AI: THE PERFECT STORM THAT RAGES AGAINST THE EVOLVING DYNAMISM THROUGH WHICH WE FORM OURSELVES AS HUMAN BEINGS

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Definition of The Perfect Storm: A critical or disastrous situation created by a powerful concurrence of factors (Merriam-Webster).

Thank you, Lee, for the invitation and opportunity to share some thoughts on this important and immensely challenging development. I am also grateful to Dr Susan La Marca for the opportunity to begin ordering my thoughts in some detail in an article for Synergy—*Artificial Intelligence and the Atrophication of Intellect and Academic Integrity (2025)* — which is publicly available from the link. This article for *ACCESS* arose out of a brief discussion with you about AI following my article for *Synergy*, during which you asked me what I meant when I said that AI is the perfect storm that makes the development of academic integrity, and by extension integrity, very difficult, if not practically impossible, which is where I have started. The title of this article is a reference to Jacques Maritain (1971, p. 1), who I will return to at the end of this article, who asserted that the guidance of this "evolving dynamism" is the "chief task of education."

Briefly, by which I mean not having to read the *Synergy* article first, there are four factors that combine to produce this perfect storm brought about by AI. Please note that while I have concerns with AI on many levels, my concern here is *practical* and based on my experience of working in school libraries over 25 years—however, for a sense of this broader concern, see, for example, *Are we living in the golden age of stupidity?* (McBain, 2025).

Firstly, technology as an end in itself

David Foster Wallace (2010) helped me to pinpoint the root cause of my concern with AI. Discussing TV and anticipating the Internet and related technologies, he warns that as the technology inevitably gets "better and better and better and better," it will become "easier and easier, and more and more convenient, and more and more pleasurable, to be alone with images on a screen, given to us by *people who do not love us but want our money*" (emphasis added). Which is fine, Wallace continues, in low doses, "but if that's the basic main staple of your diet...in a meaningful way, you're gonna die." This is a very complex issue but broadly concerns the motives of those who develop the technology in question—which we do not give enough attention to—and then the *actual* rather than *alleged* effects, or 'benefits,' of that technology—which is more difficult to deter-

mine than we appear willing to admit. And as I argued in my article for *Synergy*, AI as a product in the form we are most likely to encounter it in—Microsoft's Copilot, Google's Gemini, OpenAI's ChatGPT—is already enshittified, to use Cory Doctorow's (2025) term. This means that the companies developing these products—because they are monopsonies—have *no* financial incentive to make their products good for us, and also *every* financial incentive to make them inescapable. Once inescapable—for example, Microsoft 365 or Google Classroom in schools—so are their manifold harms. Of these harms, the one that is of particular concern to us here, is a practical concern with mitigating harm to learning, especially as this relates to academic integrity.

Secondly, technology as an educational end

There is strong tendency in schools to reduce learning to memorisation and reproduction in standardised tests—information storage and retrieval. This kind of learning is better suited to machines, as is teaching for this kind of learning, which is attractive to a certain kind of teacher, and a certain kind of administration. This is not to say that information storage and retrieval is not necessary for learning, just that it is not sufficient for learning that is both embodied and situated, and is certainly not a transcendent and honourable education (Postman, 1996). Moreover, this tendency makes schools vulnerable to the purveyors of educational technologies that both cater to and promote this kind of learning, of which AI is the holy grail. Bertrand Russell (1922) helped me to pinpoint the root cause of my concern with such an approach to learning. More than 100 years ago, he charged that

> "our system of education turns young people out of the schools able to read, but for the most part unable to weigh evidence or to form an independent opinion, [who] are then assailed, throughout the rest of their lives, by statements designed to make them believe all sorts of absurd propositions."

There is, lamentably, little to suggest that much has changed in the intervening years, except that the technological means for getting people to believe all sorts of absurd propositions, including about the technology itself, have dramatically improved, even as disparate forces ranged against a fully human/liberal education are becoming more closely aligned—technocratic educational policy and practice being conformed to financially-motivated political pressure for example. This, then, makes us vulnerable, as individuals *and* as a society.

Thirdly, a vital source of resistance to this tendency in schools—teacher librarianship—has been weakened on two fronts

On one front, an erosion of our self-confidence as teachers of the process of learning, which is an inquiry process of coming to know and understand. This derives essentially from the library's two major and unique functions as a meeting place of mind and ideas, and space for the extension of said ideas in the mind (Knight, 1968, p. viii). This approach to learning requires close and purposeful collaboration between those in the classroom who [ought to] teach the mind *to inquire* and those in the library who [ought to] teach the mind *how to inquire*. This is what Norman Beswick (1967, p. 201) meant when he said that "it is not the library that 'supports' the classroom...but the classroom that leads (or should lead) inevitably and essentially to the library."

Given the strong and relentless tendency to approach learning as information storage and retrieval, this loss of confidence is understandable. To compensate, we turn our hands away from what makes us integral to the educational process, and to other, no doubt important, instructional activities that, while integral to our instructional identity and role, are nevertheless peripheral to the educational process. In so do-

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ing, we accelerate our self-identity crisis, which is also an identity crisis. On the other front, and partly in consequence, we are increasingly ineffectual at collaboratively teaching skills—many of which are technology-dependent by definition or in use—systematically *and* progressively within a logical process that is aimed at the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, without which authentic inquiry, and I would argue real learning, is not possible. So, even with a pre-enshittified technology such as *good old search*, we lacked the practical means to teach students how to use the technology increasingly well *in the service of learning*. For the reasons outlined above, and the one below, I fear that the consequences of this educational failure will prove to be catastrophic for our children, to whom we owe a duty of care.

Fourthly, enshittified AI is ubiquitous and, in view of the above, its effects on learning insidious

I will provide two practical examples. Firstly, we are a Microsoft 365 school, which means that it is impossible for me, and my colleagues and students, to avoid Copilot in school, and painfully difficult to do so from home. I cannot do anything without Copilot offering to do it for me—find what I'm looking for, read and summarise it for me, write something for me based what it found for me and read for me—and even though I doubt it could do it 'better' than me, the constant suggestion is that it can, and the temptation to let it is great. Figure 1 is just the most recent example of what happens now whenever I open Word. (Although not our specific concern here, but equally troubling, it is worth noting in passing that I do not recall explicitly giving Copilot, or Microsoft, permission to sift through my documents, which in one instance included personal medical information on my home computer, and drives home Cory Doctorow's (2023) point that what a technology does cannot be separated from who it does to and who it does it for.)

If even I struggle to let Copilot let me think and speak for myself, how much more so for our students, who are still learning to think and speak for themselves about what they are coming to know and understand, *let alone* whether what they are being told to think and say is accurate? Every single day, I observe students in the Library losing this struggle without even being aware of it. Secondly, we offer the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) to students in their final two years of school, which is an externally assessed inquiry-based qualification. The latest information to students on the use of AI for coursework from the Joint Council for Qualifications (1996, p. 15) states, amongst other things, that where the use of AI is permitted, students are required to:

- reference the AI tool they have used
- give the date of when the AI tool generated the content
- give details of how they used it
- save screenshots of what they have asked or instructed the AI tool to do and what answer the AI gave them, and include this with the work submitted.

Now despite our best efforts to teach skills systematically and progressively within an inquiry process *from PK through 12*, which I think we do pretty well, I doubt that even our EPQ students routinely do this outside of the EPQ course, let alone those students who have not had the benefit of the 30-hours taught skills component that is a compulsory part of the EPQ. Lower down in the school, where our internal Academic Integrity Policy does not have the same weight as the external JCQ regulations, for students as well as their teachers, students search online much as they always have, except that now they find

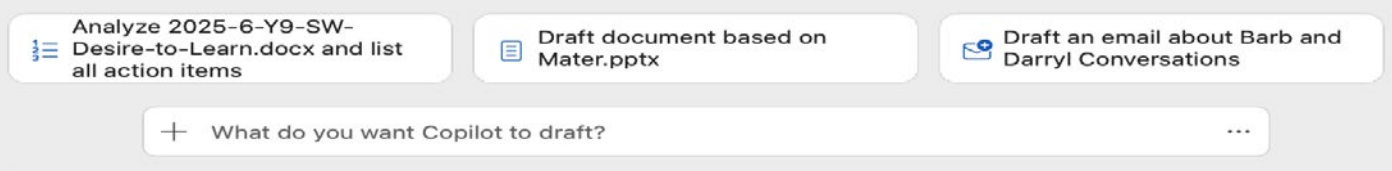


Figure 1: Enshittified Word

'*the* answer,' with even less incentive to make sense of and find meaning in the sources, or document them.

This, then, is the perfect storm that makes the development of academic integrity practically impossible, and so also erodes integrity:

- An educational system that has confused memorisation and reproduction in tests for the learning process of acquiring knowledge though inquiry, and so cannot systematically and progressively develop the skills required by this process, foundational to which are those that enable our students to act with academic integrity, and which cannot be separated from being persons of integrity.
- An educational system that is, moreover, increasingly captive to an information-storage-and-retrieval technology that is ethically (and legally) deeply compromised, *and* that is designed to make us intellectually dependent on it and so makes us complicit.

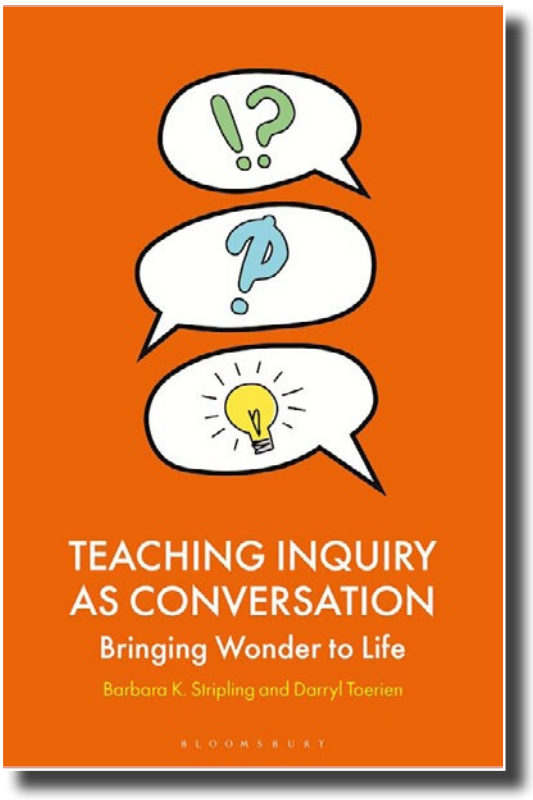
Now while this perfect storm is unavoidable, its likely outcome is not inevitable—as Marshall McLuhan (1996, p. 15), who inventoried the effects of the medium becoming the message, put it, "there is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening." Perversely, though, the attention required for this contemplation is in constant demand by the covetous purveyors of the very technology whose effects we are trying to contemplate.

Paying attention, then, or more precisely directing our attention to what properly requires it, is our first act of resistance, and imperative if we are to have a hope of weathering this perfect storm. We also need to establish a critical distance between ourselves and the technology that we are contemplating, which, in this case, is increasingly difficult, but this is another conversation—in the meantime, for some thought-provoking reading, see, for example, the following series of blog posts by Anne Lutz Fernandez: *Resisting AI Mania in Schools Part I (2025a), Part II (2025b), and Part III (2025c).*

So where does this leave us now? For me, a reminder that

> education is fully human education only when it is a liberal education, preparing the youth to exercise their power to think in a genuinely free and liberating manner — that is to say, when it equips them for truth and makes them capable of judging according to the worth of evidence, of enjoying truth and beauty for their own sake, and of advancing, when they have become adults, toward wisdom and some understanding of those things which bring to them intimations of immortality. (Maritain, 1967, pp. 47–48).

For it is only in the glow of this particular light that I can begin to contemplate whether AI is a help or a hindrance. Neither the resistance nor the revolution will be televised.



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Some further reading for ACCESS readers, in the Australian context

Challenges:

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The positives:

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The AI Pedagogy project (2025) *Creative and critical engagement with AI in education AI guide*. http://aipedagogy.org

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