

Ready for the Future of Education With Artificial Intelligence?

By [Contributing Blogger](#) on January 9, 2019, 9:48 AM. | [No comments](#)

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News Flash! 2019 is here, whether you are ready or not. Second Flash! Almost no one in the education sector is ready for the Future, capital "F", that I learned about when taking an **online course on artificial intelligence** offered through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Which means we need to get cracking.

You might be thinking that artificial intelligence (AI) is not something people in education need to focus on too much. After all, AI is really about replacing routine jobs in factories and large businesses, right? And although that may be troubling to educators, no one is seriously thinking that robots are going to replace this country's **3.1 million public school teachers**, right?

Here's why people in education (at all levels) need to get hip to AI.

First and foremost, we need to prepare our students for the future, and wringing our hands about how we don't even know which jobs will be available in 20 years isn't an acceptable response. We may not know exact job titles or descriptions, but **we have some sense of what's coming** and the constituent components to those jobs. We know, for example, that the keys to the kingdom ahead will belong to **students who can code**, who can understand neuroscience, and who can navigate complex scenarios involving psychology, ethics, and systems thinking.

We know that new sectors dedicated to collecting, scrubbing, curating, and controlling access to data will be half of the economy because all AI depends on huge amounts of **carefully filtered** data. We also know that as machines "learn" to replace workforce functions, new jobs will arise; someone has to conceive of the right way to partner with, manage, train, and oversee the bots (and the data they rely on) as they fill in positions formerly held by humans.

Second, AI has the capacity to change the way schools operate day to day. Robots could be employed to extend the reach of teaching staff for noncertificated functions like monitoring playground interactions via drones. Check out **this video about social robots** and how they are already helping underserved and often vulnerable populations, including kids with special needs needing to practice their social skills.

With advances in natural-language processing, we will soon be able to give all students learning English an instructional assistant-bot that can make all materials accessible, correct their grammar, and practice speaking with them, while they're in science class. When autonomous cars are perfected and given their own preferential lane on highways, we can capitalize on their **speed capacity** to close the gap on accessing high-quality schools for rural students. Picture a little fleet of autonomous mini-buses collecting kids along rural routes, providing them access to the 8:00 a.m. class via **telepresence** while they are driven over 250 miles in 30 minutes to school in a town that was previously inaccessible.

And if you're in higher ed., seriously, sit down and fasten your seat belts. The **changes to the workforce** will come so fast it will blow your hair back faster than the guy in the **Maxell cassette tape ad** (do you remember cassettes?), sharpening the question of relevance in education to a pin-sharp point. Companies are going to catch on to the practice of backwards mapping and simply post positions made up of educational components that are needed—coding, problem-solving, creative solution capacity—and people who want those jobs will simply go out and purchase very specific, tightly aligned, learning opportunities either through the employer or a third party that has blockchain verification. Workers will collect and showcase evidence of their skills in digital formats, tagging their own work and competencies to be noticed by the machine-learning-driven, talent-seeking platforms employers use now and will expand their use of in the future. Do you see a university in there anywhere?

It may be that the real use of universities in this brave new world is to raise up a new generation of philosophers, creatives, and ethicists whose job is to help us lasso these wild bucking bronco-bots. I was relieved to learn in my course there are **some things computers and robots are poorly suited to doing**. While natural-language processing can give us relatively accurate translations of words, it can't understand, express, or explain language idioms. If you say, "Give them an inch, and they'll take a mile" it will likely give you back a blank stare. And it turns out that there are certain brain functions associated with crafting and telling stories and creative work that bots can't do well. Lo and behold; artists may end up at the top of the heap in 2050. Wouldn't that be fun to see?

And at the end of the day, robots cannot be human. They can't know or love a student in that way that allows one to inspire and motivate another person, the way a teacher does. But if teachers really want to engage, inspire, and prepare their students for the future, they need to explore the field of AI and understand how it's going to completely reshape the world and how our students can use that opportunity to reshape it for the better.

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