

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

Dialogic pedagogy and student agency for critical AI literacy: An action research project

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As generative AI (GenAI) becomes increasingly embedded in higher education, students face contradictory narratives about its use as it is often presented either as a risk to academic integrity or as a valuable educational resource (Luo, 2025). Navigating these tensions can be particularly complex for students from equity groups, who already contend with challenges in adapting to university learning environments (Stokes, 2024). While institutional policies attempt to regulate GenAI use, these often lack the nuance needed to guide context-sensitive decision-making (Corbin et al., 2025). This presentation outlines an action research project that investigated how dialogic teaching approaches can support students in developing critical GenAI literacies through collaborative exploration and reflection.

The research took place within an Australian university's Enabling Education program and was grounded in the principles of Dialogic Pedagogy which is a critical framework rooted in reciprocal communication, shared meaning-making, and the co-construction of knowledge (Shor & Freire, 1987). Rather than imposing rules, this pedagogical model encourages transparency, inquiry, and inclusive negotiation of acceptable practices. Encouraging students, who are new to university, to become active agents supports them to build their critical AI literacy (Toncelli, et al., 2025; Wang & Wang, 2025). This approach shifts the emphasis from compliance to empowerment, allowing students and educators to engage in meaningful dialogue about the ethical and effective use of GenAI in their learning.

Using a critical participatory action research methodology (Kemmis et al., 2014), the study collected data across three foundational courses: language and literacy, digital literacy, and information literacy. In the language and literacy unit, students explored the use of GenAI tools in developing their academic writing. Through classroom activities and reflective discussions, students examined GenAI-generated feedback on their work, considering how such input could enhance their language development while identifying its limitations and ethical implications.

In the digital and information literacy courses, activities focused on the broader societal and epistemological impacts of GenAI. Students investigated how AI technologies influence knowledge creation, information access, and authorship. Educators facilitated discussions that encouraged students to evaluate when and how GenAI might be used responsibly in their coursework, particularly in creative and research-based projects, without compromising academic ownership.

Findings from this project highlight the value of dialogic approaches in Enabling Education programs to help students take ownership of their learning. Students' initial uncertainty shifted to confidence in sharing their experiences of GenAI. Further, this approach created a safe space for open discussion enabling co-construction of knowledge about critical AI literacy. By centering student voice and agency, this model offers a compelling alternative to top-down enforcement of AI-related policies. It suggests that fostering critical engagement with GenAI builds students' confidence and skills and strengthens trust between educators and learners.

This work contributes to emerging conversations around AI literacy in higher education by proposing a framework that is both inclusive and responsive to the real-world complexities of student experience. It underscores the importance of pedagogical strategies that are participatory, flexible, and grounded in shared inquiry, particularly for students navigating the margins of academic culture.

Keywords: Generative AI literacy, Dialogic Pedagogy, student agency, equity in education, action research

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