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The Great AI Con-Fidence Trick
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AI is everywhere. Everyone is talking about it, claiming to use it, and increasingly it seems that everyone you speak to is suddenly an expert.

Let me be clear: I am a strong advocate for the thoughtful use of AI in education. Looking back through the archives**, I gave an interview to *Technology Magazine* in 2020 in which I highlighted two things. First, the lack of systematic thinking around building teacher capacity to use technology effectively in the classroom. Second, the potential of artificial intelligence to transform learning**.

For those interested, the interview can be found here:
[How the University of Bahrain is technologically tailoring its campus | Technology Magazine](#)

Six years later, I find myself reflecting on that conversation through a very different lens.

AI is now everywhere - from retail and banking to real estate and education. Yet the research tells us that extracting real value from AI remains a significant challenge. According to research from MIT, as many as **95% of AI pilot projects fail to move beyond the experimental stage**.

In education, the debate has also taken a more nuanced turn. Much of the discussion now centres on the risk of cognitive loss. While efficiency may increase, an overreliance on AI could potentially weaken critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.

So the question becomes unavoidable: are we witnessing genuine transformation, or are we simply caught up in the latest technological hype?

In recent months, I have had the opportunity to run live polls at a number of conferences, asking teachers about the training they have received to use AI tools in the classroom safely and ethically. Alongside this, I have visited classrooms to observe how AI is being deployed in real time. How are teachers using it? How are students engaging with it? And most importantly, how does it affect learning?

The results are revealing.

Across the polls I have conducted, a consistent pattern emerges: **many teachers do not yet feel sufficiently trained or confident in using AI in the classroom**. And confidence matters. Confidence comes from training, practical experience, and the opportunity to experiment in real-world contexts.

This is where school leadership becomes critical. Leaders must move beyond enthusiasm for AI and instead develop **clear, integrated strategies** that support teachers through training, guidance, and the freedom to experiment within clearly defined ethical and pedagogical boundaries.

During one recent classroom visit, I observed what effective AI integration can look like when these conditions are in place. The teacher demonstrated high levels of AI literacy and was working within a controlled AI environment designed to support learning rather than shortcut it.

Students were working independently with an AI tool that provided personalised feedback on their progress. Attempts to jump straight to answers were carefully managed through scaffolded AI responses that encouraged students to think more deeply and logically about the problem.

Crucially, the teacher maintained full visibility of the conversations students were having with the AI system. Where students struggled, or where potential red flags emerged, the teacher was able to intervene immediately, what is often referred to as keeping the **"human in the loop"**.

The classroom felt different. Students were fully engaged, progressing at their own pace through personalised learning while the teacher orchestrated the experience. AI was not replacing the teacher - it was amplifying their impact.

The learning dynamic had subtly shifted. AI was not simply providing answers; it was helping students become more curious and encouraging them to ask better questions.

Is this easy to replicate? No.

But the potential is clearly there - provided the right environment, infrastructure, and teacher training are in place.

Both teachers and students now have access to a rapidly expanding ecosystem of AI tools, with generative AI leading the way. Yet unlocking the real value of these technologies requires a deeper level of **AI literacy** than we often acknowledge.

AI literacy is not simply about writing better prompts. It involves understanding how AI systems work, using them effectively, questioning their outputs critically, applying them safely, and evaluating the reliability and bias within the responses they generate.

Here again, the role of leadership becomes central.

Schools often rely on enthusiastic early adopters to build momentum, and these evangelists play an important role. However, they must be promoting the right capabilities, not simply advocating for a particular tool or platform.

Championing a tool is easy. Championing learning outcomes is far more important.

Mandates from above rarely produce lasting change. Real confidence in using AI comes from something much deeper: a culture that encourages experimentation, sustained professional development, and leaders who understand that meaningful transformation takes time.

Without that foundation, the danger is that AI becomes less of a revolution in education and more of a **confidence trick**, a technology everyone claims to understand, but few are truly equipped to use well.

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