Artificial Intelligence and Steiner Teacher Education: Navigating a Shifting Landscape

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly present in everyday life, shaping how people interact, work, and learn. For many, particularly younger generations, AI is not a novelty but part of life. As Steiner teacher educators, we may not feel comfortable engaging with AI or consider it relevant to what we do, but we need to be aware of its potential implications for our area of work. I am not here talking about personal opinions on AI or engaging with its role in Steiner schools or teaching children. Instead, I would like to briefly explore Steiner teacher education and AI, in order to raise awareness and open up conversation about potential impacts it might have on our work.

Artificial intelligence, broadly defined, simulates human intelligence in machines, allowing them to perform tasks such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. It has gained public attention with the recent advent of large language models like ChatGPT, DeepSeek, and Gemini, although AI-driven tools such as Alexa and Siri have been around for years. The technology is embedded in many automated systems which are part of everyday life such as Google Maps, predictive texts, bank fraud detection, recommendation algorithms in Facebook, YouTube or Netflix, and so on.

Some Steiner teacher educators may have already experimented with AI tools, finding them useful or otherwise. Others may be sceptical, or simply unfamiliar with them. Some might be opposed to their use in principle or dismiss them as irrelevant. On the surface, artificial intelligence has very little to do with Steiner teacher education. It appears far distant from the values and goals of an anthroposophical teacher education. However, for prospective student teachers in their early twenties, AI is not an abstract concept – it is part of their world. Staying within the walled garden of Steiner education and ignoring it is not a viable long-term approach, any more than ignoring the advent of personal computers was viable twenty or more years ago. Instead, we can take the opportunity to discuss how to engage with it meaningfully.

AI's presence in higher education is undeniable. It enables students (and teachers) to generate substantial amounts of text in seconds – some of it useful, some possibly inaccurate. Written assignments that once required twenty hours of work can now be completed in twenty seconds. Lesson plans, reflections, essays and talks can be generated effortlessly in faultless, convincing language, then refined and personalised.

For teacher educators in formal settings, it raises a fundamental question: how do we assess a student's written work when AI-generated content can be indistinguishable from original

thought? More importantly, how does this affect what I would consider the essential experience of Steiner teacher education – the inner journey of transformation that we seek to cultivate in students?

AI shortcuts the learning process. It delivers the appearance of effort without the experience of engagement. There is no process, only outcome. The struggle to grapple with complex texts and concepts, to develop critical thinking skills, to deepen feeling life – integral aspects of a Steiner teacher education—can be bypassed entirely. If student teachers do not develop these faculties themselves, how will they cultivate them in their own future students?

Throughout history, technological advancements have reshaped human capacities, often trading skill retention for convenience. The printing press reduced reliance on oral storytelling and memorisation. Calculators diminished mental arithmetic skills. The internet has weakened deep reading habits and the ability to sustain attention. Each technological shift has brought benefits, but also losses.

AI represents a profound escalation of this trend. It does not merely assist with tasks; it replaces the need for independent cognitive effort. The risk is not just that AI undertakes or completes work for us, but that it erodes the faculties required for deep thought, discernment, and critical engagement. When people rely on AI tools, they may lose the ability to analyse complex issues, evaluate sources, or form independent opinions. Intellectual autonomy gives way to passive acceptance of AI-generated conclusions.

Writing, too, is more than a means of communication; it is a discipline that refines thinking. AI-generated text may appear polished, but if students bypass the effort of structuring their own arguments, coming to their own conclusions, they lose the cognitive benefits that writing develops – clarity of thought, personal opinion and nuanced reasoning. This gradual weakening of human faculties is not just an educational concern; it has profound implications for culture and society.

Over the past year, tertiary education has undergone major changes in response to the rapid development of AI. Although Steiner teacher education appears to nurture many of the human capacities that AI may undermine, I am not convinced that this alone is enough. It is tempting to feel reassured that we are already doing what needs to be done and therefore no further action is required. However, choosing to ignore AI and hoping it will go away is not a realistic option. As digital technologies increasingly shape both our lives and those of our students, should we ask ourselves: do we have thoughtful, intentional responses in place to actively strengthen the inner qualities we value, both in our students and in ourselves as teacher educators?