

Scarlett Foti

AI in Classrooms: Learning Tool or Academic Landmine?

Technology, AI, and School

Artificial intelligence has slipped quietly into everyday school life. Students now use tools like ChatGPT, Grammarly and Quillbot for drafting, summarising, studying and, increasingly, completing assessments. Universities and schools are experimenting too, with AI-assisted lectures, feedback tools and automated resources.

In theory, this should make learning more efficient and accessible. In practice, many students are unsure where help ends and dependence begins. Teachers and tutors are reporting a rise in work that sounds polished but hollow, while students admit they feel anxious about producing work without AI support.

AI is no longer a novelty. It's a daily presence in Australian classrooms.

This isn't just a conversation about cheating or technology. It's about **student confidence, thinking skills and mental health.**

When students rely on AI to generate ideas, structure arguments or phrase responses, they may complete tasks faster, but often at the cost of deep understanding. Over time, this can erode self-efficacy: the belief that "I can do this myself." Some students begin to feel that their own thoughts are never good enough unless an algorithm approves them.

Lately, there's been a growing gap in trust. Students, such as I, have been noticing an increase in AI-generated lectures, notes, and resources that repeat information, contradict previous lessons,

or lack nuance. When education starts to feel automated, motivation drops, and disengagement rises.

When used well, AI can support research and accessibility. Used carelessly, it risks flattening creativity, critical thinking and the human relationship at the heart of learning.

Hopefully, in the future, we start to see a resurgence in human ingenuity, critical thinking, and reasonable laws surrounding the integration and reliance on AI in the educational world.

AI is a tool, not a thinker. The real challenge ahead is deciding whether classrooms are designed to help students think more deeply or simply produce work more quickly.



Word stock images

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The Literacy Lunge

Equity and Early Learning – it's time to close that gap

In some classrooms, children arrive already fluent in books. They know how to hold a story, follow a sentence, recognise patterns, and ask questions about what they read. In others, students are still learning how letters work together, years after formal schooling has begun.

Early literacy builds quietly, long before NAPLAN or report cards appear. It grows through bedtime stories, conversations at the dinner table, access to books, and time spent being read to. When those supports are missing, the gap widens early and fast.

By the time students reach primary school, differences in reading ability can already be stark. Teachers do their best to intervene, but without enough time, resources, or specialist support, many students are left catching up while the curriculum keeps moving forward.

Literacy is more than reading words on a page. It shapes confidence, comprehension, and a student's belief that school is a place where they belong. When early learning isn't equitable, the effects echo through every year that follows.

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What the Universities Accord Could Change (and What It Won't)

Universities and Funding – The Government's Action

The Australian Government's Universities Accord is being positioned as the most significant higher-education reform in decades. Its goal is to reshape how universities are funded, who gets access to degrees, and how tertiary education aligns with national workforce needs.

At its core, the Accord aims to increase participation from under-represented groups, expand university places, and improve coordination between government, universities and industry. It signals a move away from short-term policy fixes toward a longer, more structured plan for the sector.

In theory, this is about rebuilding trust and stability after years of funding uncertainty and piecemeal reforms.

For students, the Accord could mean **more university places**, especially for people from low-SES backgrounds, regional areas and First Nations communities. It also promises a stronger focus on student support and completion, not just enrolment numbers. *Continued...*

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Education or Export? Australia's Ongoing Identity Crisis

International Students

International students have long been a central pillar of Australia's education system. They contribute billions to the economy, sustain university budgets, and support research, staffing, and infrastructure across the sector.

At the same time, government policy is increasingly tightening controls around international student numbers, visas, and pathways. Universities are being asked to expand access for domestic students while navigating caps, compliance pressure, and political scrutiny around migration and housing.

The result is a growing tension: are international students being welcomed as learners, or managed as an export commodity?

For universities, international student fees often subsidise domestic education and research. When enrolments fluctuate or are restricted, institutions respond with course cuts, job losses, and larger class sizes, changes that affect all students, not just those from overseas.

For international students themselves, the experience can feel transactional. High fees, limited support, rising living costs, and shifting visa rules can leave students feeling valued for their revenue rather than their presence in the academic community.

And for Australia, the stakes are broader. International education shapes global relationships, cultural exchange, and the country's reputation as a place to learn, not just earn.

When education policy is driven primarily by economics, trust erodes on all sides.

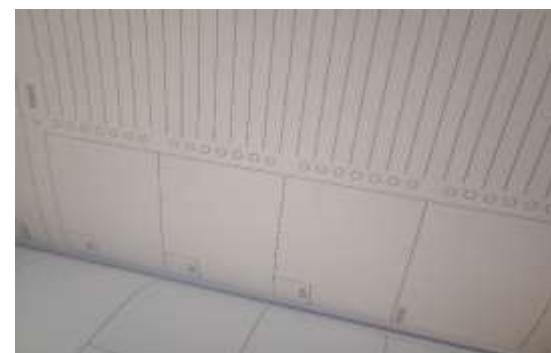
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Universities Accord

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For universities, it may bring clearer expectations and more consistent funding models. But many of the pressures institutions face right now, job cuts, course closures, casualisation of staff, and growing class sizes, are not problems the Accord can fix overnight.

And for graduates, the biggest unanswered question remains: **will degrees become more affordable and more secure pathways to employment**, or simply more tightly linked to labour market demand?



Picture caption: 12-month planner designed for uni students – S&R store

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Where Will We Be in 12 Months?

Educational Future

Australian education is in a period of transition rather than resolution. Over the past year, governments have announced reforms across teacher workforce policy, university funding, early learning access, and the use of technology in classrooms. Yet many of the system's deepest pressures remain unresolved.

Teacher shortages persist, student mental health concerns are rising, universities are restructuring, and debates around equity and access continue across early childhood, schooling, and tertiary education. Reports from bodies such as the Grattan Institute, the OECD, and Australia's Department of Education suggest that while policy intent is growing clearer, implementation is slow and uneven.

The next 12 months will not deliver a transformation, but they will reveal the direction Australia is choosing.

Looking ahead, several trajectories are already visible.

Teacher workforce data indicates that without meaningful workload reduction and retention strategies, shortages will continue, particularly in public, regional, and low-SES schools (Grattan Institute, *Ending the Teacher Shortage*, 2023; OECD *Education at a Glance*, 2024). This has direct implications for class sizes, subject availability, and student support.

In higher education, the Universities Accord sets long-term goals around access and equity, but universities remain financially reliant on international student revenue, making them vulnerable to policy shifts and global uncertainty (Australian Universities Accord Final Report, 2024; Universities Australia submissions). Over the next year, students are likely to feel the impact through course availability, staff turnover, and delivery modes.

Meanwhile, early learning research continues to show that literacy gaps emerge before formal schooling and widen without targeted intervention (Australian Education Research Organisation; Grattan Institute literacy reports). Without expanded early childhood investment, equity gaps are unlikely to close.

Technology will also shape the year ahead. Schools are moving from reactive responses to AI toward more structured guidance, but evidence suggests students need explicit instruction in critical thinking and AI literacy to avoid over-reliance and anxiety (OECD *Digital Education Outlook*; Australian Council for Educational Research).



Picture caption: Illustration from Wading Through the Deep

Truth to the Teachers

What considering learning styles can do for you



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Every classroom is a mix of minds. Some students grasp concepts instantly when they see a diagram. Others need to hear it explained, talk it through, or physically try it before it clicks.

They're reducing friction between how information is taught and how it is received.

Recognising learning styles gives teachers a practical lens to interpret behaviour, engagement, and performance. A student who struggles to sit still may not lack discipline. They may be a kinesthetic learner trapped in a static lesson. A student who seems disengaged during discussion may thrive when given visuals or a written structure instead.

Learning styles such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, verbal, logical, interpersonal and intrapersonal reflect **different neurological and psychological preferences**, not levels of intelligence. When teaching methods vary, more brains light up.

When instruction aligns with how students naturally process information:

- Multiple brain regions are activated, increasing comprehension and retention
- Cognitive load is reduced, making learning feel achievable rather than overwhelming
- Students are more likely to stay engaged and persist through challenge

This doesn't mean creating thirty separate lesson plans. It means **offering multiple entry points** to the same concept. A diagram alongside an explanation. Discussion paired with written reflection. Movement can be built into content-heavy lessons. Small adjustments can have outsized effects.

Psychological Impacts:

Improved Motivation and Engagement

When students feel that learning "makes sense" to them, effort increases. Lessons feel less like endurance tests and more like opportunities to succeed.

Stronger Self-Efficacy

Students who understand how they learn best are more confident. They begin to attribute success to strategy rather than luck, and failure to adjustment rather than ability.

Reduced Anxiety and Frustration

Mismatch between teaching style and learning preference can lead to quiet stress, shutdown, or disruptive behaviour. Alignment lowers emotional resistance and supports regulation.

Behavioural Impacts Teachers Notice

- Greater task persistence
- Improved classroom behaviour
- Increased willingness to participate
- More consistent work completion
- Fewer avoidance strategies

When students feel capable, behaviour often follows.

Considering learning styles is not about abandoning curriculum standards or evidence-based instruction. It's about **flexibility within structure**. Teachers who vary delivery, encourage metacognition, and validate different approaches to learning create classrooms where more students can access success.

The goal is not to teach *to* learning styles, but to teach *with* awareness of them.

When students feel understood, learning becomes collaborative rather than combative. And when teaching works with the brain instead of against it, everyone benefits.