NO.7

THE EDUCATION CONVERSATION

FEBRUARY 2026

AI, Tech & Experiential Tools for Modern Learning

Using artificial intelligence and hands-on digital tools to create personalized, meaningful learning experiences.

Editor's Note

Beyond the Tool: Designing Learning That Thinks

Artificial intelligence is everywhere in education right now. It promises efficiency, personalization, speed, automation. And while those promises are compelling, they are not the point.

The real question is not what AI can do. The real question is what kind of thinking we are designing for.

In every classroom, whether in the lower grades or in higher education, technology should amplify human thinking, not replace it. When we integrate AI thoughtfully, it can support reflection, feedback, iteration, and creativity. When we use hands-on digital tools intentionally, we move learners from passive consumption to active construction.

Experiential learning has always been powerful because it is rooted in doing. Learners build, test, reflect, revise, and try again. AI, when used responsibly, can strengthen that cycle. It can personalize pathways, generate formative feedback, simulate real-world complexity, and expand access to ideas. But it cannot replace curiosity, judgment, or ethical reasoning.

That is where educators and leaders matter most.

Technology should never drive pedagogy. Strong learning design must lead, and tools must follow. If a platform disappeared tomorrow, would the learning experience still be meaningful? If automation became unavailable, would students still be thinking deeply? These are the questions that anchor responsible innovation.

In this issue, we explore how AI and experiential tools can work together to create personalized, meaningful learning experiences across age groups and contexts. From early years classrooms to higher education settings, the common thread is intentionality. Not using technology because it is available, but because it strengthens thinking. The future of learning will not be defined by smarter machines, but by braver design decisions. It will be shaped by educators who choose depth over speed, agency over automation, and ethics over convenience. If we design with intention, AI becomes a partner in thinking, not a substitute for it. If we lead with clarity, technology becomes a catalyst, not a distraction.

The responsibility is ours. And so is the opportunity.

With care,

Zeina

Featured Contributions

In this section, we spotlight classroom practice and professional insight that bring this month's theme to life. Each contribution reflects thoughtful experimentation with AI and experiential tools, grounded in real educational contexts. Rather than focusing on technology for its own sake, these pieces explore how intentional design, structured exploration, and reflective practice can transform learning into something more personalized, engaging, and meaningful.

AI Took My Place in the Details... and Left Me the Sky

Many of us, as Arabic language teachers, have long dreamed of having a personal assistant in the classroom, someone to handle routine tasks, design activities, rewrite texts, prepare worksheets, and carefully manage differentiation among students. Yet this dream has often been constrained by budget limitations and cost-cutting discussions that make additional classroom support unrealistic.

Today, with the advancement of artificial intelligence, that vision is no longer unattainable.
Through my experience teaching Arabic, I have discovered that AI tools can effectively function as "smart assistants." They generate diverse learning activities within minutes and adapt them to different student levels, offering support where needed and extending challenges for advanced learners. AI can simplify texts, enrich them, or redesign them according to specific learning objectives.

Teachers can now build interactive websites focused on specific skills such as descriptive writing, textual analysis, or vocabulary development. Other platforms are capable of generating complete educational games aligned with the precise skill being practiced, whether grammatical, rhetorical, or communicative.

At this stage, I believe we need to change the question.
We must stop asking: Will AI replace teachers?
Instead, we should ask: How can AI become a collaborative partner in our classrooms?

Artificial intelligence cannot replicate a teacher's empathy, intuition, or ability to read subtle classroom dynamics. It cannot replace human warmth. However, it provides speed, adaptability, and analytical capacity. When we combine human pedagogy with intelligent tools, we create a more balanced and powerful learning environment.

By Ms. Alaa Hassan

> *Artificial intelligence cannot replicate human warmth, but when combined with pedagogy, it creates a more powerful learning environment.*

More importantly, integrating AI into Arabic language classrooms carries a symbolic dimension. Arabic is often, unfairly, portrayed as a language that does not keep pace with modernity or technology. When students see their language taught through advanced digital tools and embedded within innovation, this perception begins to shift.

AI integration helps break the emotional barrier some students feel toward Arabic. It reframes the language as dynamic, flexible, and fully capable of existing at the center of technological progress rather than at its margins. The impact of AI, therefore, is not only about efficiency. It is about emotional transformation. It restores creative space for teachers while rebuilding students' connection to their language.

My experience with AI in Arabic language classrooms has been more than a technological shift, it has been a pedagogical and cultural transformation that re-energized my teaching and helped position Arabic as a language of the future.

By Ms. Noor Khanfar, M.Ed.

> *When technology becomes part of the design process, students stop being passive learners and begin seeing themselves as thinkers, creators, and change makers.*

Beyond The Screen: Using Hands-On Digital Tools in Lower Grades

When AI in education is mentioned, it usually focuses on applying it and its tools in upper grades and classes. But, in my experience teaching in lower grades, the real transformation begins much earlier! This can be observed when technology is built, tested and reimagined.

In lower grades and primary education, learning is based on hands-on activities and practices where learners are motivated to contemplate with their hands before thinking abstractly. Therefore, digital tools such as simple robotic kits, colouring blocks, digital story telling platforms and design tools can be incredibly impactful and powerful when applied and used thoughtfully.

And the key word here is - thoughtfully!

As lower grades' educators in the modern educational systems, we are always trying to apply games and exciting practices during our sessions. Therefore, we must acknowledge that technology should not replace fun and play in educational settings, but it enhances it. For instance, when students use basic robotics to solve a classroom challenge (like designing a simple "water delivery system" or navigating a robot through a map), they are not just "learning technology." They are developing problem-solving skills, spatial awareness, collaboration, and resilience. When they use digital storytelling tools to narrate their own science observations, they are strengthening literacy alongside digital fluency.
What makes hands-on digital tools meaningful in lower grades is not the tool itself. But it is the structure around it.

From here, we acknowledge that our young learners need;

- Clear simple challenges.
- Time to explore, investigate and make mistakes.
- Time to reflect, think of what did and didn't happen.
- Guided questions that connect digital tools to real-world scenarios in their surroundings.

In my classroom practice, I have seen that when technology and its tools become a part of the learning session and the design process in stages including Ask, Imagine, Plan, Create and Improve; students begin to see themselves as thinkers, creators and change makers rather than passive learners.
However, we should shed the light on the responsibility of applying digital tools in lower grades to keep experiences safe, balanced and effective to improve sensory learning, social interactions and academic performance. When AI tools are properly used, they can build cognitive thinking, increase engagement for diverse learners and strengthen communication which will lead to learners' ability to design solutions and explain their reasoning.

The future of AI and educational technology begins in our classes, both lower and upper grades - by responsibly using it and empowering learners to discover, create and establish. Because, in academic settings technology is not about devices, it is about building thinkers.

Leadership Reflection Box

Leading with Clarity in an Age of Intelligent Tools

Artificial intelligence is accelerating. Leadership judgment must deepen.

The question is no longer whether AI belongs in education but how, why, and under what conditions.

Before adopting or scaling any new technology, pause and ask:

- What learning problem are we trying to solve?
- Is pedagogy driving this decision — or momentum and pressure?
- Will this tool strengthen critical thinking, or shortcut it?
- Does this innovation build long-term educator capacity?
- Are privacy, equity, and student wellbeing fully protected?
- How will we evaluate meaningful impact beyond surface-level engagement?

Responsible leadership in the age of AI is not about speed.

It is about discernment.

It requires clarity of purpose, courage to say no when needed, and commitment to design learning experiences that remain strong, with or without technology.

Innovation should expand human potential, not replace it.

And leadership must ensure that it does.

Practical Toolkit Section

5 Tools You Can Try This Month

Technology integration is most powerful when it is intentional, aligned, and purpose-driven. The tools below are not recommendations for adoption at scale, but starting points for thoughtful experimentation. As leaders and educators, our role is not to chase innovation, but to evaluate it carefully, asking how each tool strengthens thinking, deepens engagement, and supports meaningful learning design.

1. AI-Supported Feedback Tool

MagicSchool AI
Website: https://www.magicschool.ai

What it does:

MagicSchool AI helps educators generate differentiated feedback, rubric-aligned comments, lesson adaptations, and scaffolding prompts tailored to education contexts.

Why it matters pedagogically:

High-quality feedback drives learning, but it is often time-intensive. When used thoughtfully, AI-supported feedback can:

- Provide faster formative insights
- Support differentiation
- Free educator time for deeper conferencing and relationship-building
- The goal is not automation, but augmentation.

Simple implementation idea:

Upload a short student writing sample and generate rubric-aligned feedback at two levels (e.g., developing and proficient). Refine before sharing and use it as a drafting partner rather than the final voice.

2. Creative / Design Tool

Canva for Education
Website: https://www.canva.com/education/

What it does:

Canva for Education allows students to design presentations, infographics, short videos, storyboards, and visual explanations using structured templates.

Why it matters pedagogically:

Design-based learning strengthens:

- Concept synthesis
- Visual literacy
- Communication skills
- Ownership of learning

When students create rather than consume, understanding deepens.

Simple implementation idea:

Instead of a traditional summary assignment, ask students to design a one-page visual explanation of a concept using constraints (maximum five visuals and 100 words). Include a short reflection explaining their design choices.

3. Experiential Tool

Ozobot (Entry-Level Robotics)
Website: https://ozobot.com/

What it does:

Ozobot robots respond to color-coded commands and basic programming, allowing learners to build, test, and iterate through hands-on challenges.

Why it matters pedagogically:

- Robotics integrates:
- Computational thinking
- Problem-solving
- Collaboration
- Iteration and resilience

It transforms abstract logic into visible, testable action.

Simple implementation idea:
Design a real-world challenge (e.g., create a delivery route that avoids obstacles). Students plan, test, revise, and explain their reasoning, with reflection built into each iteration.

4. **AI Thinking Partner Tool**

ChatGPT (Structured Academic Use)
Website: https://chat.openai.com/

What it does:
ChatGPT can generate explanations, practice questions, counterarguments, case scenarios, and guided prompts to support inquiry and deeper thinking when used with clear structure.

Why it matters pedagogically:

When positioned as a thinking partner rather than an answer machine, it can:

- Support metacognition
- Model high-quality reasoning
- Help students compare perspectives
- Encourage revision and refinement of ideas

The impact depends entirely on how it is framed and scaffolded.

Simple implementation idea:
Ask students to submit their own response to a question first. Then have them prompt ChatGPT to generate an alternative perspective. Students must analyze similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses before revising their original answer.

5. Research Support Tool

Elicit (AI Research Assistant)
Website: https://elicit.com/

What it does:

Elicit is an AI-powered research assistant that helps scholars search academic literature, summarize papers, extract key variables, and compare findings across studies.

Why it matters pedagogically:
For researchers and doctoral students, it can:

- Accelerate literature scanning
- Support systematic thinking
- Help identify patterns across studies
- Reduce time spent on early-stage synthesis

It is not a replacement for critical reading, but a tool that supports structured inquiry and evidence mapping.

Simple implementation idea:
Use Elicit to generate an initial list of papers on a focused research question. Compare its summaries with your own reading notes and identify gaps, disagreements, or methodological trends before drafting a literature review section.

Access & Subscription Note

Many of the tools listed above offer free versions with limited features, alongside paid or institutional plans with expanded functionality. Before adoption, review pricing structures, data policies, and school or university licensing agreements to ensure alignment with your context and budget.

Responsible Use Reminder

AI and digital tools should support, not replace, professional judgment.
Before introducing any new platform, consider:

- Is the learning objective driving tool selection?
- Are data privacy and student safety protected?
- Does this tool build capacity, or create dependency?

Responsible innovation requires clarity, balance, and ongoing reflection.

Closing Reflection

TECHNOLOGY BUILDS THINKERS WHEN WE DESIGN FOR IT

Throughout this issue, one message remains clear: technology is not transformative on its own. Tools do not innovate. Platforms do not think. Artificial intelligence does not learn.

People do.

The power of AI and experiential tools lies not in their sophistication, but in the intention behind their use. When educators design for inquiry, reflection, iteration, and dialogue, technology becomes a catalyst for deeper thinking. When leaders align innovation with purpose, digital tools become extensions of thoughtful pedagogy rather than distractions from it.

The future of modern learning will not be defined by how advanced our tools become. It will be defined by the questions we ask, the structures we build, and the values we protect.

- Will we design learning environments that reward speed or cultivate depth?
- Will we automate answers or strengthen reasoning?
- Will we chase innovation or lead it with clarity?

AI can personalize pathways. Experiential tools can make thinking visible. But neither can replace curiosity, ethical judgment, collaboration, or resilience.

Those are human capacities.

And the responsibility to develop them rests with us.

If we design intentionally, lead courageously, and integrate technology responsibly, we do more than modernize learning.

We build thinkers. We build creators. We build reflective, capable humans prepared not just to use intelligent tools, but to shape the world in which those tools exist.

Coming in Issue #8:
Neurodiversity and Learning Pathways
Celebrate cognitive diversity through experiential practices that adapt to learners, not the other way around.

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