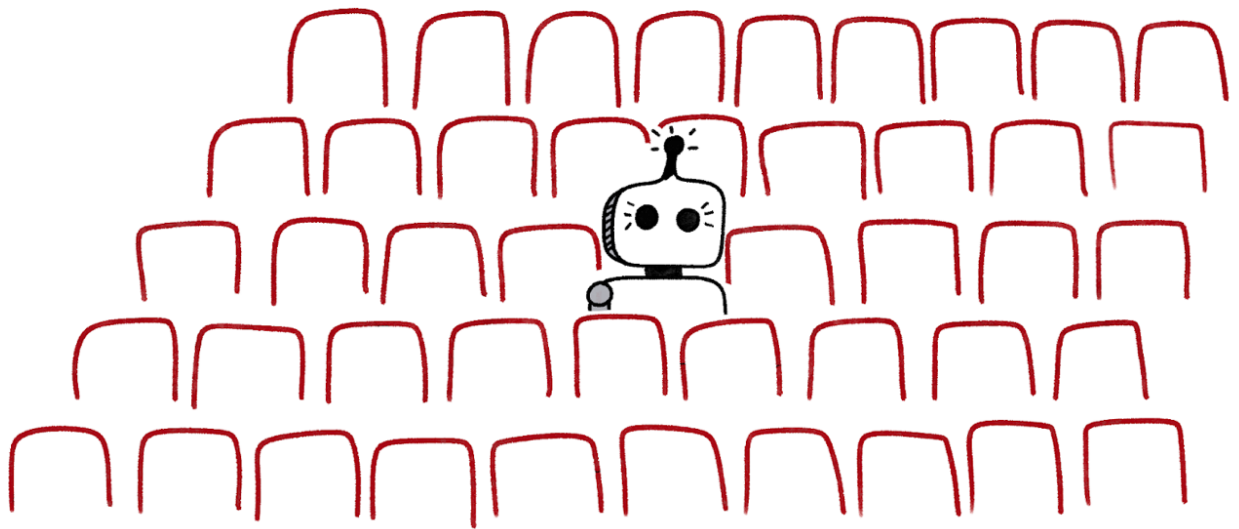




AN AI POLICY ISN'T A PLAYBOOK:

EDUCATORS NEED AGENCY, NOT JUST NEW RULES

BY

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WITH

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INTRODUCTION

Many educators in US schools are having a “Ted Lasso” moment when it comes to AI. By “Ted Lasso,” we are referring to a TV show¹ that follows Ted, an American college football coach from Kansas City, who is hired to run a professional English soccer club by an owner who is expecting (and hoping) he will fail. Although he’s been coaching for a long time, **Ted is brought in to coach a game that he doesn’t know how to play**. The show is framed around the experience of watching his earnest, deeply well-intentioned efforts to rise to the moment despite not knowing the rules.

In one episode, Ted is leaving the training facility and finds reporters waiting for him in the parking lot. One accosts him, lists a string of recent failings he’s had as a coach, and asks, “How worried are you about the threat of relegation?”²

Ted replies, “Right now, I’m mostly concerned with the definition of relegation.” In this moment, Ted is admitting he doesn’t yet know that his team could be dropped to a lower league if they keep losing.

Miffed by his answer, the reporters continue, asking Ted about a key player who recently left due to the team’s losing streak. Ted says, “Well, if I’m being honest, it, uh, breaks my heart a little. I think one of the neatest things about being a coach is the connection you get to make with your players. That’s a loss that hits me a lot harder and is gonna stay with me a lot longer than anything that happens while playing a game on a patch of grass.”

Our research team has thought a lot about Ted Lasso as we’ve talked with educators about the effects of generative AI in their schools. **At a high level, there is the reality that Ted Lasso, despite years of experience coaching, suddenly finds himself coaching a very different game. Educators face their own version of this challenge as AI tools simply arrive³ in and outside of their classrooms, changing the game in ways that profoundly impact learning and teaching.** Just as Ted Lasso lacks familiarity with UK football terms like “relegation,” a teacher might not know exactly what AI-related concepts like “AGI”⁴ or “cognitive surrender”⁵ fully mean (few of us do). Rather than struggling over the loss of a player to another team, a teacher might be struggling with the loss of their sense of a student, because the work they turn in may have been assisted, or produced outright, by AI.

But there’s an important difference in Ted’s story, one that every educator will immediately recognize. Unlike teachers today, Ted *chose* to coach a game he didn’t know how to play. He brought along his best friend and assistant, Coach Beard, who helped him learn the rules and call the plays. Ted was allowed, expected even, to lead with his values. He had permission to prioritize the growth and wellbeing of his players over winning. Ted’s story isn’t a story about struggling to have agency. It’s a story about what having agency can *do*.

WHAT'S INSIDE

AGENCY WITH AI	3
<i>Why we need (yet) another framework</i>	
WHAT WE'RE HEARING	5
<i>Educators and students describe their dilemmas with AI</i>	
WHAT WE'RE DOING	12
<i>Five plays you can use tomorrow in your classroom</i>	
FROM REF TO COACH	24
<i>The mindshifts each play needs to succeed</i>	

In this report we synthesize what we have learned about the effects of generative AI on teaching and learning.⁶ We have been listening to educators and young people talk about life with technology for fifteen years. Since ChatGPT launched in late 2022, those conversations have increasingly turned to AI. In 2024, we were funded by the John Templeton Foundation to explore how young people build character in the age of AI.⁷ As part of that work, we set out to conduct a “landscape analysis” of school AI policies. But the more we listened, the clearer it became that even in schools with policies, what matters most is whether the people inside those schools – teachers, principals, and students – have **agency** to navigate a moment that’s changing faster than any rule can keep up with. As we’ll discuss, agency involves more than AI literacy. It also means having real choices about how these tools fit into our classrooms and our lives.

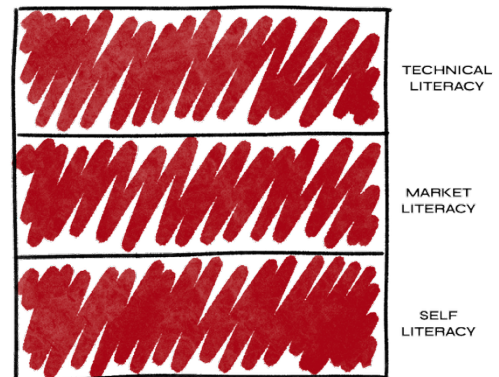
Organizational psychologist Adam Grant defines **character** as our capacity to prioritize our values over our instincts.⁸ We lean on this definition because it treats character as a capacity rather than a given, and because it highlights the relationship between our values and our choices. To Grant, and to others long before him,⁹ character is something we practice. But practicing honesty, courage, humility – some of the many virtues good character requires – means having actual choices to make. Without agency, students can’t build character. Without agency, teachers can’t give their students choices.

We wrote this report for educators grappling with what AI means for teaching and learning. We draw on a range of data to inform it, including interviews and focus groups with educators and youth, advisory groups and professional development workshops, and a nationally representative survey of public school teachers and principals. We start by explaining what we mean by “agency,” then we move into what we’re hearing from educators and young people, and finally what we’re doing in response. We conclude by recommending mindshifts to support educators as they move from referees of AI use to coaches equipped with plays that support agency for their students, and themselves.

AGENCY WITH AI

At the Center for Digital Thriving, we define digital agency¹⁰ as having meaningful choice, intentionality, and control over how technologies fit into our lives. While we recognize that agency can be undercut by the systems we live within, we also cultivate a stance of critical optimism¹¹ that agency is possible. Part of what makes that possible is AI literacy. By “AI literacy,” we actually mean three things:

- **Technical Literacy** – understanding how AI tools operate, their strengths and limitations, and how to use them effectively.
- **Market Literacy** – understanding the market forces that incentivize the way AI technologies are designed and distributed.
- **Self Literacy** – knowing your values, ethics, and goals, recognizing where you have expertise and where you don’t, and attending to how these intersect with AI.



When we use the word “agency,” we don’t only mean agency as individuals. As the psychologist Albert Bandura described,¹² humans exercise agency in three modes:

- **Individual Agency** – when you act directly, exercising choice and control yourself.
- **Collective Agency** – when we act together, through relationships and shared values.
- **Proxy Agency** – when others with more power act on our behalf, through policies, rules, and institutional norms.



PUTTING LITERACY + AGENCY TOGETHER

These concepts come together in the **AGENCY-CENTERED FRAMEWORK FOR AI LITERACY**,¹³ which defines how these literacies and modes of agency interact. Through the framework, we can diagnose where agency is missing, start conversations about it, and develop targeted strategies for educators and students. Crucially, Bandura argued that agency is not just our capacity to have choice, intention, and control in our lives. It’s also our belief that we have that capacity. So, the framework also gives us all hope – to *BELIEVE*, as Ted Lasso might say¹⁴ – that we can have more of a say over how AI shapes our lives and learning.

NOT ANOTHER FRAMEWORK?!

We know there is no shortage of AI literacy frameworks in the education landscape, and we considered calling the table below something else to avoid adding to the pile. But! This one adds several important things currently missing from the conversation:

- 1 It names **collective agency** as a key dimension shaping technology's effects.
- 2 It recognizes **market forces** as a significant factor in our digital experiences.
- 3 It underscores the importance of **self-awareness** in our interactions with AI.

	Individual Agency <i>(you act directly)</i>	Collective Agency <i>(we act together)</i>	Proxy Agency <i>(others act for us)</i>
Technical Literacy <i>(how AI works in practice)</i>	Understanding how generative AI works; discerning if, when, and how to use it.	Being transparent about AI use; building trust; learning together.	Knowing what AI can and can't do; how design choices and policies shape your access and options.
Market Literacy <i>(the business models behind these tools)</i>	Being alert to the data collected about you, not for you; choosing what to share.	Advocating for AI that's accessible, safe, fair, and built without exploiting people or the planet.	Recognizing hidden incentives in AI tools, platform settings, and policies.
Self Literacy <i>(who you are and who you are becoming)</i>	Knowing your values, goals, and moral compass; having humility about your limits.	Co-creating shared values and norms around AI use, with care for others in your community.	Noticing when AI agents, people, or policies uphold or compromise your values.

The **AGENCY-CENTERED FRAMEWORK FOR AI LITERACY** is a **diagnostic** tool. It helps you understand where agency is present and where it's missing. It's also **tactical**. It helps you make decisions that support agency for your school and students. And, most importantly, it's **aspirational**. It helps you imagine where agency is possible – for both educators and students. And, like all frameworks, it works best with examples. So, let's dive into the data. In the sections that follow, we use educator and youth voices and national survey findings to show what the framework helps us see, *and* what it suggests we do.

WHAT WE'RE HEARING

Since November 2022, when the release of ChatGPT inspired a flood of generative AI chatbots, image generators, and AI companions, our team has been working to understand them. We've also been doing the one thing we know helps when technology outpaces our understanding: **listening**. We've been listening to educators and young people talk about the effects of generative AI in their lives, their learning, and their character. We surveyed nationally representative samples of public school teachers and principals – more than 1,000 educators – in April and May of 2025¹⁵ about their experiences with generative AI and related policies. And in the following school year, we continued conducting interviews and focus groups, facilitating workshops, and hosting communities of practice. The most recent student interviews ran from April through June of 2026.¹⁶ In the sections that follow, we report on the most salient themes we've noticed across these efforts, framing each theme with a direct quote from an educator.¹⁷

“THE USE OF AI TO CHEAT HAS BEEN A REAL ISSUE”

In our national survey, we asked teachers and principals, “Have you experienced any dilemmas or difficult decisions related to the use or implementation of generative AI in your school or classroom?” 25% of teachers and 29% of principals who responded to this question said yes.¹⁸ Among teachers, the percentage varied by school level: roughly one in ten (11%) in elementary school reported a dilemma, compared with nearly three in ten (29%) in middle school and more than four in ten (44%) in high school. Elementary teachers make up about half of public school teachers in the US, which pulls the overall number down.¹⁹

We asked educators who said yes to describe a specific situation, and stories about cheating dominated their replies. 74% of teacher descriptions (171 total) and 69% of principal descriptions (85 total) were coded as cheating-related,²⁰ spanning a wide range of schoolwork and activities – essays, research papers, math problems, lab reports, college credit courses, state exams, art projects, and extracurriculars. Educators described students using AI where it wasn't allowed:

“...for entrance into the Hispanic Honor Society.”

(High School Foreign Language Teacher)

“...on Snapchat to take pictures of their homework and it will fill in the answers for them.” (High School Math Teacher)

“...to answer test questions including on state exams.” (Elementary School Teacher)

“...to generate an essay application to attend an optional field trip.”

(6th Grade Science Teacher)

“...to write 75% of their [graduation] speech.” (Middle School Principal)

When we talked to students, they spoke directly to their use of AI in schoolwork:

“Oh, I always use AI.” (High School Junior, 16 yo)

“It’s not a secret anymore ... it’s everybody using AI nowadays.” (High School Freshman, Age Not Given)

“And the nice thing is I can just take a picture [and upload it to Gauth] and be, like, on my merry little way.” (College Student, 18 yo)

“I had some overdue homework for math, and I didn’t feel like doing it, so I was just like, ‘hey, do this for me.’ And then it did it for me.” (High School Sophomore, 16 yo)

It’s tempting to read these quotes and assume that “everybody” is “using AI” to cheat, but below we show that some of these uses are supporting learning – the same kind of help an attentive parent or tutor would give, coming from a chatbot instead. And some of it is exactly what it looks like above: handing an assignment over entirely. Without market literacy, students don’t see how the design and marketing of these tools make it hard to use them in ways that support learning. Some tools are directly marketed as homework helpers, while others are built for working adults – what Rebecca Winthrop calls “wide” AI use²¹ – with no built-in guardrails. Students describe these in-between uses:

“[I used AI for] a math problem that I had trouble with last night ... It had everything right except for one part ... I argued with it and decided that it was wrong and I was right.” (High School Senior, 18 yo)

“There was a paragraph and I was like, okay, I like this paragraph, but it’s not what it could be. This paragraph is not going to give me an A, so, you know, [I asked AI to] reword my paragraph so it’s more professional or more academic or more concise.” (High School Senior, 18 yo)

“I put it in the chat and was like, ‘grade this because this is a question for my final exam for my religion class’ ... it tells you like, oh, this is what you did good. This is what needs improvement.” (College Student, 18 yo)

AI use is everywhere, and agreement about what is and isn’t okay is all over the place. This leaves students to navigate these choices on their own, and often in secret. Wharton professor Ethan Mollick calls people who hide AI use **SECRET CYBORGS**.²² Many of us, adults included, experience tensions around when to use these tools, especially if we are pressed for time or in over our heads. Students are navigating these same tensions in learning environments that are expressly designed to continually challenge them, and in a larger ecosystem that they have described as a “*culture of needing to be productive all*

*the time and, like, needing to be working all the time and, like, the grind ... it's so damaging."*²³ It's easy to dismiss student cheating as laziness or apathy, and in some cases it may be, but the stories we hear suggest that they are doing their best to contend with cultural pressures while staying true to their values – just like we are.

"It sucks because I never was going to cheat, but now it feels like I have to."
(Student, Age and Grade Not Given)

"I feel like guilt plays a role in it too – although I have [used AI and hid it], I did not feel good about it." (Student, Age and Grade Not Given)

"It makes me kind of feel like I'm not human because ... it's so different from how I lived without AI. It feels like there's pre-AI and post-AI." (College Student, 18 yo)

“THERE’S NO ACTUAL PROOF”

Detection of AI is a huge challenge well beyond schools. Journalists face mounting difficulty verifying synthetic images and video.²⁴ Deepfake candidates (using AI-generated video to fake one's presence in a virtual job interview) are applying for jobs.²⁵ Tools marketed to detect cheating have been shown to be unreliable,^{26, 27} leaving teachers who suspect students of cheating with no reliable way to prove it. Some teachers use what we've come to call **AI-DAR** (like radar) to try to sense when AI has been used.

"A student submitted a writing piece to me. The response did not align with work he had previously done. I was suspicious that the student's writing was AI generated, [but when I ran it through a detector] the result came back that the piece was written by a human. However, judging that one particular piece against all the other pieces of writing the student had done, I still had the impression that he did not write the response himself. The dilemma for me was whether or not to confront him about the matter because I had no definitive proof that he had used AI." (9th Grade ELA Teacher)

"When a student digs in and says they didn't use it, there's no actual proof."
(7th Grade ELA Teacher)

"It's gotten to the point where it's almost impossible to pull a student aside and say, 'you used AI' because you can't. You can't prove it." (High School Senior, 17 yo)

At the same time, students describe facing a similar burden of proof, but in reverse. We've heard many stories from young people about being falsely accused of cheating with AI. In one listening session, a young person told us about a friend who was falsely accused on an assignment. The teacher ultimately believed she was innocent, but she had to redo the assignment anyway because the teacher feared the state examiner would flag it too, and

with greater consequences. We've even heard from students who have begun to cap their effort, or perform mediocrity on purpose to not get flagged:

"We can't make ourselves sound too smart anymore, we cannot give our full effort anymore, because then we're at the risk of being detected for AI, because there are teachers who've told us point blank, 'if it gets detected for AI, I'm not going to have a discussion with you about it. Even if you say you wrote it, I'm just not gonna believe you.'" (Academically Ranked as High School Senior, 15 yo)

"MY HANDS WERE TIED"

Teachers are often placed at the frontlines of these nuances. And they say that students can "dig in" and deny use when confronted. Only 18% of teachers and 24% of principals in our survey reported that their school has specific policies governing generative AI use.²⁸ This can leave teachers on their own, exercising individual agency without the proxy agency of institutional policies and administrator support, or a sense of collective agency with their peers.

"I strongly suspected that a student turned in an IB investigation that was AI generated, and an AI detector agreed with me. But school policy is not to penalize students for using AI. I considered it cheating, but my hands were tied in terms of penalizing." (High School Math Teacher)

"A set of parents sued the school when their child was found to be using generative AI. The school was too scared and sided with the parents. I would have LOVED resources on how to know for certainty whether or not a student is using AI in their assignments." (High School Social Studies Teacher)

"I AM UNABLE TO ACCURATELY ASSESS THEIR ABILITY"

But beyond issues of accusation is the struggle teachers now have assessing what their students do and do not actually know. In Ted Lasso terms, it's like trying to coach a game blindfolded. Teachers describe dilemmas like:

"Trying to figure out how to trust that students are doing their thinking while AI is all around. In ELA we teach and assess thinking and writing standards. It is increasingly difficult to do that when students hand over thinking to AI." (High School Teacher)

"How to accurately assess what students understand and the degree to which they understand them on any given assignment that is taken outside the classroom. Students use AI on so many things." (8th Grade Math Teacher)

"We allowed our students to use AI to give feedback on their writing ... [they used] the feedback over and over again until their writing no longer contained any of

their original work. [We made them] start over with their original draft and [they] were not allowed to use AI for feedback." (5th Grade Teacher)

Some students feel the same dilemma, but from the inside. It's not lost on them that AI can compromise learning:

"But with AI, you trick yourself into thinking you're learning, even though, like, you're getting the answers and it's explaining it to you. I think we have this false confidence that we're actually really taking in what AI is giving us."
(College Student, 18 yo)

"NOW I AM FORCED TO LEARN IT MYSELF"

Teaching with and using AI feels less and less optional, as many educators realize they need to prepare their students for a world that requires them to use AI ethically and effectively. But putting that into practice can put teachers in a tough spot, either because they themselves don't know how to use these tools, or because the tools, as they exist today, fundamentally misalign with their values. Dilemmas like these reveal how educators' agency is being undercut in some of the most consequential choices they make: what and how to teach.

"My dilemma is that I am personally against the existence of generative AI given how much its usage is already affecting our society and students. And yet, it feels almost necessary to teach students how to use it responsibly and effectively because there are no limits or controls on its existence and usage. So now I am forced to learn it myself in an attempt to do this." (High School ELA Teacher)

"I am trying to find the balance of teaching them to use [AI] correctly while also learning about it myself. I don't want to be a teacher who does not allow her student to use this tool at all and risk them falling behind their peers." (6th Grade ELA Teacher)

Inside schools, AI has become something faculty actively debate. In some, we heard of school leaders strongly encouraging use and teachers refusing outright. In others, we heard of school leaders putting bans in place and teachers breaking them:

"Admin encourages teachers to use AI to write emails and generate content for curriculum. It is very evident when it is used and takes away from teacher thinking and ownership." (High School Special Education Teacher)

"Several teachers flat out refused to allow students to use it after the decision was made that they could ... it took several meetings with the teachers involved as well as with the union to get this sorted out." (Principal)

"AI is blocked [at my school] so I have to balance: do I want to teach students about the world they will (already do) inhabit, or follow policy? I chose to break policy." (High School Science Teacher)

"Teachers in the building are debating whether or not it is appropriate to use AI to do planning for our instruction. This feels like a dilemma because we would be less involved in selecting material and therefore engage less with curriculum. This hasn't been resolved and we have been told to use our best judgment." (Kindergarten Teacher)

"STUDENTS RECOGNIZE THIS HYPOCRISY"

Teachers are increasingly using AI tools, and for a variety of reasons. When students notice their teachers using AI to create lessons or grade assignments while also telling them their own work must be original, they can read it as hypocrisy. This can erode trust, and even become its own justification for cheating.

"Teachers who insist on original work often use generative AI to create lessons. Students recognize this hypocrisy, which they believe justifies using generative AI to do their work for them." (High School ELA Teacher)

"[Students] feel it is unfair for teachers to use it to create assignments. While I can understand their frustration, I explain to them that we have the knowledge, but it saves us time. They are still learning." (Middle School Math Teacher)

"I feel like, well, teachers, they should be a role model ... if they don't want us to count 100% on AI, I don't know why they're doing it. It's kind of hypocritical, but ... I just leave it because I'm a student at the end of the day." (High School Freshman, Age Not Given)

We call this **TWO-WAY SUSPICION**: when two parties both suspect each other of using AI, eroding trust regardless of whether AI is actually used. Or as one student put it, *"it's kind of like a hellscape for both students and teachers."* Students even describe this suspicion among themselves:

"I'm always scared now that people in my group are going to write something and just input it from AI ... So today, earlier, I was putting our whole paper into an AI detector and I put it in four different ones. And one of them flagged all my writing. And I knew ... I did all the writing, I know that I typed it all out." (College Student, 18 yo)

This suspicion can erode the individual agency both teachers and students exercise with AI in ways that fit their work, and the collective agency they build when they figure out what good use can look like, together.

“PARENTS GET UPSET”

Parents also play a role in the dilemmas educators (and students) describe. Sometimes parents are central to the dilemma, and other times they complicate what's happening between their child and the school. This is challenging because their concerns diverge:

“Parents feel as though [allowing AI] is encouraging cheating.” (High School Teacher)

“We have had parents get upset when we don't accept work because it was written by AI.” (Middle School Social Studies Teacher)

“A student turned in a paper completely generated by AI and lied about it ... the parent was completely not concerned or didn't care about the dishonesty.”
(Middle School ELA Teacher)

“Parents are concerned when teachers use it to grade student work.” (Principal)

This pressure extends to students as well. Young people have described their parents pressuring them to use AI even when they don't want to, or, in some cases, when their school policy prohibits it.

“My father was like ... I don't know why they have this 'no AI' policy ... you're gonna have an internship at my AI company, and we're gonna make sure you understand how to use AI because AI is the future, blah blah blah.” (High School Senior, 18 yo)

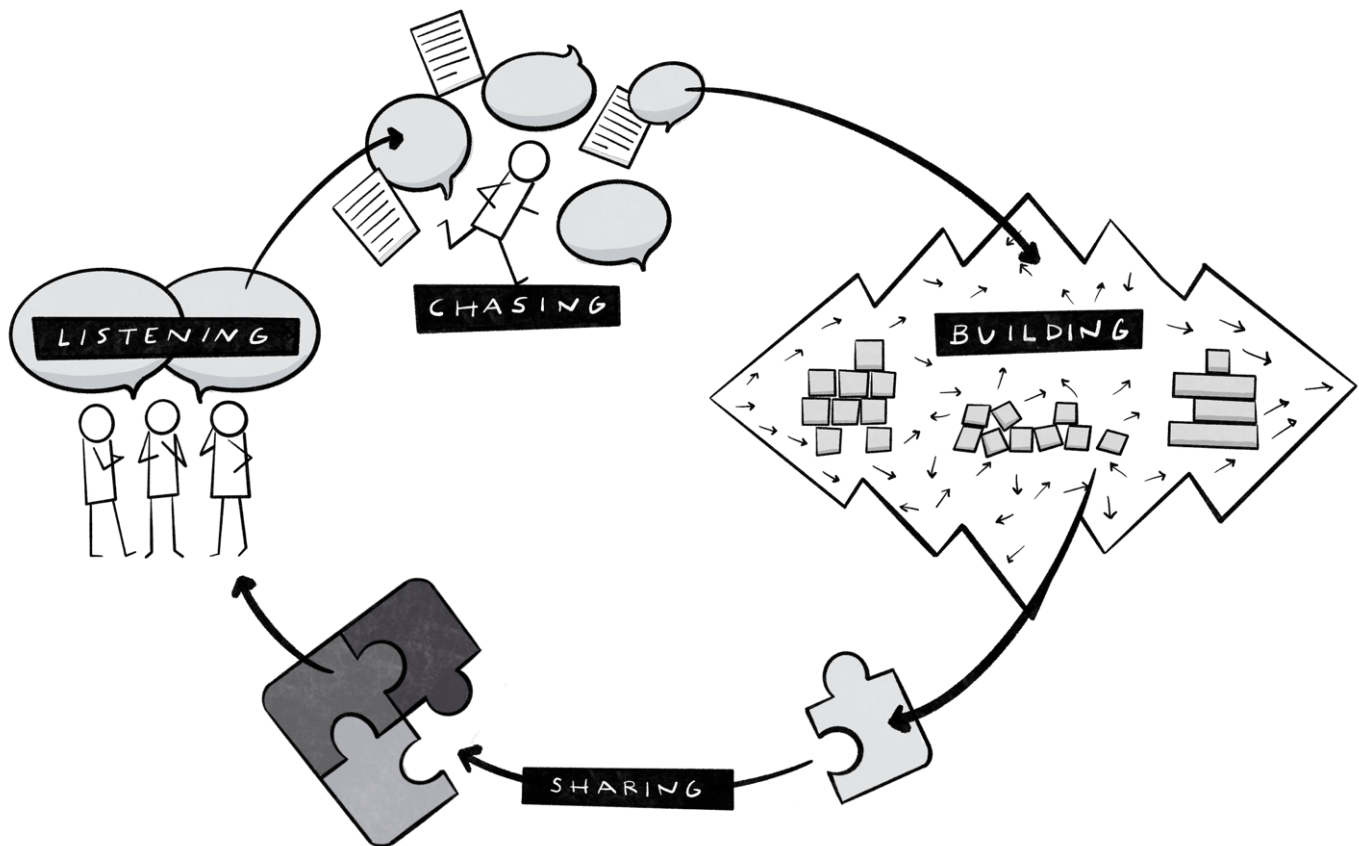
These parents, like many educators we've heard from, want their children to be prepared for the future. We see evidence from some students that their parents are stepping in to help them learn these tools:

“I'm not telling [AI to] 'do this work for me ... solve my homework for me, make my life easier.' I try to go a more different approach, where – it's what my dad taught me, essentially: explain this to me in a simple way, using these specific analogies that I can understand.” (Academically Ranked as High School Senior, 15 yo)

A loss of agency runs through each of the dilemmas described above. We hear this loss when students describe dulling their answers to avoid false detection, when teachers are forced to learn tools they ethically oppose so their students won't fall behind, and when school leaders navigate parents who are upset every which way AI is handled. The question for us, then, is how to support agency for everyone involved, especially for young people, who can only build character if they have meaningful choices to make. Policies can tell us what's in or out of bounds, but they don't, on their own, give us the skills and habits to become good coaches and players. We believe what's needed most right now is more akin to a playbook than a policy. A playbook filled with strategies that help educators and students build digital agency with these technologies.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

At the Center for Digital Thriving, listening fuels everything we do. We start by listening to young people and the adults who care for them. We're especially **listening** to understand what's hard for teens and what supports might help. Then, we **chase** insights from what we hear by conducting research. We look for where existing research offers solutions we can bring in and adapt, and where gaps remain. Those insights inform a participatory design process with young people and educators to **build** public goods, together. We then **share** what we've built through free resources that you can put to use in your classroom. All this gives us new perspectives as we begin again with **listening**:



Below, we share five “plays” – concrete approaches to real classroom pain points, each paired with resources to run with your students. **Think of yourself as the coach: you call the play, and your students run the moves it's made of.** Every play is a product of our design research process illustrated above, and you can call any of them in your classroom or faculty meeting starting tomorrow. They're lightweight, repeatable, and co-created with educators and students. And they are designed to support more flexibility and meaningful choice as AI technologies and related policies affect all of us.

THE PLAYS AT A GLANCE

For each play that follows, we first describe the dilemma it responds to, then the moves it's made of (each one as a free resource), what it looks like in practice, and finally when you might want to "call it" in your classroom. You'll also see a diagram alongside each play that maps the areas of agency and literacy that it supports in our framework. While they're written from the perspective of an educator calling plays for their students, they work just as well with groups of adults, like your faculty or even parents. Here's a quick rundown:

THE PLAY	THE DILEMMA	THE MOVES	WHEN TO CALL
FIND YOUR FEET <i>Center values</i>	Students make choices with AI that feel compromised.	Sort values, then bridge to questions that guide AI choices with TECH + VALUES and VALUES BRIDGE .	Start of the year, course, or unit (or when the class needs a reset).
SCOUT THE FIELD <i>Spot pressures</i>	Students are hiding their AI use.	Name pressures to hide AI use and look for patterns across the group with MAKING AI PRESSURES VISIBLE .	Early, a good warm-up for other plays.
ALIGN ON THE LINE <i>Navigate gray areas</i>	Many uses of AI fall in the gray area and the rules are unclear.	Brainstorm AI uses, map where they fall, and decide on the line with ALIGN ON THE LINE .	Before any unit or assignment, or after one goes sideways.
WATCH THE REPLAY <i>Reflect on fumbles</i>	Moments with AI pass too quickly for us to reflect on them.	Map an experience with AI, plan how to respond next time with MAP A MOMENT .	Anytime, but especially after Find Your Feet or Scout the Field.
NAME THE GAME <i>Find new words</i>	We don't have words to talk about the ways AI is affecting us.	Create and define words to talk about AI with others with the AI TO Z WORKSHOP and AI TO Z GLOSSARY .	Anytime.

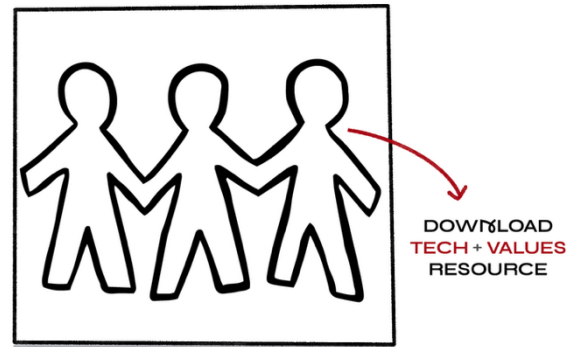
PLAY NO. 1: FIND YOUR FEET

Generative AI and social media can support our values, but they can also make it harder to live by them. Our first play, “Find Your Feet,” helps students steady themselves amidst these tensions. It facilitates values clarification, and it helps students reflect on how their choices are affected by their interactions with technology. Recall the teen who said, *“It sucks because I never was going to cheat, but now it feels like I have to.”* Or the educator who wrote, *“I am personally against the existence of generative AI ... and yet, it feels almost necessary to teach students how to use it responsibly ... so now I am forced to learn it myself.”* Moments like these can leave students and educators feeling powerless with AI. “Find Your Feet” anchors students in their values so that they can approach such moments with more intention.

THE MOVES

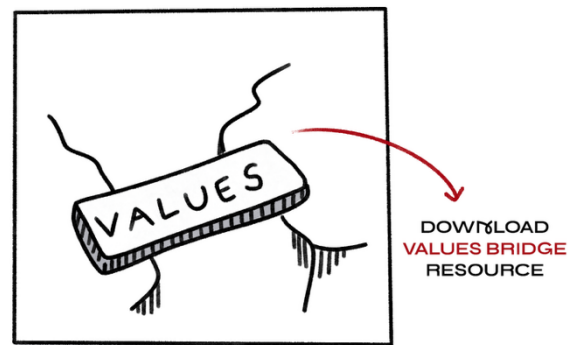
The play has two moves: the first, “Tech + Values,” helps students clarify what matters most to them right now; and the second, “Values Bridge,” helps them identify questions that foster values-aligned choices. These moves work best sequenced in that order. Together, they help students in moments where their choices with AI feel compromised.

In **TECH + VALUES**, students sort a deck of 14 values cards into three columns: most important, important, and less important to me right now. (We chose these values with input from psychologists and young people, specifically for their relevance to digital life.) Then, the same values go up on posters, and students vote with dot stickers. Each student gets dots in two colors and places them on values they feel tech makes easier to live by (in one color), and values tech makes harder (the other). Once dots are placed, students can see how technology affects the values they care about. The posters that end up with a mix of both colored dots make nuance visible – technology can be both helpful and harmful. The activity draws on practices from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which calls this “values clarification.” Identifying what we care about most can help us make values-aligned choices, especially when technology pulls us the other way.²⁹



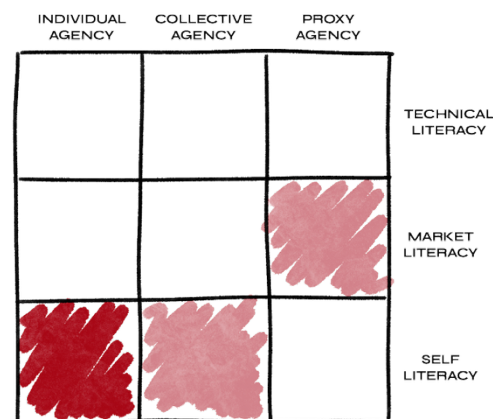
VALUES BRIDGE demystifies ethical approaches to decision making. It draws upon a range of ethical perspectives³⁰ such as virtue ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology, but in the form of questions that young people can answer without getting tripped up or intimidated by vocabulary that can be hard to understand or relate to. Research by our collaborator Rotem Landesman and her colleagues suggests that reasoning through questions like these helps young people work through technology-related dilemmas.³¹ In

the move, students draw bridges from the values they sorted to questions that help them honor those values. For example, a student who values authenticity might draw a bridge to the question, “What helps everyone feel most free, true to themselves, or empowered?” After drawing these bridges, students reflect with others on whether they ask different questions when using AI, and why.



ON THE FRAMEWORK

“Find Your Feet” builds individual agency × self literacy (dark red): students clarify their values, consider the way AI interacts with them, and reflect on the choices they make. The play also supports other dimensions (light red). Dot voting builds shared norms, and market forces surface when students discuss why some values are harder to live by.



IN PRACTICE

Imagine you’re calling this play for the first time. A student runs the Tech + Values card sort, and chooses *hard work* as one of her “most important” values. Then the class dot votes and the student sees a relatively even split among her peers who believe technology makes the value of *hard work* both harder and easier to live by. The group discusses how AI can help you be more productive, but it can also do almost all of your work for you. When she runs Values Bridge, she’s reminded that a question she tends to ask herself when making hard choices is, “Would I still do this if everyone in my community around me knew?” But when she’s using AI, the question she usually reaches for is “What helps me meet my goals and take care of myself – both now and later?”

When you call this play, you center the teen, not the tech. In doing so, you gain entry into a conversation that honors their experiences, allows those experiences to be different from each other, and holds the nuance that technologies can be both helpful and harmful at the same time.

WHEN TO CALL IT

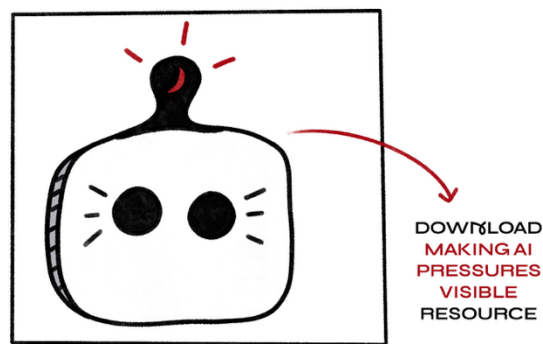
In our experience, “Find Your Feet” works best at the start of a course, unit, or assignment where it can center values and seed conversations about them over time.³² It can also be repeated throughout the year since what matters most to us *right now* can change. Run in this way, “Find Your Feet” reminds us of our values so that when AI challenges them, we can find our footing and act with integrity.

PLAY NO. 2: SCOUT THE FIELD

We began the “What We’re Hearing” section with the most common dilemma teachers told us they were facing: “*The use of AI to cheat has been a real issue.*” Our second play, “Scout the Field,” helps students identify the pressures they feel to hide their AI use. It resists making assumptions about why, and instead approaches the topic with curiosity about the underlying reasons. The play also acknowledges the feelings of shame and isolation that can come with secrecy, making these pressures all the more difficult to name and share. As one teen put it, “*guilt plays a role in it too – although I have [used AI and hid it], I did not feel good about it.*”

THE MOVE

“Scout the Field” has a single move called **MAKING AI PRESSURES VISIBLE**. It opens by defining Ethan Mollick’s concept of a “secret cyborg.”³³ A secret cyborg is someone who uses AI but hides it – not necessarily to cheat, but because the environment makes admitting it feel risky. Mollick, a business school professor, coined the term to name what often happens in the workplace, but the same dynamic takes place in schools. This move asks students to list moments when *others* feel pressure to hide their AI use. The framing of “others” is important because students can name a pressure without claiming it as their own. Students share these pressures with the group, either by posting them on a shared wall, or by passing them in for you to read to the room. Once the pressures are named, the group notices patterns among them, which invites group reflection on how they come to be, and what strategies might help mitigate them.



ON THE FRAMEWORK

Mapped onto the framework, “Scout the Field” builds self literacy across individual and collective agency (dark red). Asking students to name pressures they see builds self-awareness. Mapping those pressures across the group turns them into something the class can talk about and act on together. The play also lends support to market literacy (light red), since pressures often trace back to productivity culture and the business models that profit from it.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY	COLLECTIVE AGENCY	PROXY AGENCY	
			TECHNICAL LITERACY
			MARKET LITERACY
			SELF LITERACY

IN PRACTICE

We've run this play with many teens and have heard about the pressures they feel to be secret cyborgs. Those pressures range from the universal to the personal to the poignant:

"People might think that they lack creativity or that they are lazy."

"My family is not a huge fan of AI and I don't want them to think less of me."

"If I 'connect' with AI for support, does that mean I don't have real friends who can support me? It makes me feel bad about myself."

Almost always, the play surfaces moments that can be notoriously hard to uncover, and helps students feel less isolated and alone. **When you call this play, you ask about – rather than assume – what your students are experiencing.** In doing so, you bring hidden pressures into the open, where they carry less shame and can be talked about and addressed.

WHEN TO CALL IT

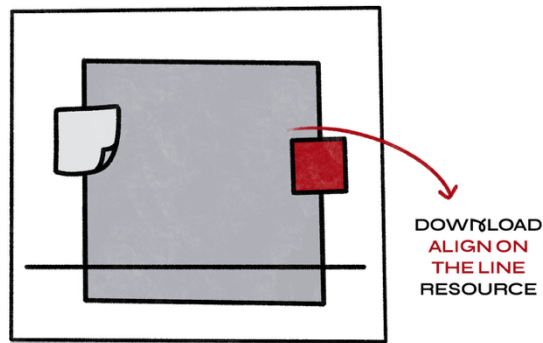
In our experience, "Scout the Field" works well at the start of a year, course, or unit to establish rapport and trust when talking about AI. It is also a natural warm-up for the plays that follow. The pressures it surfaces become lines to debate in "Align on the Line" and moments to map in "Watch the Replay." One note before you call it: this play really benefits from good modeling, and we've seen the room open up when educators go first and share a pressure of their own. Call it to better understand the field your students are playing (and learning) on as these technologies shift the ground beneath them.

PLAY NO. 3: ALIGN ON THE LINE

In listening to young people, we've discovered a concept that resonates widely. We call it "the line." This refers to when it's okay and not okay to use AI for a given task; in other words, what crosses the line. The phrase comes directly from a teen's reaction to hearing about someone using ChatGPT to write a heartfelt card. In their words, *"Sometimes you struggle, getting [thoughts] from your head into words – that's probably most of the time okay, but asking [ChatGPT] to write an entire card, like, that's a line."* Students are drawing these lines all the time and in different ways from one another. Usually, they're drawn without clear guidance from their teachers because AI tools and their uses change so frequently. Our third play, "Align on the Line," helps make those lines visible, assignment by assignment, so they can be debated and decided. It also spares teachers the job of tracking every use, because the class surfaces them together.

THE MOVE

ALIGN ON THE LINE has a single, titular move that plays out in two steps: in the first, students define their own lines; in the second, the class aligns together on where the line falls for a given assignment or unit. It opens by selecting a specific assignment or task and asking the class to generate all the ways someone *could* use AI to help with the task. Like listing when “others” feel pressure to hide AI use in “Scout the Field,” the use of the word “could” is important because it invites students to name ways AI could be used without having to admit they’ve used AI that way themselves.



After the class collectively brainstorms potential uses of AI, they individually map them on a five-point scale where 1 = totally fine, 5 = crosses a line, and the in-between numbers are the “gray area” (2 = mostly okay, 3 = not really sure, 4 = feels sketchy). Then, they compare maps to see where lines are being drawn by others. This invites a class discussion about why the line might differ for some, and where the class should draw the line for this specific context. This discussion can surface how learning goals influence the line, and if some learning goals might need to be reconsidered given the ways AI is reshaping work and learning. Last, the class (or you) documents what officially crosses a line for that assignment, what care the gray-area uses deserve, and which uses are totally fine – clarity young people tell us they’re craving.

ON THE FRAMEWORK

Mapped onto the framework, “Align on the Line” builds two literacies at once – technical and self – across both individual and collective agency (dark red). Listing out all the ways AI can be used to accomplish a task supports technical literacy by making those uses visible to everyone (including educators!). Mapping individual lines invites personal reflection on values and goals, and sharing individual maps supports the co-creation of shared norms.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY	COLLECTIVE AGENCY	PROXY AGENCY	
			TECHNICAL LITERACY
			MARKET LITERACY
			SELF LITERACY

The play also lends support to several other aspects of agency, most notably proxy agency. This is because defining where the line is for a specific assignment becomes a kind of “proxy,” or rule, that helps guide students’ choices. The play can also help students notice how tools are designed to make AI use the default, like when search engines place an AI-generated answer above other results (a consequence of market forces).

IN PRACTICE

Imagine you're calling this play on an assignment to write an analytical essay about *The Great Gatsby*. You ask the class to name all the ways someone could use AI to help. They come up with:

- checking grammar and spellcheck
- creating an outline of each paragraph's topic
- inputting a quote and asking why it's significant
- giving you the main themes of the book
- generating a complete analysis of the characters
- "hey chatgpt write me an essay about the themes of Great Gatsby in 5 paragraphs"

Each student maps those uses on the 1-5 scale for themselves. When they compare maps, some uses are easy to agree on: grammar and spellcheck sits at 1 (totally fine) and "hey chatgpt write me the whole essay" sits at 5 (crosses a line). But, as we've heard students describe, "*there's a lot of gray area with AI.*" Is having AI give students the main themes a helpful starting point, or one of the main reasons for the assignment? Is "changing wording to make phrases more well-written with stronger vocabulary" harmless polish, or a surrender of their voice? These discussions surface uses that are otherwise hard to make visible, and help the group align through conversation and debate. **When you call this play, you move from a "handing down rules" stance to an "all hands on deck" one.** Instead of drawing the line for students, you support their agency by drawing it with them.

WHEN TO CALL IT

Call "Align on the Line" repeatedly throughout the school year. Use it before a single assignment or unit, or even to create school-wide policies. It works at many grain sizes, though in our experience, it works especially well in the context of a single assignment, so the line can shift as learning goals, students' skills, and the technologies do.

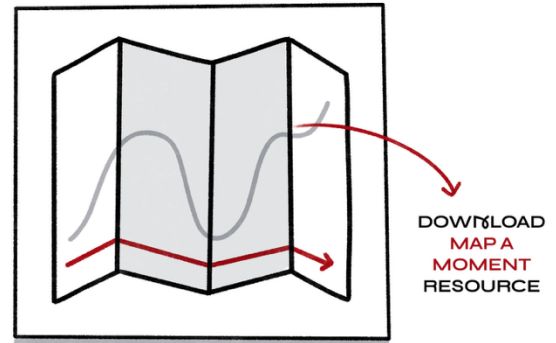
PLAY NO. 4: WATCH THE REPLAY

The plays we've shared so far *prepare* students to make values-aligned choices with their AI use. This next play, "Watch the Replay," focuses on moments *after* they've used it: the fumbles, the highlights, and the moments that were a mix of both. Recall the teen who told us, "*guilt plays a role in it too – although I have [used AI and hid it], I did not feel good about it.*" Moments like these tend to get buried because AI use is fast and mostly invisible. "Watch the Replay" slows them down and makes them visible. It invites students to get curious about them, like a player reviewing a game reel. It helps students spot the decision points and asks them to work the muscle of choosing with their values, so they're stronger the next time they experience something similar.

THE MOVE

“Watch the Replay” has a single move called **MAP A MOMENT**. It is anchored in psychiatrist Dan Siegel’s work on reflection and attunement, which treats looking back at our own experience as a skill that can be taught and strengthened.³⁴ Siegel’s research also suggests that reflection on hard moments can help us respond differently in the future when we’re confronted with a similar situation, a capacity he

calls *response flexibility*.³⁵ The move asks students to choose a real experience with AI that felt complicated. It can be something they experienced personally or something they heard about. They map what happened over time (could be minutes, hours, days, or even weeks) as a line graph. As the experience unfolds across the map, they place markers where emotions were involved, both positive and negative. They also annotate inflection points with what they felt and why, and they add stars at any decision points. Then, in pairs or small groups, students share their map and, together, they identify what helped (or would have helped) to navigate it in a way they’d feel better about. In our co-creation of “Map a Moment,”³⁶ teens advocated for a design that honors a complex range of emotions for a complex set of reasons (for example, *relief* that a burden was lifted by AI, while also feeling *guilt* at the same time).



ON THE FRAMEWORK

Mapped onto the framework, “Watch the Replay” lights up the self literacy row, especially across the individual and proxy modes of agency (dark red). Mapping and annotating the emotional terrain of their experience slows the moment down and invites students to notice where their AI use did (and didn’t) align with their values and goals.

The play also lends support to the collective agency column (light red). Sharing maps helps students connect over the dilemmas they’re experiencing, and those conversations can reveal new ways to use these technologies, including how the design of their features can limit their choices, and how those choices can affect others.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY	COLLECTIVE AGENCY	PROXY AGENCY	
			TECHNICAL LITERACY
			MARKET LITERACY
			SELF LITERACY

IN PRACTICE

When we were co-designing this play with teens, one of the teens chose a moment she hadn’t experienced personally, but heard about from a friend: her friend’s summer internship was at a gaming company, and he was asked to write dialogue in the voice of a

character he didn't know well and so he used AI to help. As she mapped his story, the line dipped low as the friend struggled, but climbed as AI delivered the perfect dialogue. In her annotation she noted that while the friend was impressed with the quality of the output, he was also troubled by how good the AI was and what that meant for his future career. She went on to create an annotated video of the map, styled like a runner video game, and shared it with her friend. **When called, this play can turn moments students might rather forget into information that can help them choose differently next time.** Even when students map moments they hear about from others, the play still works.

WHEN TO CALL IT

In our experience, “Watch the Replay” works especially well after “Find Your Feet,” where values and questions can be used as a lens for annotation. It also pairs naturally with “Scout the Field,” where the pressures that surface make rich material for mapping, and with “Align on the Line,” where the replay shows how the lines the class agreed upon played out in reality. It's also a good play to call anytime you feel the class would benefit from a reset. With AI technologies evolving so quickly, “Watch the Replay” is one way to slow things down and engage with more agency.

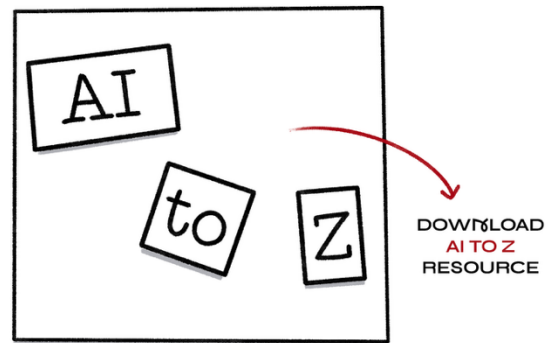
PLAY NO. 5: NAME THE GAME

Each play so far has been written with the assumption that you'll run it with your students. This is because, as we saw in “What We're Hearing,” the dilemmas educators most often described to us in our nationally representative survey concern their relationships with students. But every play that we have shared also works with your faculty, and our last play, “Name the Game,” is one we recommend running with your colleagues before your students. The play addresses a pain point that everyone, even the people creating these technologies, feels: that AI is changing faster than we can keep up with. “Name the Game” helps us see what is changing, gives us language to talk about those changes, and invites us to choose how we want to respond – as individuals, as a community, and as institutions of learning. Think about some of the new words we've used in this report: *secret cyborg*, *AI-dar*, *two-way suspicion*. These terms help us see the ways that AI is affecting trust in the classroom, and they unlock conversations that are otherwise challenging to have.

THE MOVES

“Name the Game” has two moves and they can be run together or independently. The first, “AI to Z Glossary,” is a conversation seeded by terms created by educators, young people, researchers, and technologists. The second, “AI to Z Workshop,” is the process we used to create those terms. Let's break each down:

The **AI TO Z GLOSSARY** contains some of the most salient terms from our workshops. These terms name the ways AI is changing schools in particular – how we think and learn, how we connect with each other, and how expectations of what we can learn and do are shifting. The glossary presents each term dictionary-style with a definition, pronunciation, and an example sentence. It then scaffolds a circle conversation about which terms feel “sticky,” and how they show up in our lives. A few examples:



- **AI-dar:** The perceived ability to detect when AI has been used
- **Carbon Botprint:** When you question if using AI is worth it compared to potential environmental cost
- **Chatplomacy:** Using AI to soften tone, smooth communication, or make messages more diplomatic
- **Expectation Explosion:** When AI increases efficiency, leading to an expectation to produce more, faster, or at a higher level – raising both what is possible and what is expected
- **Why Botherism:** The feeling that if AI can do a task, there is little point in learning or attempting it yourself

The **AI TO Z WORKSHOP** is the process we use to generate new terms, and it moves through five steps: seed the group with a few glossary terms, generate new terms or concepts individually on cards, share them through rounds of pair shares, document the group's terms on a shared board, and reflect on what surfaced. The move is designed to keep the power of naming in your community. Words aren't handed down from above, nor are they borrowed from communities your students have no real connection to.

ON THE FRAMEWORK

Mapped onto the framework, “Name the Game” supports collective agency across all three literacies (dark red). Terms are created and refined through a group process, and they span all three literacies: technical (e.g., *chatplomacy*), market (e.g., *carbon botprint*), and self (e.g., *why botherism*). The play also lends support to individual agency (light red). Once you have the language to describe a phenomenon, you can decide for yourself how you want to relate to it.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY	COLLECTIVE AGENCY	PROXY AGENCY	
			TECHNICAL LITERACY
			MARKET LITERACY
			SELF LITERACY

IN PRACTICE

We've run "Name the Game" with students, faculty, researchers, and technologists. In just a few minutes, a group can go from blank index cards to using new terminology in conversations they've never had. The terms in the A to Z Glossary have been iterated upon and refined, but they don't start out that way. They often start out clunky and filled with blanks or [words in brackets] where the right terms haven't yet slotted in. Even in rough form, a term can spark recognition and connection. Let's look at a term that resonates widely:

chat·plo·ma·cy *n.*

- 1 Using AI to soften tone, smooth communication, or make messages more diplomatic: *I was so mad when I wrote that email, so I ran it through some **chatplomacy** before I hit send.*

Most people have either used AI this way or been on the receiving end of someone who has. Having a name for chatplomacy helps us consider how we feel about it. It invites conversation about the value of finding the right words on our own, and about when it's more important to be direct than diplomatic. Would you want chatplomacy disclosed? How would you feel about disclosing it yourself? And what are the benefits (and drawbacks) of using chatplomacy to be more inclusive and considerate? **When you call "Name the Game," you support agency through one of the most fundamental tools we have as humans (and LLMs): language itself.**

WHEN TO CALL IT

Because AI changes so often, this play can be called most any time. It works as well for establishing rapport at the start of a year as it does for reflecting on how the year went. It fits inside a single faculty meeting or class period. As we mentioned, we recommend running it with colleagues first because if we want students to have agency, educators must have it, too. Remember how Ted Lasso's answer to the reporters was that his biggest concern wasn't his losing streak, it was the definition of relegation? "Name the Game" helps you move from needing such definitions to writing your own.

FROM REF TO COACH

We began this report with a scene from Ted Lasso where he had just lost one of his best players and was under the threat of relegation (if his team kept losing, they'd be demoted to a lower division). We chose that scene because we suspected it might resonate with educators who feel they're losing track of their students, or who feel they've been relegated from coaching one of the most important games a human being ever plays – learning – to being handed a whistle and told to blow it when a student is out of bounds.

The out-of-bounds call educators are making most right now is cheating with AI. And for good reason. Many students are using AI to do their schoolwork, even when it violates policy. We hear this from educators, and more importantly, we hear it from students:

"[Does your school have any rules around AI use?] Oh, yeah. Not supposed to use it, really ... I'm pretty sure, like, 99% of everyone uses AI anyways."

(High School Sophomore, 16 yo)

"Just because they have a policy does not mean that it can be ... respected ... because what are they going to do? You can't see anything. [If that's the case, is everyone cheating?] Off the record, yeah. Yeah."

(High School Senior, 17 yo)

But the most important story about AI in schools isn't cheating. Running underneath that story is a more pernicious one: cheating doesn't just cost students their learning. **It costs them – and you – the relationship you have with one another.** It's the loss Ted Lasso named when he was asked about losing one of his best players. It's a loss that "hits me a lot harder and is gonna stay with me a lot longer than anything that happens while playing a game on a patch of grass." It's a loss that's echoed in this student's voice:

"I don't usually go to my teachers. I kind of just go to Chat ... I mean, I guess it's not like they're ... not inviting. It's just I'm just so used to going to Chat instead of them."

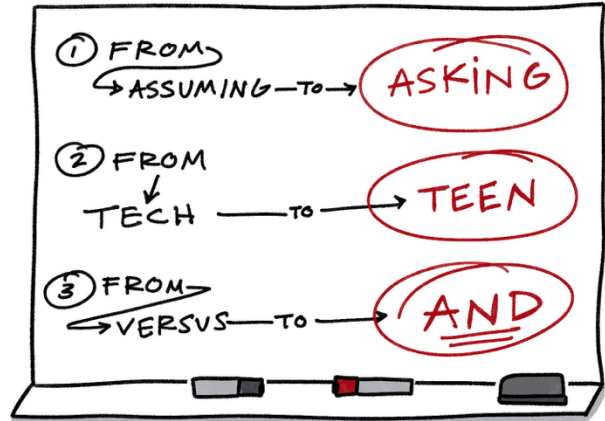
(High School Junior, 16 yo)

The plays in this report are designed to get students talking – with you and with each other – about their values, their goals, the pressures they face, and the mistakes they make with AI. We hope you'll still need a whistle, but to get their attention because they're talking so much.

Our Project Zero colleague Ron Ritchhart has argued that educators need mindsets alongside skills and tools.³⁷ We invite you to think of the plays above as tools, and to know that you have the skills you need to call them because those skills are relational, not technical. And as for the mindsets, our team has named three that we believe each play needs to succeed:

- **FROM ASSUMING TO ASKING:**

Ask what your students are experiencing, and approach their answers with curiosity. Listening in this way is game-changing, especially when it comes to tech conversations that can come pre-loaded with distrust, guilt, or shame.



- **FROM TECH-CENTERED TO TEEN-CENTERED:**

It can be tempting to focus on the tech, but when you lead with questions that put your students at the center – focusing on things like their values, their strengths and vulnerabilities, the pressures they face – you gain entry into a new conversation.

- **FROM US-VS-THEM TO US-AND-THEM:** We can find ourselves in a tug-of-war relationship with our students and their tech use, but the reality is that AI technologies are challenging for all of us. Reframing conversations as an “us-and-them” instead of “us-versus-them” effort helps us connect over the struggle.

It's not common for an athlete to talk about their favorite referee, but most everyone has a story about their favorite teacher. Which brings us back, one last time, to Ted Lasso. One of the first things Ted did was to tape a simple yellow sign in the locker room with the word “BELIEVE” written on it. He pointed to it when players, or coaches, were discouraged. Ted wanted them to BELIEVE that they mattered, regardless of what they achieved. That they deserved to be cared about, even if they'd made mistakes. And most of all, Ted wanted them to BELIEVE in hope. He said that believing in ourselves and believing in one another was “fundamental to being alive.”³⁸ We BELIEVE it's fundamental to being a student, too. And an educator. And human.

As AI evolves and disrupts life and learning in helpful ways, harmful ways, and all the ways in between, the most human and effective thing we can do is to BELIEVE that we can make things better, and that we're not alone. Remember what Bandura argued: agency isn't just our capacity for choice, intention, and control – it's our **belief** that we have that capacity. No policy can mandate that belief, and no technology can take it away.

Education philosopher Maxine Greene said, “I don't want to save the world. I only want to start a conversation.”³⁹ Educators, you don't have to save the world from AI. Right now, you only have to start a conversation: with your students, and with each other.

METHODS APPENDIX

NATIONAL SURVEY

We surveyed two nationally representative samples – one of US public school teachers, one of US public school principals – totaling 1,018 respondents, in April and May of 2025. Our survey examined attitudes and experiences of teachers and school leaders regarding generative AI and related policies. School teachers and principals responded to questions about their uses of generative AI for work, perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable uses of generative AI, current school policies and practices related to generative AI, and broader perceptions of digital technologies. Surveys included both closed-ended (numerical) and open-ended (text entry) questions. Teachers and school leaders received different versions of the survey. Some questions were shared across both, with language adjusted for role (e.g., teachers were asked about “your classroom” while principals were asked about “your school”). Other questions were unique to one group – teachers, for instance, answered questions about specific assignments and classroom-level policies that principals did not receive.

The survey samples were drawn from RAND’s American Educator Panels, which include the American Teacher Panel (ATP) and the American School Leader Panel (ASLP).⁴⁰ Survey invitations were sent to 1,400 teachers (1,390 were eligible) and 998 principals (991 were eligible) from K-12 public schools. After excluding respondents screened out as ineligible by RAND, 719 teachers and 299 principals were retained in the analysis (N = 1,018). Completion rates were 51.7% (teachers) and 30.2% (principals). Both surveys are weighted to account for differences in sampling and response so that each represents, to the maximum extent possible, its own national population. Two features of the study design worth noting:

1. Although both the teacher sample and principal sample are nationally representative, they are not matched pairs from the same schools.⁴¹ So any comparison between groups should be treated as a national-level pattern, not a statement on what’s happening in any one school.
2. Because the surveys reflect two different populations and were weighted respectively, they cannot be combined into findings about “all educators.” For this reason, percentages are always reported separately by role.

The surveys were administered online and in English. Teachers were emailed invitations on April 28th, 2025, and their survey closed on May 19th, 2025. Principals were emailed invitations on April 21st, 2025, and their survey closed on May 27th, 2025. Both surveys took about 15 minutes, and respondents received a \$15 e-gift card for their participation.

WEIGHTED DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

CHARACTERISTIC	TEACHERS (%)	PRINCIPALS (%)
GENDER		
Female	76.9%	55.8%
Male	23.1%	44.2%
RACE		
White	80.8%	78.4%
Minority	19.2%	21.6%
DEGREE		
	Bachelor's – 40.4%	Master's or less – 63.6%
	Master's or more – 59.6%	More than master's – 36.4%
EXPERIENCE		
10+ years	63.8%	59.6%
Less than 10 years	36.2%	40.4%
SCHOOL LEVEL		
Elementary	48.5%	59.4%
Middle School	19.1%	17.6%
High School	32.4%	23.1%
URBANICITY		
Suburban	38.1%	30.8%
Town/Rural	32.2%	41.4%
Urban	29.7%	27.8%
SCHOOL NEIGHBORHOOD POVERTY (IPR)		
0-200%	16.4%	18.4%
201-400%	54.7%	58.4%
401%+	29.0%	23.1%

Note. Percentages are weighted; rows may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Race follows RAND's two-category panel calibration variable, which classifies educators as White or as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group and is benchmarked to national population data from NCES's National Teacher and Principal Survey.⁴² Respondents' self-reported race and ethnicity in the survey itself is more detailed; among teachers, for example, 77% identified as White, 9% as Hispanic or Latino, 6% as Black or African American, and 7% as another race or ethnicity (weighted). Principal experience is self-reported. IPR is the income-to-poverty ratio of the school's neighborhood; higher values indicate less poverty.

Respondents who reported experiencing a dilemma were asked to describe a specific situation, and all 256 who said yes provided one (171 teachers, 85 principals). We analyzed descriptions inductively, surfacing themes reported in “What We’re Hearing.” To quantify cheating-related dilemmas, each description was coded by a human researcher, Claude (Anthropic’s Fable 5 model, Max effort in Incognito mode), and ChatGPT (OpenAI’s GPT-5.6 Sol, High reasoning, in a Temporary chat). The prompt we used was developed in collaboration with Claude (Anthropic’s Fable 5 model, High effort) through several turns of refinement and testing before using the final version below. We ran the coding chats in Incognito (Claude)/Temporary (ChatGPT) mode so that no context from the prompt development chat carried into the coding. The prompt we used for both AI coders was:

The attached CSV file contains deidentified answers from K-12 public educators about dilemmas or difficult decisions they’ve experienced related to the use or implementation of Generative AI at their school. We are exploring the percentage of these responses that are related to students cheating. For the purposes of this task, cheating-related dilemmas involve student behavior that violates the rules, expectations, or spirit of an assignment or learning activity. This includes using AI tools that may otherwise be permitted if the particular use substitutes for work the student is reasonably expected to do themselves.

Carefully read each response and decide if it is or is not related to student cheating.

- If it is, code it 1.*
- If it isn’t, code it 0.*

Also decide how certain you are of each code (note: certainty should not effect [sic] your code, use your best judgment and note your reasoning even if certainty is low):

- If little interpretation is required, high*
- If the code requires a reasonable level of inference, medium*
- If the response is genuinely ambiguous or could go either way, low*

Produce an identical CSV, preserving all original rows, columns, values, and row order, but add three columns:

- cheating_related (1 or 0)*
- certainty (low, medium, high)*
- notes (a brief explanation of your reasoning)*

This coding task requires you to consider the dilemma as a whole, not simply look for particular keywords. We are especially interested in whether educators

interpret the dilemma through the lens of student cheating, academic integrity, or plagiarism. A response should be coded 1 if student cheating is a meaningful part of the dilemma, even if the response also raises other concerns.

Code 1 when:

- The educator describes students using AI to do or supply work, thinking, problem-solving, writing, answers, or skill demonstration that the student is expected to do themselves.*
- You may infer a violation of the “spirit of the assignment” from the behavior described. The educator does not need to explicitly use words such as “cheating,” “dishonesty,” “plagiarism,” or “academic integrity,” and the response does not need to state an explicit AI rule or prove that the student knew the exact policy.*
- Do not code a response 1 merely because the educator worries that AI will reduce learning, effort, critical thinking, or skill development. Code it 1 when AI is described as doing or supplying work or thinking the student is expected to do (even when the educator mainly emphasizes the resulting loss of learning).*

Example of cheating_related = 1: “Students use AI to answer homework questions instead of solving them themselves.” The educator does not need to call this cheating; AI is substituting for work the student is expected to perform.

Example of cheating_related = 0: “I worry that regular AI use will weaken students’ critical-thinking skills.” This concerns learning effects but does not describe students using AI to substitute for expected student work.

There are some quotes in these data that are about policies (forming them, debating them). General policy dilemmas are 0, but code 1 when the policy dilemma is prompted by or substantially concerns student behavior that meets the criteria above. Similarly, there are examples about teaching AI literacy—treat these as 0 unless the response also describes student behavior that meets the cheating criteria above.

All coders (one human, two AI) coded all 256 descriptions and agreed on 93% of the descriptions (Krippendorff $\alpha = .88$). Human-GPT agreement was lowest (93.0%) and Human-Claude agreement was highest (97.3%), with GPT-Claude in between (95.7%). All disagreements were resolved by the human who reviewed the rationale of AI coders and made a final call (four cases were revised to side with the AI coders). Because AI coders worked from a prompt we developed, we report these figures as a check on the human coding rather than as inter-rater reliability. These agreement statistics are unweighted.

INTERVIEWS WITH EDUCATORS

Our team at the Center for Digital Thriving conducted follow-up interviews with a subset of survey participants who indicated that they were willing to participate and allowed RAND to share contact information with us. Of those who consented (N=250; 150 principals, 100 teachers), we screened interview participants using purposive sampling with maximum variation, identifying potential participants through their open-ended responses to questions about dilemmas that have come up in their school, what they wish each other (principals / teachers) understood about generative AI in their school, and specific situations where they used generative AI in their work. We aimed to add depth and context to our survey analyses and to our understanding of emerging findings. Nineteen educators (7 teachers and 12 principals) were invited for interviews, and twelve (4 teachers and 8 principals) consented and completed interviews between July 2025 and August 2025. Interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes (min 25, max 37) and participants received a \$50 e-gift card. This project was determined exempt by the Harvard University-Area IRB (Protocol # IRB24-1223).

TEEN INTERVIEWS

The student quotes in this report came primarily from in-depth interviews conducted April-June 2026 through In Tandem and as part of the Nearfield Listening Lab scroll-through project. Topics included the teens' experiences with generative AI, such as types of AI tools used for academic purposes; however, AI use for academic purposes wasn't the exclusive topic. That project received IRB approval from BRANY (ID # 25-329-2426).

Teens were recruited through In Tandem, a nonprofit organization whose Youth Voice Fellowship engages youth aged 13-19 in shaping programs and products that affect their lives, as well as through a network of US schools. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity across gender, age, and socioeconomic status. Eligible participants were US-based, English-fluent, and able to participate in virtual sessions via Zoom. Participants aged 18 and older actively consented to participate in the research; participants aged 15-17 provided active assent and additionally required parent/guardian consent. Participants were compensated \$45 per interview.

As of this publication, the scroll-through project is ongoing and the relevant dataset we examined for this report included interview transcripts from conversations with 31 young people ages 15-19. The table below presents demographic and school characteristics of the youth interview participants.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH (N=31)

CHARACTERISTIC	N	%
AGE		
15	1	3%
16	10	32%
17	6	19%
18	10	32%
19	3	10%
Did not respond	1	3%
GENDER		
Woman	16	53%
Man	11	37%
Nonbinary	2	7%
Prefer not to say	2	7%
SCHOOL TYPE		
Public	19	61%
Military School	4	13%
Charter	4	13%
Private	3	10%
Hybrid College Program	2	6%
Homeschool	1	3%
Religious	1	3%
Other	1	3%
HISPANIC OR LATINX		
Hispanic or Latinx	6	19%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
White	17	55%
Black or African American	9	29%
Asian or Asian American	5	16%
Middle Eastern or North African	2	6%
Indigenous American or Alaska Native	2	6%
Another Race/Ethnicity (self-described)	1	3%
LOCALE		
Suburban	19	61%
Urban	8	26%
Town	2	6%
Rural	1	3%
Not sure	1	3%

Note. Percentages are of all 31 participants and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Participants could select more than one option for school type, race/ethnicity, and locale, so counts and percentages for these characteristics sum to more than 31 and 100%. Hispanic or Latinx origin was asked as a separate item from race/ethnicity; participants could identify as Hispanic or Latinx in addition to any race/ethnicity category above.

Select youth quotes featured in “The Plays” sections came from sessions conducted by the Center for Digital Thriving as part of the resource development process, specifically workshops in December 2024 (Virtual), Summer 2025 (Cambridge, MA; Bellevue, WA), and October 2025 (Detroit, MI).

HOW WE TREATED QUOTES

Quotes from educators and young people appear throughout the report, and we handled them the same way everywhere. Spoken quotes are reproduced from interview transcripts in the speaker’s own words, and we kept, rather than cleaned up, the way people actually talk. Ellipses mark every cut we made within a quote. Where an interviewer’s question is needed to make sense of an answer, it appears inside the quote in brackets. Anything we paraphrased appears outside quotation marks. Written responses to the survey’s open-ended questions are reproduced with minor spelling corrections. We attribute each quote by role, and we do not name participants, their schools, or their districts.

¹ *Ted Lasso*. (2020-2023). [TV series]. Doozer Productions; Ruby’s Tuna; Universal Television; Warner Bros.

² Relegation: In European football, the lowest-ranked teams at the end of a season are demoted to a lower division. This is a concept that doesn’t exist in major American sports leagues.

³ Reich, J. (April 10, 2024). GPTd on Arrival: A New Paradigm for Understanding Education Technologies. Connected Learning Alliance: <https://clalliance.org/blog/gptd-on-arrival-a-new-paradigm-for-understanding-education-technologies/>

⁴ AGI: Short for “Artificial General Intelligence.” AGI refers to AI that could learn and handle virtually any intellectual task a human can, rather than excelling only at particular ones. What exactly would count, and how close we are, remains actively debated.

⁵ Shaw, S. D., & Nave, G. (January 10, 2026). *Thinking—Fast, Slow, and Artificial: How AI is Reshaping Human Reasoning and the Rise of Cognitive Surrender*. PsyArXiv. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/yk25n_v1

⁶ Ours is one of several recent national efforts to map the landscape of AI in schools. On the educator side, see: Doss, C. J., Bozick, R., Schwartz, H. L., Chu, L., Rainey, L. R., Woo, A., Reich, J., & Dukes, J. (2025). *AI Use in Schools Is Quickly Increasing but Guidance Lags Behind: Findings from the RAND Survey Panels*. RAND; and Walton Family Foundation & Gallup (2026). *Teaching for Tomorrow: Closing the Expectations Gap*. On the student side, see Schwartz, H. L., & Diliberti, M. K. (2026). *More Students Use AI for Homework, and*

[More Believe It Harms Critical Thinking: Selected Findings from the American Youth Panel](#). RAND; and Common Sense Media (2026). The Common Sense Media Census: [AI Use by Tweens and Teens](#).

⁷ IMAGINE (Inspiring Moral AI Guidance IN Education), Grant ID 63220 See more: <https://www.templeton.org/grant/imagine-inspiring-moral-ai-guidance-in-education>

⁸ Grant, A. (2023). *Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things*. Viking. Grant defines character here in the context of how it differs from personality: "Personality is your predisposition – your basic instincts for how to think, feel, and act."

⁹ See Vallor, S. (2016). *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting*. Oxford University Press, which builds its "technomoral virtues" from Aristotelian, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions.

¹⁰ Weinstein, E., Tench, B., Choukas-Bradley, S., James, C., Buch, E., & Nesi, J. (2023) *Teaching Digital Well-being: Evidence-based Resources to Help Youth Thrive*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Center for Digital Thriving.

¹¹ By "critical optimism" we mean taking both the benefits and harms of life with technology seriously (the critical part) while keeping a solutions-minded, hopeful eye on what's possible (the optimism part). It's one of our key values at the Center for Digital Thriving.

¹² Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 1(2), 164-180. Our reading of Bandura follows Weinstein and James (2022), who frame adults as proxy agents who can support or undercut young people's agency. See Weinstein, E., & James, C. (2022). *Behind Their Screens: What Teens Are Facing (and Adults Are Missing)*. MIT Press. Also, we'd like to note that Bandura's work resonates with self-determination theory. See Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*. Guilford Press.

¹³ Tench, B. (2026). Agency-Centered Framework for AI Literacy. Cambridge, MA, USA: Center for Digital Thriving. <https://digitalthriving.gse.harvard.edu/agency-centered-ai-literacy-framework/>

¹⁴ Early in the show, Ted tapes a handmade yellow sign reading "BELIEVE" in the locker room. Over the course of the show, the sign comes to stand for the team believing in themselves and each other.

¹⁵ The 1,018 respondents include 719 teachers and 299 principals in US K-12 public schools drawn from RAND's American Educator Panels (American Teacher Panel and American School Leader Panel). A full methodology report is in the appendix.

¹⁶ Interviews were conducted between April and June 2026 through In Tandem, a nonprofit whose Youth Voice Fellowship engages young people ages 13-19, and as part of the Nearfield Listening Lab scroll-through project. As of this writing, the dataset includes transcripts from conversations with 31 young people ages 15-19, purposively sampled for diversity across gender, age, and socioeconomic status. A full methodology report is in the appendix.

¹⁷ Throughout the report, quotes are reproduced in the speaker's own words. Ellipses mark every cut, bracketed text supplies an interviewer's question or a clarification, and anything paraphrased appears outside quotation marks. Quotes are attributed by role. We do not name participants, their schools, or their districts.

¹⁸ Of the teachers who had heard of generative AI, 669 responded to this question and four did not. Of principals, all 290 who had heard of it responded. (Forty-six teachers and 9 principals said they had never heard of generative AI and were routed past the question.)

¹⁹ Percentages are of the 669 teachers and 290 principals who had heard of generative AI and answered the question. The school-level breakdown (11% elementary, 29% middle, 44% high) is our analysis of the same weighted teacher data, in which elementary teachers are about 50% of the sample.

²⁰ Percentages are weighted to the national population of K-12 public school teachers and principals. Unweighted, 128 of 171 teacher descriptions (74.9%) and 59 of 85 principal descriptions (69.4%) were coded as cheating-related.

²¹ Winthrop, R. (May 19, 2026). [Is it time to measure cognitive stunting?](#) Brookings Institution.

²² Mollick, E. (June 18, 2023). Detecting the Secret Cyborgs. One Useful Thing: <https://www.oneusefulthing.org/p/detecting-the-secret-cyborgs>

²³ Weinstein, E., Konrath, S., Lara, E. A., Tench, B., James, C., Mann, S., & Lenhart, A. (2024). *Unpacking grind culture in American teens: Pressure, burnout, and the role of social media*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media, Center for Digital Thriving, and Indiana University.

²⁴ Williams, K. (March 11, 2025). What Journalists Should Know About Deepfake Detection in 2025. Columbia Journalism Review, Tow Center for Digital Journalism. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center/what-journalists-should-know-about-deepfake-detection-technology-in-2025-a-non-technical-guide.php

²⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internet Crime Complaint Center. (June 28, 2022). Deepfakes and Stolen PII Utilized to Apply for Remote Work Positions (Alert No. I-O62822-PSA). <https://www.ic3.gov/PSA/2022/psa220628>

²⁶ Deep, P. D., Edgington, W. D., Ghosh, N., & Rahaman, M. S. (2025). Evaluating the effectiveness and ethical implications of AI detection tools in higher education. *Information*, 16(10), 905. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info16100905>

²⁷ Weber-Wulff, D., Anohina-Naumeca, A., Bjelobaba, S., et al. (2023). Testing of detection tools for AI-generated text. *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 19(1), 26.

²⁸ Reminder: Our survey was fielded in April-May 2025. The 18% and 24% figures combine two response options, "Yes" and "Yes, but they need significant improvement," to the question "Are there specific policies or guidelines that govern Gen AI use in your school?" Weighted, the figures are 17.5% of teachers and 24.1% of principals, among respondents who had heard of generative AI and responded to this question. (Nine teachers who had heard of Gen AI didn't respond to this question. All principals who had heard of it responded.)

²⁹ Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J. B., Bond, F. W., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and commitment therapy: Model, processes and outcomes. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44(1), 1-25.

³⁰ Questions in the Values Bridge resource were adapted from the [Moral Spectrum Exploration Exercise](#) created for PLATO: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization by David Shapiro, taken from content in his 1999 book, *Choosing the Right Thing to Do: In Life, At Work, in Relationships, and for the Planet*. Our collaborator Rotem Landesman introduced us to Shapiro's work.

³¹ Landesman, R., Salac, J., Lim, J. O., & Ko, A. J. (2024). Integrating philosophy teaching perspectives to foster adolescents' ethical sensemaking of computing technologies. *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on International Computing Education Research (ICER '24)*.

³² The timing and facilitation guidance we offer for these plays reflects practice-based experience rather than formal evaluation. We have facilitated these activities directly with educators and young people, refined them with our educator advisory council, through professional development sessions, and classroom engagements, and adjusted them based on what we observed. They have not been tested through controlled studies.

³³ See note 22.

³⁴ Siegel, D. J. (2007). *The mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. W. W. Norton & Company.

³⁵ Siegel, D. J. (2010). *Mindsight: The new science of personal transformation*. Bantam Books.

³⁶ Map a Moment was co-designed with our collaborator Rotem Landesman and the UW Youth Advisory Board she established at the [University of Washington's Center for Digital Youth](#).

³⁷ Ritchhart, R. (2023). *Cultures of Thinking in Action: 10 Mindsets to Transform Our Teaching and Students' Learning*. Jossey-Bass.

³⁸ *Ted Lasso*, "Signs" (season 3, episode 5), 2023.

³⁹ Greene, M., as quoted in Sousanis, N., & Suzuki, D. (2015). Continuing a Conversation with Maxine Greene in Comics. *Teachers College Record*.

⁴⁰ RAND American Educator Panels, American Teacher Panel/American School Leader Panel, "2025 Educator AI Policies and Challenges surveys," Technical Document, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, May 2025. The demographic table in this appendix reports the weighted values from Tables 3 and 4 of the technical documents.

⁴¹ There were six cases in which two educators from the same school completed the survey. In one case, there was a teacher from the elementary school and one from the middle school with the same school ID. In three cases, there were two high school teachers with the same school ID. And in two cases, a teacher and a principal had the same school ID. We kept all responses because each response reflects a different educator's perspective, and the unit of analysis in our statistics was the educator (not the school).

⁴² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), 2020-21. NTPS is the federal survey RAND uses to benchmark its educator panels to the national population of public school teachers and principals. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/>