Like it or not, AI is becoming part of school life

by Steven Hunt

Nicols et al. (2025) argue that we must engage with the issue of teaching with Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), not simply set our hearts and minds against it. Important areas to take into consideration, however, are issues around teacher autonomy, student privacy, and algorithmic discrimination. This article is based on my own observations in the classroom, as an attendee at a number of conferences on the subject,[1] and as a fellow-explorer with teacher colleagues as part of my role as PGCE subject lecturer at the Faculty of Education in the University of Cambridge.

In 2025, HEPI reported on their survey of 1,041 FT undergraduate students' use of Gen AI tools:

> 'We find that the student use of AI has surged in the last year, with almost all students (92%) now using AI in some form, up from 66% in 2024, and some 88% having used Gen AI for assessments, up from 53% in 2024. The main uses of Gen AI are for explaining concepts, summarising articles, and suggesting research ideas, but a significant number of students – 18% – have included AI-generated text directly in their work.
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> When asked why they use AI, students most often find it saves them time and improves the quality of their work. The main factors putting them off using AI are the risk of being accused of academic misconduct and the fear of getting false or biased results. Women are more worried about these factors than men, and men report more enthusiasm for AI throughout the survey, as do wealthier students and those on STEM courses. The digital divide identified in

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[1] These have included The Sydney Teaching Symposium, at the University of Sydney, Australia in 2024; the Ancient History Teachers' Conference at Harrow School, UK, in 2023; and the Active Languages Conference at the University of Reading, UK, in 2023.

2024 appears to have widened.' (Freeman 2025)[2]

The survey corroborates a more informal study reported by writer Jeremy Ettinghausen in *The Guardian*, who read and analysed three students' ChatGPT logs (with their permission) over a period of 18 months (Ettinghausen 2025). These students seemed to be using ChatGPT for everything – every tiny thing – and Ettinghausen expressed surprise at how much its usage had percolated into nearly every aspect of the students' lives.

In order to understand this phenomenon more fully, we need to go back into the classroom, where the Department for Education (DfE) is actively promoting the use of Gen AI today.

The Ecology of the School Classroom

It is possible that university academics of a certain age do not appreciate how much classroom practices have changed in the last ten years, especially since the period of Covid lockdowns in the UK (2020–2021). In 2025 what we might call the 'digital classroom' is – and has long been – the norm. Any discussion about the use of Gen AI by students should be seen against the backdrop of the everyday classroom, in which many students and teachers make easy and frequent use of digital resources (for examples of common classroom practice, see Natoli & Hunt 2019 and Christiensen 2022). While there is some criticism and some education policy makers are beginning to suggest that this digital drive has gone too far, advocating for a return to the textbook and paper and pen (see, for example, Associated Press, Sweden, 2023), mainstream schools have embraced all things digital. An observer in a school languages classroom today will note students' attention move seamlessly between textbook, interactive whiteboard, projection screen, and their own laptop or personal handheld device. The separation of teaching and learning into different skills – reading, writing, listening, speaking, and translating – no longer holds. Indeed, the tools we use at present already make it difficult to track exactly *how* language learning is taking

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[2] Details of the HEPI report can be found in HEPI-Kortext-Student-Generative-AI-Survey-2025.pdf. The report includes translation and editing tools, as well as Gen AI.

place, when we can simply scan a text with a smartphone and receive an instant translation, or when we can write or scan our sentences into Google and our devices will read them aloud. Not so long ago, there was a clear distinction between what was written on a board, in a book, and on paper: separate devices were used to transmit sounds or pictures. Now, they all blend into one another, with text on a physical page turned effortlessly into screen-based text, with a video automatically subtitled, and with the recording of writing and annotation capable of being captured in real time, stored, and disseminated in different formats. As Nicols et al. (2025) point out, 'the advent of "generative AI" […] did not so much introduce AI into schools as it extended and intensified existing forms of AI-enabled automation in teaching, learning, and leadership'. In the classroom, the different language skills have become increasingly blurred; now GenAI has made these processes even more ambiguous. Classical languages learning in schools is not immune to these changes – indeed, teachers are grasping them enthusiastically (see, for example, Cavaleri 2022[3]; Tagliaferro 2023; Ross 2023; Burns 2023, 2024a, 2024b; Ross & Baines 2024; Díaz-Sánchez & Chapinal-Heras 2024; Audis 2025; Cavaleri et al. 2025; Morrice et al. 2025; Peddar 2025).

Hallucinations, Credibility and EdTech

The errors that Gen AI makes are well-attested, whether we call them 'hallucinations' of various sorts (for a categorization of these, see Sun et al. 2024), plagiarism (Kwon 2024), or simply 'bullshit' 'to be characterized not by an intent to deceive but instead by a reckless disregard for the truth' (Hicks et al. 2024). According to Ulises A. Mejias of Michigan State University, Gen AI 'directly undermin[es] the principles we have been trying to instil in our students' (Mejias, 2025). It encourages cheating and pilfers other people's work (copyright or not) (Kermode 2024). Those who use it may be accused of a lack of effort and accountability: essays produced through Gen AI synthesize information to produce merely 'passable imitations of knowledge' (Shah &

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[3] See also Baines & Ross (2024) for a report of their AI workshop at Reading. The 2025 Sydney Teaching Symposium, at the University of Sydney, Australia, included a number of presentations on the subject of AI in the university and school classrooms. Tagliaferro's dissertation focused on how AI-produced model Ancient History essays could support students' own writing development; Audis' dissertation was a study of how A level Latin students used Gen AI to live-check Latin unseen translation.

Bender 2022). No human agency or experience is involved: Gen AI lacks authenticity and soul (Raine 2024). The only answer is to resist, it is said (Cadwalladr 2025; Fernandez 2025; Nichols et al. 2025). That tactic can prove difficult, however, when Gen AI seems to infiltrate every task that one tries to perform in one's everyday responsibilities (Bearne 2025). As Rowe (2024) ruefully notes, when you switch on the screen, an omnipresent button appears which promises to improve your writing and the button is almost irresistible. There have been many other concerns expressed about the use of Gen AI in universities, mostly about students' potential abuse of it (see, for example, Franks & Plummer 2025 and Goetze 2025). This includes Classics, of course (Morley 2024). But businesses are competing to attract students to their products with discounted rates to normalise Gen AI as part of the learning process (Shroff 2025) and respected journal collections extol the virtues of having AI do the searching for you. For example, JSTOR (2025) has its own headline that AI will improve accessibility to its stable of journals 'without compromising academic integrity'. It quotes a teacher: 'One of my students—she has dyslexia—has found the tool incredibly helpful for quickly discerning what an article is about. Even my other students, who do not have dyslexia, have benefited from how much it speeds up the research process for all of us'. Wiley (2025), too, promotes the 'new pathways' which its own AI-powered search engine will create for its readers. Both collections reassure the reader with frequent references to their long-established products: *scholarly sources, trusted content*, and *academic integrity* apply to the journal content itself. But we might wonder whether those words can be applied as readily to the practices which the AI-powered tools encourage in their users.

Gen AI Promotion by the Department for Education (DfE)

Despite these and other misgivings, the DfE has been strongly advocating the use of AI in schools. The last Conservative government allocated funding for the education quango Oak National to develop an AI lesson-planner, subsequently called *Aila*. This has been topped up with £3 million in December 2024 by the Labour government (S. Booth 2024). *Aila* can be used for lesson-planning, the creation of slideshows and practice worksheets for students, but it is of limited use as it draws information only from Oak National's own curriculum resources. The Labour government seems just as

interested in the potential of AI as the Conservatives were; in order to broaden access to a larger range of resources, it has awarded £4 million to set up another AI platform for schools, to help with planning, preparation, marking, and assessment – 'mainlining AI into UK's veins' (R. Booth 2025). On 13th January 2025, a press release declared the DfE's ambitions for AI to 'help drive down admin for teachers so they can get on with teaching our children' (Department for Education 2025a). A few days later, the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson gave the keynote speech at the Bett Educational Technology show in which she extolled the virtues of AI technology in the classroom:

> 'So, here's my vision for the future. A system in which each and every child gets a top-class education, backed by evidence-based tech and nurtured by inspiring teachers. A system in which teachers are set free by AI and other technologies, less marking, less planning, less form filling. A system in which their drive, their energy, their passion, is fully focused on delivering change for children.' (Phillipson 2025)

Amid the boosterism, I feel that Phillipson and Starmer's excitement for the opportunities that AI will bring to the classroom (frequent mentions of the words 'turbocharge', 'enterprising', and 'agents of change' slip into the speech) may turn out to support commercial interests rather than classroom realities. Both politicians seem to ignore two factors. The first is that the majority of the administration duties which teachers are compelled to undertake (continuous monitoring and assessment of student performance being the biggest of them) is a direct result of policy decisions made some fourteen years ago under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government (2010–2015) and many before that too. A cynic might say that a cheaper and easier solution might be to reduce the number of these administrative demands.

The second is an altogether more important one: that is, politicians seem to consider *lesson planning* as an administrative task. They appear to think that lesson planning (and perhaps marking too) can be left to others, and those others could mean AI. In fact, planning lessons, courses, and curricula are some of the more pleasurable parts of the job – highly personal to the teacher and integral to their art of teaching. Take

them away, and there is the danger that a teacher becomes little more than a deliverer of someone or *something* else's material and a glorified classroom manager. DeliverAI rather than Deliveroo.

And what might AI-derived lesson plans look like? How subject-specific might they be? How aligned with individual teachers' expectations of the ideal? The previous Conservative government's characterization of learning was very much that of a banking model (Freire 1970). Former School's Minister Nick Gibb notoriously delighted in prioritizing the learning and acquisition of facts over the development of skills (Gibb 2017). A glance at the Core Content Framework – a kind of national curriculum imposed upon teacher training institutions – emphasises teacher knowledge and draws on a small number of cherry-picked research papers to reinforce the message. This approach has not gone uncontested (Macedo 2013). Frankly, one would have expected a more sophisticated view from the present Labour government, but so far there has been no indication of change: the learning of facts, concomitant examinations, and schools' accountability for examinations seem to continue to be their understanding of what schools are for. And for over a decade this view, reinforced by Ofsted, has influenced school curricula and classroom resources, with a creeping consensus that course materials used in classrooms should lead to and prepare students for success in examinations – the only thing that matters. Examination board-endorsed textbooks and revision guides, alongside professional development delivered by the examination boards themselves, exemplify how closely-knit the relationship has become. For most pupils aged 14–18, the examination *is* the curriculum. Why not then go one step further: if Oak National's *Aila* can easily provide 'off the peg' lesson plans for every subject at every level for those who use its own curriculum, how much more beneficial might be a DfE-endorsed AI platform for the rest? Why not reduce the role of teacher (they cost so much and there are never enough of them!) and standardize the teaching along with the curriculum? Such a move would be patently absurd to all those involved in education, for whom the very interaction between teacher and students in the classroom is what makes true learning happen.

In addition to financially supporting *Aila* and the establishment of its own platform, the

DfE is enthusiastically promoting AI in UK schools. In 2025 Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced a £187 million *Tech First* scheme to develop resources to which every student would have access (Department for Education 2025b). Some suggestions for its use were placed in *Schools Week*, a widely read online education magazine: AI would help with marking, feedback, and ideas for lessons; emails and timetables; budget planning and the writing of tenders; and adapting materials for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It would encourage teachers to develop critical thinking lessons, to rethink homework tasks, and to draw up an AI vision for their school. It noted that transparency and oversight of materials would be essential. Teachers needed, however, to beware of risks, intellectual property, safeguarding, and privacy. They needed to be proactive with students on 'deepfakes' (Dyson 2025). For teachers who are interested in developing their practices using Gen AI, the DfE, along with the Education Endowment Fund, announced a national trial of the impact of Gen AI on lesson planning (Storer 2025).

A key DfE interest is how AI might be able to deliver personalized learning. However, Professor David Spendlove of Manchester University notes that while AI may provide the opportunity to offer personalized learning tools at scale, there remain problems of equitable access (Spendlove 2025). The DfE seems similarly agitated, which is perhaps why it has instituted the *Tech First* scheme. Stephen Morgan, the Under-Secretary of State for Early Education, reassured teachers in an article in *TES Magazine*:

'But everyone means everyone. I won't allow digital disparities to deepen disadvantage, which is why my department is laser-focused on ensuring that schools across the country have the technological foundations from which to build.' (Morgan 2025)

There remain anxieties, however. The consolidation of data in huge commercial platforms means that we 'alter the location from which we theorize educational practice – from the lived dynamics of classrooms to the abstract datasets of proprietary systems' (Williamson 2017). As it is, teachers currently wrestle with the recommendations of the Core Content Framework (which, incidentally, lasts beyond

the first year of teacher training through the next two years of the Early Career Teacher years) as they try to fit generic pedagogical principles to the classroom and students with whom they are actually working. Learning is much more than being instructed. It's an embodied experience and hugely interactive, with teacher and other students bringing in experiences and knowledge from both within and without the classroom. How much more difficult will it be when AI recommends a different learning pathway or different information to the student, perhaps unbeknownst to the teacher. The datasets created by machine learning are not interested in these cultural and emotional aspects but comprise 'narrow forms of educational knowledge baked into the online environments' (Perrotta & Selwyn 2019). A quick prompt of ChatGPT will produce, for example, very limited ways of planning a lesson for teaching a school Latin text. It's usually heavily influenced by the traditional P-P-F (Present – Practice – Feedback) paradigm, which will often not suit the task and learning objective of the text under consideration, let alone observe the age, prior knowledge, prior attainment, and interests of the students and their teacher. Gen AI tends to oversimplify the approach and, I have to say, make it all rather samey or beige. As Jeremy Knox, Associate Professor of Digital Education at Oxford University notes:

> 'This is the paradox at the heart of the technology industry's promotion of AI for education: technical novelty and invention that is at the same time a rearticulation of educational orthodoxy. The problem with the corporate vision of AI in education is that it fundamentally lacks imagination about how teaching and learning might be organised and practised. It is a thoroughly conservative vision of the all-knowing teacher, reconstituted as an on-demand service for the contemporary student-as-consumer.' (Knox 2025)

In Latin and Ancient Greek teaching, then, AI may simply reinforce the P-P-F paradigm, typified by grammar-first and grammar-translation courses. Latin lesson plans built through Oak National's *Aila*, for example, may well derive from the materials offered on its own site which have also formed the basis for the ultra-traditional approach of the DfE-backed Centre for Latin Excellence.[4] This occurs at a time when

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[4] The Centre for Latin Excellence has since December 2024 had its DfE grant withdrawn.

many teachers prefer more interactive methods, including reading-comprehension (using commercial courses or the increasingly large collection of novellas), or are exploring active approaches to ancient language teaching, involving speaking, for example.

On the other hand, we do not know how much AI may completely change the way in which established practices take place, such as the teaching of writing (Dixon-Román et al. 2019). Teachers have a pretty good view on how to teach writing, depending on the age and ability of their students. If we outsource some of the practice to Gen AI, we cannot be sure that that will follow the practices that the teacher has developed and refined for themselves and their students. In the past, teachers may have shared lesson resources and developed them with other teachers – a valuable social experience of its own kind and a kind of professional development. As Sam Gibbs, Director of Education at Greater Manchester Education Trust, notes:

'If we believe that one of the purposes of education is to produce thinking citizens – and we should – we must recognise that teaching is not merely delivery but the modelling of critical thinking. […] When we outsource the deeply intellectual work of curriculum design – be it to external agencies or internal specialists – we deny teachers opportunities for creativity and critical thinking, for joyful immersion in the patterns and rhythms of their subjects.' (Gibbs 2025)

What of the student experience? It is possible that students may feel happier conversing with a chatbot than engaging with others in the class or socially. Pooley (2025) notes the propensity for Gen AI chatbots to indulge in glazing[5] its interlocutor – something the teacher might find irritating, but which some students find reassuring or entertaining. A danger is that 'AI might reinforce cultural stereotypes through imitative social interactions' (Dai et al. 2025). We see this perhaps already in the so-called 'echo chamber' of social media platforms, where the algorithm feeds us what we like to hear, reinforces our view, and rarely challenges us. Gen AI might also introduce racial bias (Hoffman et al. 2024). We do not know, then, how much Gen AI will create the 'model

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[5] To 'glaze' someone means to feed them compliments that are so over-the-top that they come across as cringe-worthy or phony.

of the learner' (Pea & Jacks 2014) and what that model might be (Slade & Prinsloo 2013). The formulaic nature of Gen AI products might lead to narrowed expectations of what *good* looks like (Gibbs 2025).

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The DfE has instructed schools to offer mandatory training for the use of AI assistive technology for students with SEND (Norden 2025). This is, clearly, to be applauded. Again, however, there are warnings. Michael Finlay, Headteacher at Springwater School, a special education school in Harrogate, offers some pertinent observations: that AI data sets neglect or ignore students with complex, atypical, or complex needs; that algorithms optimise for majority behaviours or normative development pathways, interpreting neurodivergent behaviours as anomalies or errors and penalising them for non-linear or non-standard progression; and that the promotion by EdTech of 'individualised, efficiency-oriented models of learning […] may be at odds with the relational, holistic, and strengths-based approaches required by many learners with SEND' (Finlay 2025). There also remain new ethical dilemmas: what happens when the student has the AI taken away or can no longer afford it? What responsibility does the teacher have for recommending an AI for use? Can the student or parents refuse the AI? (Hernández-Orallo & Vold 2019). If a student is using AI to develop their 'cognitive ecosystem', does that even mean a re-evaluation of what intelligence might look like? (Adams et al. 2023).

Being in a Class – What We Value

The widespread use of AI for learning clearly has benefits. But it also has many problems, as I have shown. Most of all, as Dr Michał Wieczorek, IRC postdoctoral fellow at Dublin City university notes:

> 'AI deprives children from opportunities to gain experience in democratic living and acquire communicative and collaborative skills and dispositions, while also habituating them to an environment over which they have little or no control, potentially impacting how they will approach shared problems as democratic

citizens.' (Wieczorek 2025, p. 1)

We are not talking about students learning about democracy here from lectures or handouts. I take as an example the feedback I had from a group of students of Ancient Greek in a school in Essex. What they valued, apart from the intellectual challenge of the language itself in comprehension and translation, was the very geekiness of doing something that people like them like doing. They really relished the classroom spirit: small classes, growing together with a regular, reliable, and fun teacher. They enjoyed learning with and learning about other people. They felt they had a shared history of learning, with shared experiences, shared jokes: friendship. They learnt not just Ancient Greek and its culture, but also how to take part, to take turns, to listen and respond. Contrast this with the sort of 'personalized' learning experience promoted by people like Salman Khan (2025), the founder of Khan Academy. The experience may be personalized, but it does seem rather solitary and screen-fixated.

If we are to use AI in the classroom, then, it has to be not as a replacement, but as a complement to the classroom experience. In much the same way as the contemporary classroom has absorbed the Interactive whiteboard and the laptop, AI will become another, rather important, tool. Students see the product without the skills, and the time, and the struggle, and they forget that that is how one learns – not just by amassing information, but by the rather difficult process of going to find it, reshuffling it, attempting to make something out, remaking it in a way that suits them and also for others. We need to focus them – and remind ourselves – of the importance of the process of learning. As D. Graham Burnett, Professor of History of Science at Princeton University notes, writing in *The New Yorker*, 'To be human is not to have answers. It is to have *questions*—and to live with them' (Burnett 2025).

In conversations I have had with teachers, responses have, inevitably, been very varied. They have many, many questions. My own Classics PGCE student teachers' views have ranged, to no-one's surprise, from rejection, through reluctance, to full engagement with enthusiastic experimentation. As yet, I am unaware of a systematic review of Classics teachers' use of AI. That may be something in itself worth researching, and the Generative AI for Latin Teachers Facebook group set up by US

Latin teacher Maureen Gassert Lamb may help to circulate ideas and practices.[6] In the meantime, those who have experimented with AI in the classroom tend to have come away with both positive reactions and also a reassuringly sceptical view towards full adoption. This may speed up, of course, as the new school term now starts and the full force of the DfE's AI strategy begins to be felt. At the moment we do not know how we will find ourselves using AI in the years to come.

In the meantime, let's remember what teachers actually do for a living – a living that might tire them physically but never exhausts them mentally. Our future use of AI must not forget what we are good at. As an anonymous blogger on *Thinking Flexibly* reminds us:

> 'I know what it means to have a student knock on your door after school to talk about a comment you left them on their latest essay, and I know how there is no way the *conversation* that follows is replaceable by any technology.
>
> I know what it means to stand at the front of the room discussing essay feedback with a class of students and having the *credibility* of that classroom knowing the time that I invested in their writing.
>
> And I know what it feels like to sit at my desk at the end of a school year completely exhausted but also very proud and grateful of the privilege it is to have watched another group of students venture through their journeys as writers, all with their own individual and wonderful iterations, *and to know that something happened in that classroom worth happening*.' (Thinking Flexibly 2025)

AI is not going to go away. But if teaching is to remain a satisfying and rewarding career, we must not forget who we are and why we are doing it.

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[6] A useful guide is *Generative Artificial Intelligence and Language Teaching* by Moorhouse & Wong (2025) in the *Cambridge Elements* series. It is accessible and jargon-free, with case study examples of practice, as well as tips and questions for teachers to get started for themselves.

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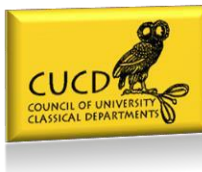
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