

Introduction to the Artificial Intelligence Special Issue

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Artificial intelligence, particularly generative artificial intelligence tools (Gen AI) have infiltrated educational discussions over the past few years. These tools are sometimes considered valuable resources to help individuals develop diverse creative endeavors. Tools facilitate illustration, layout and color schemes, voice overs, video production, writing, idea generation, lesson planning, and so forth. However, these tools are simultaneously vilified as biased and inaccurate, resource and energy intensive, plagiarizers, copyright violators, and cheating enablers.

Unlike many educational innovations that promised sweeping change and ultimately under delivered and were forgotten for the next fad, Gen AI seems different. Students and faculty members alike are adopting it rapidly. As Rogers (2003) mentioned, individuals are more likely to adopt innovations when they are compatible with existing norms, can be observed and tried prior to adoption, are easy to use, and provide a relative advantage over the status quo. Gen AI tools seem to fit these requirements well. Through ordinary search queries, users can access and examine AI functionality with minimal to no prior knowledge. Increasingly, major corporations like Google, Microsoft, Adobe embed Gen AI features within flagship software applications to further promote (and market) their use. Although output varies based on prompt quality, tool understanding, tool optimization, and other factors, most tools appear to be good enough to disrupt and alter previous processes (see Christensen, 1997).

As educational institutions consider policies regarding Gen AI tool use, so too do teachers and students. The purpose of this special issue is to examine practices that teachers and teacher educators use to address Gen AI issues in the classroom. Lessons in this issue span the age range of early childhood education to advanced graduate study. The twelve articles in this issue are organized around Gen AI awareness and literacy, ethical considerations with use, and content generation.

ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

AI LITERACY AND AWARENESS

The first three articles focus on AI awareness among early childhood and higher education students. The article *AI Education for Young Children (PreK-2): Nurturing Curious and Creative Thinkers* discusses how AI literacy can be introduced and explored by Kindergarten and early elementary school students. Although other articles discuss AI literacy among elementary and secondary students, they focus more fully on content generation. Because of this difference, the next articles *AI Literacy Workshop for Graduate Teaching Assistants* and *Fostering Pre-service Teachers' AI Literacy: Lesson Units to Build Knowledge and Confidence* both center around students in higher education. These articles focus on helping teachers acquaint themselves with AI tools so they can better incorporate them in their classrooms.

ETHICS

The next three articles focus on ethical decisions associated with Gen AI use. All are geared towards higher education students. *Sparkling Students' Eco-Critical Awareness of Generative Artificial Intelligence* encourages undergraduate students to consider and explore the environmental impact of popular AI tools. *Taking Ownership of Gen AI: Connecting AI and Ethics for Undergraduate Students* and *Teaching Students to Identify Ethical Risks and Blind Spots in Academic AI Use* both focus on how students may use AI tools and the ethical decisions they need to make (e.g., copyright and fair use, author voice, bias) when considering their use.

CONTENT GENERATION

The final six articles focus on Gen AI tools to generate content. Three articles focus on secondary education contexts (grades 7-12) while three additional articles focus on preservice teacher education. The first article *Using AI-Generated Multimedia to Teach Leisure Choice Making* leveraged AI generated images to create choice boards for middle school students with autism spectrum disorder.

The next two articles, *Building AI Capacity Through Coding Fundamentals: An AI-Augmented Coding Activity for Teens Using Python, Data Structures, and Verification Practices* and *Exploring Biomes and Ecosystems Using Artificial Intelligence Tools* focus on AI use in secondary schools to critically examine and facilitate Python coding and demonstrate ecosystem knowledge through poster and movie script development.

The final three lessons: AI as a Lesson-Planning Partner in Preservice Teacher's Mixed-Reality Rehearsal, AI – supported Digital Storytelling, and Teaching Prompt Engineering as a Core AI Literacy Skill in Undergraduate Education leverage AI tools to help undergraduate students prepare lesson plans, generate digital stories, and better prompt AI systems.

As you review the lessons in this or any JTILT issue, you may notice that they identify flaws. Authors mention challenges faced, limitations, and lessons learned as they reflect on implementations. These limitations remind us that no lesson is perfect. We encourage you to share your lessons and encourage you to share the flaws you found during implementation. As educators we can learn from others. Your ideas, activities, and challenges will help others in similar settings and situations.

LESSON COMPETITION

This issue also includes information regarding a lesson competition. Submissions are due October 1, 2026 and winners will be announced during the Association for Educational Communications and Technology Annual Convention held in Chicago Illinois November 3-7. Details can be found in the [lesson competition call](#). Please submit your lessons!

GET INVOLVED!

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REFERENCES

- Christensen, C. M. (1997). *The innovator's dilemma: When new technologies cause great firms to fail*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.

SHARE AND MODIFY THESE LESSONS!

Whether or not you submit manuscripts for the journal or participate in lesson competitions, we hope you use, share, and modify these journal resources. The lessons printed in this journal are provided in sufficient detail that others can implement them without additional details or modify them to meet individual classroom needs. Unless otherwise noted, all JTILT articles, posted presentations, assignments, rubrics, job aids, and so forth are published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license](#) (pictured below):



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