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The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

A pedagogy of trust: From pandemic adaptation to AI transformation

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The conversation around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education is often framed as though we are adapting from a stable baseline. In reality, teaching and assessment practices were already significantly reshaped by the pandemic, a period that demanded compassion, accessibility, and rapid digital transformation (Hodges et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020). While these shifts improved equity and inclusion, they also normalised highly prescriptive assessment approaches, limiting space for creativity and learner agency (Armoed, 2021; Sambell & Brown, 2021). As Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) now moves from pandemic-driven adaptation toward AI-integrated learning, these inherited practices warrant reconsideration: approaches designed to provide structure and safeguard integrity may inadvertently constrain the agency, experimentation and authentic engagement that emerging technologies make possible.

This presentation challenges the idea that AI is the first major disruption in higher education and presents it as a catalyst that exposes long-standing tensions between guidance and autonomy, support and trust, and structure and freedom within TEL contexts (Eaton, 2020; Selwyn, 2023). Drawing on an integrated theoretical foundation of social constructivism, heutagogy, and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework (TPACK), it introduces the need for an innovative mindset shift from a pedagogy of protection toward a pedagogy of trust (Cole et al., 1978; Hase & Kenyon, 2000; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Applied to assessment design, social constructivism foregrounds dialogue and co-construction, heutagogy supports learner agency and self-determined engagement with AI, and TPACK guides purposeful alignment between emerging technologies, pedagogy and disciplinary knowledge.

Aligned with the *Human-Centred Learning Design* theme, this presentation offers a conceptual lens for rethinking assessment in AI-integrated environments, one that prioritises relationships, learner agency, and co-created integrity. Using strong visual storytelling true to the Pecha Kucha format, the session traces a path from pandemic-era learning and assessment design to the current AI landscape and beyond, highlighting how each moment has reshaped our relationship with knowledge, teaching, and our perceptions of academic integrity. Attendants are invited to reflect on where control-driven practices persist in their own assessment approaches and explore how greater learner choice, transparent AI engagement and co-created expectations for integrity might enable more trust-based, ethically engaged approaches to learning (Bovill, 2020). The challenge is no longer how we protect learning from technology, but how we design for trust, transformation, and future-ready education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, heutagogy, pandemic, learning design, assessment design

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