

The Rochester Provocations

The TeachingAbout.AI project, made possible in part through funding from Google.org, met in Rochester, New York on December 3-6, 2025 to extend work around the LibraryReady.AI PreK-12 AI Scope and Sequence. We developed eight provocations to inspire thought, dialog, and action around the wicked problem of AI in education. Wicked problems are defined as complex issues without a simple or correct solution. Attempts to resolve wicked problems will be situational, iterative, and messy; even better solutions may introduce new problems. As such, AI was not the primary topic of conversation. Instead our goal is to reframe thinking around AI to the wider issues that must be addressed before undertaking the larger task of teaching educators, students, and the community about AI.

Our thinking was guided by Neil Postman's 1998 lecture "*Five Things we Need to Know About Technological Change*" in which he argued that technological change is ecological rather than additive. The introduction of a new technology alters the entire ecology of a system; its effects cannot be isolated, contained or reversed. This perspective offers a new lens through which to examine the impacts of AI on education and pushes us to consider a broader scope for how we approach this wicked problem.

1. There is no AI problem.

Education itself is a wicked problem; assuming there is an AI-in-education problem risks us thinking there is an AI solution.

2. We can be agents of validity or victims of cheating.

We cannot control cheating and focusing on it will lead to an adversarial relationship with students; where we have agency is in how we engage students with more meaningful tasks that lead to an accurate understanding of student learning.

3. Our assessments were broken before AI.

We need to rethink how we understand and implement assessment including an emphasis on developing and implementing valid assessments in pre-service teacher programs.

4. There is no such thing as AI-proof.

Be it assessments, careers, or anything else, the ubiquity of AI and pace of growth means AI-proof is a problematically alluring impossibility.

5. Most things a human teacher can do, AI can mimic.

If we cannot identify and prioritize what human teachers bring to the classroom, we risk replacement. We must research the impact of human ingenuity, creativity, and relationships.

6. Teachers must have permission to compromise, diverge, and iterate.

Schools must develop a supportive and collaborative culture where teachers are empowered and expected to seek better solutions to the wicked problem we face.

7. The real AI crisis is how we take advantage of the opportunity.

There will not be a perfect solution, but we [students, teachers, institutions, society] have an opportunity to explore innovative changes to what we do.

8. Avoidance of AI in education is not an option.

AI is unavoidable and a failure to address harm reduction feeds into the ongoing public health emergency created by the intentional design of algorithms to extract capital from humans.