



Book Review

José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson, *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* (2nd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press, 2025, 400 pages.

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There are moments in the history of education when the ground does not merely shift, but is reconstituted. The second edition of *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* arrives at precisely such a moment. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has moved with unusual speed from novelty to necessity, from experimental curiosity to everyday academic presence. In that context, José Antonio Bowen and C. Edward Watson offer a book that is at once practical, reflective, and deeply provocative. Their work does not ask whether artificial intelligence belongs in education. Instead, it starts from the recognition that AI is already present and asks the more important question: how should teachers, students, and institutions respond with intellectual seriousness?

This is what makes the book particularly valuable. Many recent discussions on AI in education fall into one of two extremes. One treats AI as a revolutionary solution that will modernise teaching, personalise learning, and liberate educators from routine work. The other treats it primarily as a threat to originality, an engine of cheating, and a force that will weaken thought itself. Bowen and Watson avoid both simplifications. Their argument is more disciplined and more useful. They neither romanticise AI nor demonise it. Instead, they treat it as a structural challenge that requires educators to rethink teaching, assessment, and the meaning of learning in an age of machine-assisted cognition.

The central argument of the book

At the heart of the book lies a strong pedagogical claim: AI should not be treated as a minor classroom tool to be inserted into existing practices; it should be understood as a force that compels the redesign of those practices.

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Bowen and Watson show that many conventional academic structures were built on assumptions that no longer hold with the same force. Writing tasks, homework, take-home essays, and even some forms of assessment were designed in a world where information was relatively scarce and where the production of polished text was assumed to reflect primarily human effort. Generative AI unsettles these assumptions.

The authors argue that if AI can summarise sources, generate responses, suggest outlines, produce feedback, and imitate the appearance of reasoning, then educators must look again at what exactly they are evaluating. This does not mean that writing, critical thinking, or research have become irrelevant. On the contrary, the book insists that these capacities matter more than ever. What has changed is the need to distinguish between performance and understanding, between output and intellectual engagement. The enduring strength of the book lies in this insistence that education must now become more intentional about what counts as evidence of learning.

This argument gives the book a seriousness that elevates it beyond a mere survival guide. It is practical, certainly, but it is also conceptual. Bowen and Watson are not simply offering techniques for handling AI in the classroom; they are encouraging readers to reconsider the architecture of education itself.

Pedagogy, co-intelligence, and classroom redesign

One of the most compelling dimensions of the book is its treatment of the relationship between human intelligence and machine support. The authors repeatedly return to the idea that teaching now takes place in a context of co-intelligence, where students increasingly think, write, search, and organise their work with the assistance of digital systems. Rather than pretending this relationship can be erased, Bowen and Watson ask how it can be shaped responsibly.

Their answer is persuasive because it is grounded in pedagogy rather than technological fascination. The book urges educators to redesign assignments so that the process becomes visible. Students should not simply submit final answers; they should demonstrate how they arrived there, where AI was used, what was accepted or rejected, and how human judgment guided the outcome. In this respect, the book places transparency above prohibition. That is an important move. Blanket bans may appear decisive, but they often produce concealment rather than integrity. Bowen and Watson instead advocate an educational response built on disclosure, reflection, and accountability.

The discussion of assessment is especially strong. The authors make a convincing case that the age of AI requires a shift from product-based evaluation to process-rich assessment. Drafts, oral explanation, in-class reflection, iterative revision, and evidence of reasoning become more valuable than isolated polished outputs. This is not a rejection of standards; it is an attempt to recover meaningful standards under altered conditions. In many ways, the book's most practical contribution is its demonstration that assessment must evolve if it is to remain credible.

At the same time, Bowen and Watson do not ignore the danger of intellectual dependency. They recognise that AI can reduce effort, accelerate routine work, and make difficult tasks feel deceptively simple. Yet ease is not always equivalent to learning. One of the book's most insightful suggestions is that cognitive offloading must be paired with intentional re-engagement. Students may use AI to support aspects of learning, but they must still be brought back into acts of judgment, comparison, questioning, and interpretation. This balance between assistance and responsibility is one of the most mature features of the book.

Institutional relevance and ethical concerns

Another notable strength of the book is that it moves beyond the individual classroom and recognises that AI is an institutional issue. The pressures created by generative AI are not confined to teachers alone. They involve policy, faculty workload, professional development, infrastructure, student access, and administrative decision-making. Bowen and Watson understand that pedagogical innovation does not take place in a vacuum. Even the most thoughtful teacher works within systems of accreditation, regulation, risk management, and unequal access to resources.

This wider institutional lens makes the book far more useful than many narrowly technical guides. It acknowledges that educators need frameworks, not just tools. The authors also demonstrate awareness of ethical questions surrounding AI, including fairness, privacy, and the responsibilities that educational institutions bear when adopting technologies that may influence student opportunities and academic practice. Their treatment of ethics is not abstract moralising; rather, it is woven into the broader question of how institutions can respond responsibly to technological change.

The book is equally valuable in its recognition that equity matters. AI is often celebrated for expanding access to information and support, but access is not evenly distributed. Students do not all encounter AI under the same conditions, and institutions differ widely in the technologies they can adopt and regulate. By acknowledging this, Bowen and Watson avoid an

overly celebratory narrative. They understand that educational technologies can widen inequalities even while appearing to democratise opportunity.

A critical appraisal of the book

As a review, it is important to note that teaching with AI is not without limitations. Its tone is pragmatic and solution-oriented, which is one of its strengths, but this also means that some larger structural questions remain only partially explored. Readers looking for a more sustained critique of the political economy of AI in education, the influence of large technology firms, or the long-term implications of data dependency may find the book less radical than they hoped. Bowen and Watson are primarily concerned with helping educators act wisely within the current moment, not with offering a full-scale ideological critique of digital capitalism.

A further limitation is that the book sometimes appears more directly addressed to institutions and instructors who already possess some degree of flexibility, support, or digital readiness. In contexts where resources are scarce, class sizes are large, and institutional autonomy is constrained, some of the proposed redesigns may be difficult to implement in full. This does not invalidate the authors' insights, but it does suggest that the practical applicability of their recommendations will vary significantly across settings.

There is also a deeper intellectual tension in the book that deserves attention. By framing AI as a collaborator or partner in learning, the authors open an important conversation about adaptation, but they also enter uncertain territory. Some readers, particularly in the humanities, may worry that normalising AI as a learning companion risk legitimising forms of intellectual outsourcing that can weaken habits of close reading, patience, and original expression. The book does not ignore this concern, but it remains an unresolved tension rather than a fully settled issue. In truth, that may reflect the state of the debate itself.

Yet these limitations should not overshadow the book's achievement. What Bowen and Watson offer is not a final answer to the AI question, but a serious framework for thinking and acting in a period of rapid change. Their refusal to indulge in panic is admirable, but even more admirable is their refusal to accept superficial enthusiasm. The book is careful, balanced, and pedagogically grounded.

Style and contribution

From a stylistic perspective, the book is clear, readable, and well organised. Bowen and Watson write with the authority of experienced educators, yet they avoid unnecessary jargon. Their prose is accessible without being simplistic, and the book's structure allows readers to move easily between conceptual discussion and practical application. This balance between readability and intellectual seriousness is one of the reasons the book will likely appeal to a wide audience, including classroom teachers, administrators, policy thinkers, and researchers interested in the future of higher education.

More importantly, the book's deeper contribution lies in its defence of the human core of education. Beneath its practical guidance runs a larger argument: if machines can increasingly generate answers, then education must invest more deliberately in the cultivation of judgment, interpretation, ethical reasoning, curiosity, and reflective thought. In that sense, the book is not really about replacing traditional learning with AI-enhanced efficiency. It is about recovering what is most valuable in learning when routine performance can be automated.

That is why this second edition matters. It speaks to a moment in which many educators feel both urgency and uncertainty. Bowen and Watson do not pretend that the situation is simple, nor do they offer easy reassurance. What they do offer is a vocabulary for navigating change with seriousness. They remind us that the question is not whether education will be shaped by AI, but whether it will be shaped thoughtfully.

Final Thoughts

Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning is an important and timely book. It succeeds as a practical guide, but it also succeeds as a provocation to rethink educational purpose in an era of generative technology. Bowen and Watson show that the most productive response to AI is neither naïve adoption nor defensive rejection, but reflective redesign rooted in human judgment and pedagogical integrity.

For that reason, the book deserves serious attention from educators and institutions across disciplines. It does not resolve every debate surrounding AI in education, and it should not be read as the last word on the subject. Nevertheless, it is one of the more balanced and intellectually useful contributions to the field. As a book review, one may finally say that its value lies not only in the advice it provides, but in the seriousness with which it asks educators to reconsider what learning, authorship, and teaching should mean in a transformed academic world.