Synopsis of December 13, 2024 Webinar, “Assessment for Deeper Learning: Blending Instructional and Assessment Purposes in the Age of AI: What We are Learning in California Public Schools from the Wisdom of Practice”

Panelists: Wes Kriesel and Kunal Dalal

Moderators: Dr. Brent Duckor and Dr. Carrie Holmberg

Blending Instructional and Assessment Purposes in the Age of AI: A Vision for Deeper Learning

In an age where artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping education, a fundamental question arises: How can AI foster deeper learning while supporting the intertwined purposes of instruction and assessment? This question is not just theoretical but deeply practical, as educators, policymakers, and technologists grapple with the evolving role of AI in K-12 education. A recent webinar hosted by the Center for Innovation in Applied Education Policy brought together experts and practitioners to discuss how AI is transforming learning environments and empowering students and educators alike.

The Promise of AI for Deeper Learning

Deeper learning—a concept emphasizing the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in the 21st century—relies on critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving. AI’s potential lies in its ability to enhance these dimensions by personalizing learning experiences and offering real-time feedback. For example, Wes Kriesel and Kunal Dalal, leaders in educational AI initiatives, highlighted how students are already using AI tools like ChatGPT for creative brainstorming and writing. These tools allow students to engage in iterative learning processes, fostering confidence and agency.

Yet, as Kriesel noted, AI’s impact extends beyond efficiency. Students like Kieran, who used AI to draft anime stories, illustrate how technology can unlock creativity and empower learners to see themselves in new ways. Kieran’s journey from struggling writer to confident storyteller underscores the transformative power of AI when coupled with intrinsic motivation and a supportive environment.

Centering Student Voice

A recurring theme in the webinar was the importance of centering student voices in conversations about AI. Students are not just passive users of technology; they are active participants who see AI as integral to their lives, not just their schooling. For instance, a student-led AI conference in Orange County brought together 600 students to share their

visions for the future of education. This event underscored that AI is not just a tool but a catalyst for dialogue about what education could and should be.

Dalal emphasized that these student-centered events reveal a broader truth: AI is an excuse to have long-overdue conversations about education. Students' insights challenge educators to rethink traditional models and embrace more collaborative, dynamic approaches to teaching and learning. "Students don't just want to be included in discussions about AI," Dalal said. "They want to be central to them."

AI and Formative Assessment

One of AI's most promising applications is in formative assessment—an approach that prioritizes feedback and continuous improvement over high-stakes testing. In Anaheim Union High School District, for instance, students upload audio reflections about their weekend activities, which AI analyzes to identify traits aligned with a graduate profile. Traits like persistence, empathy, and leadership are highlighted, shifting the focus from rote academic skills to holistic development.

This approach, as Kriesel explained, exemplifies "triangulated learning"—a model where students, teachers, and AI collaborate to create meaningful learning experiences. By integrating AI into formative assessment, educators can better understand and support students' unique strengths and challenges, fostering a culture of growth and agency.

Rethinking Assessment Paradigms

AI's capacity to generate text, analyze data, and provide feedback invites a reevaluation of traditional assessment paradigms. One innovative experiment involves grading not essays but the prompts students create. By focusing on the critical thinking and decision-making processes behind AI-generated content, educators can assess deeper cognitive skills. This shift moves assessment from a static, evaluative model to a dynamic, interactive one.

Moreover, AI allows for "depersonalized personalized learning," where content and feedback are tailored to individual students' needs and contexts. This approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also aligns with students' personal and cultural identities, making education more relevant and impactful.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Despite its potential, integrating AI into education is not without challenges. Ethical concerns about bias, data privacy, and equitable access must be addressed to ensure AI serves all students fairly. Additionally, as Kriesel noted, educators must grapple with their own learning curves and uncertainties about AI. "We're not experts," he said. "We're learners alongside our students."

This humility is crucial in navigating an era where the pace of technological change often outstrips institutional readiness. It also underscores the importance of fostering a collaborative learning culture, where educators and students explore AI's possibilities together.

A Moral Imagination for AI

One of the most profound insights from the webinar was the call for a "moral imagination" in AI education. Dr. Wakanyi Hoffman's work on indigenous AI exemplifies this vision. Her AI-powered storytelling bot models how traditional wisdom can inform modern technology, offering a human-centered approach to learning that values empathy, culture, and relationships.

This vision aligns with broader calls to anchor AI in human values. As Dalal remarked, "AI is the first technology where it's as important for it to know about us as it is for us to know about it." By prioritizing relationships and ethical considerations, educators can harness AI not just as a tool but as a partner in building a more just and inclusive educational system.

The Road Ahead

The age of AI presents both unprecedented opportunities and profound uncertainties. As Kriesel and Dalal observed, we are only beginning to understand how AI can support deeper learning and reimagine assessment. Yet, the stories emerging from Orange County and beyond offer a hopeful blueprint for what's possible when students and educators engage with AI collaboratively and creatively.

At its core, the promise of AI lies not in its algorithms but in its ability to amplify human potential. By centering student voices, fostering agency, and embracing a moral imagination, we can ensure that AI serves as a catalyst for deeper, more meaningful learning.

IAEP Center Director, Brent Duckor, noted in the last segment:

> It was fortuitous (pointing to his background bookshelf) as we talk about the moral Imagination and we think a little bit about buttressing ourselves with our own sense, as you said, of sort of what did we bring to the questions that we are questioning about?
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> I think of what's behind me, which is a bookshelf. This is my 17th century/18th century technology: the printing press. The idea that there's actually a book and that the book could contain knowledge.
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> And I have a whole collection of philosophy (in my personal library), including one of my favorites, Hegel. G. W. F. Hegel was quite good at presenting himself as the philosopher who had finally understood everything. He literally came to the conclusion, somewhat hubristically, that he understood everything that was known at that point (in the early 19th century). And this, of course, threw derision upon him by many other philosophers to follow.

> But I think about in some sense the AI challenge, what we don't yet know, is when do we come to the conclusion that we actually have either known enough or that we still need to know more, and that there's more to know that we don't know?
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> It sort of sounds like a little bit of a crazy philosophical conundrum, but it is Evolving. AI is changing. It is actually learning from us, and we are learning from it. And that dialectic is creating a whole new frontiers of potential knowledge.
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> So maybe nobody will be able to do or claim what Hegel thought he could claim with physical books....

Duckor ended the session:

> You are all doing something that is quite inspiring to the rest of California. That is, you are grappling. As you said, I love that idea, with something very powerful for young people that they already need to find, which is voice. They need to continually express what it is and who they are to us, so we can listen more carefully. In this conversation around AI, we might actually find out that it's not that far from what we thought was important 50 years ago, 30 years ago, or 20 years ago. It's just a new way of exploring that challenge, which is engaging students in their own senses as lifelong learners.

As the webinar concluded, one thing was clear: The future of AI in education will be shaped not by technology alone but by the values and vision we bring to it.

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