.

What to do in Terms of Design? Four Moves:

1

REDUCE

Remove friction that drains time or attention without forming capability.

2

SCAFFOLD

Support learners through difficulty they are not ready to navigate alone.

3

OUTSOURCE

Offload procedural/support work when it is not tied to core learning.

This is the most dangerous and tricky

4

PRESERVE

Keep learners in contact with work that forms judgment, standards, practice, transfer, or participation.

Activity 1: Reclaim One Learning Moment

Every assignment contains moments where genuine thinking could happen, and moments where a student might accept the first plausible answer or outsource their thinking.

AI makes it easy to produce the next answer. The question becomes: What is the next question and how can the design of an assessment lead students to discover that question?

Activity 1: Instructions

Map the Learning Path (~5 minutes)
Sketch the path a learner walks through your assignment - the task, the scaffold, the moment where ownership should shift

Sort the Thinking (~5 minutes)
What can be reduced or outsourced? What must be preserved?

Redesign One Moment of Premature Closure (~5 minutes)
Find the point where students would be likely to accept the first plausible answer and stop engaging? Redesign that part of the assignment.

The Learner Agency Question (~2-3 minutes)
What should students learn to recognize for themselves about when to use a tool and when to work through it themselves?

Activity 1: Debrief

What was the moment of premature closure you identified, and what made it easy to spot?

What was hardest to sort, and did anything surprise you about which column it landed in?

When you redesigned that moment, what were you asking students to do that they weren't doing before?

What would it look like if students could make the distinction themselves between what is worth struggling through and what can be handed off?

An Old Liberal Arts Question in a New Context

If our goal is learner-owned adaptation: learners gradually pursue how to shape supports, use AI-saturated environments, seek feedback, calibrate difficulty, and revise their own learning architecture from inside a real encounter with the domain....

How do we cultivate the internalization of a learner level interpretive architecture — adaptable across domains?

How do learners become capable of shaping their own supports without losing genuine contact with the domain?

The framework should hold two questions together:

What should educators reduce, scaffold, delegate, or preserve in the design of learning experiences?

How do learners become capable of shaping their own supports without losing genuine contact with the domain?

Activity 2: Novice Learning Experience Design

If you had **limited time** to acquire functional competence in a domain-specific skill in a discipline where you have **little or no expertise**, how would you design and scaffold the learning environment around yourself?

Constitutive, Inherited, Or Re-Thinkable?

- Which judgments, standards, methods, or fundamentals actually form competence?
- Which inherited steps still protect the domain, and which may be rethought with AI present?
- What can be jumped over provisionally and returned to with more advanced eyes?
- What would be dangerous to skip? Why?

Place Support Inside The Learning Zone

- What should you attempt before receiving support?
- What becomes possible with models, criteria, examples, feedback, other tools, or AI?
- Where would AI widen opportunities for practice, comparison, rehearsal, or revision?
- What evidence would guard against fluent-looking but borrowed competence?