PERSONAE
SCENARI E PROSPETTIVE PEDAGOGICHE

Educare la persona nell'era dell'Intelligenza Artificiale: pensiero critico, cura e sviluppo umano nei contesti educativi contemporanei

Educating the Person in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Critical Thinking, Care and Human Development in Contemporary Educational Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping educational environments, raising pedagogical questions that extend beyond technological innovation. This article argues that the educational challenge posed by AI concerns not only digital competence but also the formation of the person. Drawing on contemporary pedagogical debate, the contribution proposes a humanistic framework in which critical thinking, educational care and human development are interpreted as complementary dimensions of educational practice. Rather than opposing technology, the article explores how pedagogical mediation can orient AI towards formative purposes, preserving the centrality of the learner and reaffirming education as a relational and ethical process within increasingly technology-mediated contexts.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Critical Thinking, Educational Care, Human Development, Personhood

L'Intelligenza Artificiale sta trasformando i contesti educativi, ponendo questioni che vanno oltre la mera innovazione tecnologica. Il contributo sostiene che la sfida educativa dell'AI riguarda innanzitutto la formazione della persona. Attraverso una riflessione pedagogica, viene proposto un quadro interpretativo umanistico in cui il pensiero critico, la cura educativa e lo sviluppo umano sono letti come dimensioni complementari dell'agire educativo. Piuttosto che contrapporre tecnologia ed educazione, l'articolo evidenzia il ruolo della mediazione pedagogica nell'orientare l'uso dell'AI verso finalità formative, preservando la centralità della persona nei processi di insegnamento e di apprendimento.

Parole Chiave: Intelligenza Artificiale, Pensiero critico, Cura educativa, Sviluppo umano, Persona

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping educational environments, transforming how knowledge is generated, accessed and interpreted. Educational debate has largely focused on digital competences, personalised learning and the opportunities offered by generative systems (Benvenuti et al., 2023; Costa & Murphy, 2025). However, these developments raise questions that cannot be addressed through technological innovation alone. Every transformation affecting the conditions of learning inevitably becomes a pedagogical question,

calling for renewed reflection on the purposes of education and the formation of the person.

Artificial Intelligence is not just a new tool for learning; it actually changes how students, teachers, and information interact. The real question is not whether AI can help with teaching and learning, but whether it will help students become independent thinkers, make good decisions, and take responsibility for their actions. Just because we can get information quickly and easily, it doesn't mean we really understand it. And just because AI can give us personalised lessons, it's not the same as helping us grow and develop as people, like a human teacher would (Luckin, 2025).

When you think about it, education is more than just learning facts and figures. It's about helping people become the best version of themselves. So, what if we use technology to create a space where students can really think for themselves, understand the world around them, and grow into responsible adults? It's not just about using technology to make learning easier or replacing teachers, but about giving students the tools they need to navigate the world and make a positive impact. By doing this, we can help students develop critical thinking skills, learn how to solve problems, and become active members of their communities. This way, education becomes a powerful tool for personal growth and development, and technology plays a key role in making that happen.

The job of a teacher is not just to help students learn but to create a space where they can explore, discover, and grow in ways that prepare them for life. As one author put it, education should be a process that helps people develop and thrive, rather than just absorbing information (Author, 2024). By shifting our focus to this more holistic approach, we can start to see how technology can support, rather than replace, the human side of education.

Against this background, this article argues that educating the person in the age of Artificial Intelligence requires a humanistic pedagogical perspective that integrates critical thinking, care, and human development. Rather than opposing technology, the contribution proposes these dimensions as complementary forms of educational mediation through which innovation can remain oriented towards genuinely formative purposes.

2. Critical Thinking as an Educational Practice in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The rapid diffusion of generative Artificial Intelligence has profoundly transformed the ways learners encounter knowledge. Today, information is no longer simply retrieved but increasingly generated, reorganised and presented through systems capable of producing coherent and persuasive responses in real time.

This evolution undoubtedly expands educational opportunities, yet it also changes the conditions under which knowledge is interpreted, questioned and validated. The educational challenge, therefore, no longer lies primarily in accessing information, but in developing the capacity to evaluate its meaning, reliability and implications (Benvenuti et al., 2023; Mauti, 2024).

Critical thinking is not just about fact-checking what we see online. It's about becoming a better version of ourselves. When we think critically, we start to question things we used to accept without a second thought. We take charge of our own learning and don't just swallow everything we're told. The real power of critical thinking lies in its ability to help us think deeply and make informed choices, rather than just going with the flow. This way, we can avoid being passive and instead develop a more thoughtful understanding of the world. By learning to think critically, we can make smarter decisions and become more thoughtful people. We start to see things from different angles and make choices that are truly our own. Critical thinking helps us grow and learn in a way that's meaningful and lasting. It's a skill that benefits us in all areas of life, from our personal relationships to our careers and beyond. By embracing critical thinking, we can become more independent, more confident, and more discerning individuals. We can learn to evaluate information, analyse situations, and make decisions that are truly in our best interests. In the end, critical thinking is a tool that helps us live more intentional, more thoughtful, and more fulfilling lives.

Rather than diminishing the importance of critical thinking, Artificial Intelligence reinforces its educational necessity. The increasing sophistication of generative systems may encourage the belief that interpretation itself can be delegated to technological devices. Yet education has never coincided with the production of correct answers. It

develops through uncertainty, dialogue and the continuous effort to confront alternative perspectives. Learning becomes educational precisely because understanding is achieved through interpretation rather than prediction.

Recent pedagogical scholarship has therefore argued that intelligent technologies should be integrated into learning environments in ways that stimulate inquiry rather than replace it (Costa & Murphy, 2025; Obaje, 2025). Educational mediation remains essential in transforming technological interaction into an opportunity for discussion, argumentation and critical reflection. In this sense, Artificial Intelligence does not weaken the educator's role; it makes it more demanding. Guiding learners towards intellectual independence becomes increasingly important as technological systems become more capable of producing knowledge-like responses (Authors, 2025).

Critical thinking should therefore be understood not as a defensive strategy against Artificial Intelligence, but as one of the essential conditions through which education preserves its formative function. The pedagogical question is not whether intelligent systems can generate answers, but whether educational processes continue to cultivate persons capable of asking meaningful questions, interpreting complexity and exercising autonomous judgement. It is from this perspective that educational care emerges as the relational condition through which critical thinking can genuinely develop.

3. Educational Care as Pedagogical Mediation

If critical thinking enables learners to exercise autonomous judgement, educational care provides the relational conditions through which such judgement can mature. These dimensions should not be considered separate educational objectives but complementary expressions of the same formative process. Reflection develops through relationships that sustain dialogue, trust and intellectual responsibility. For this reason, the growing presence of Artificial Intelligence does not diminish the relevance of educational care; rather, it makes its pedagogical function increasingly evident.

Much of the current discussion surrounding Artificial Intelligence highlights its capacity to personalise learning by adapting content, pace and feedback to individual learners. Although these possibilities represent a significant educational opportunity, pedagogical personalisation cannot be reduced to algorithmic adaptation. Educational processes concern persons before performances. They involve experiences, interpretations and aspirations that cannot be fully inferred from behavioural data or automated responses.

Learning is not just about getting information; it's about growing as a person. Teachers should help students learn in a way that makes them to think, question, and understand what they're being taught. This way, students can make sense of what they're learning and use it in their own lives. Just having access to a lot of information, even with the help of artificial intelligence, is not enough. Students need to be able to talk to teachers and other students, and learn from each other, to really understand what they're learning. This is what makes learning a meaningful experience. Technology can be helpful, but it's not a replacement for human interaction. It's the way teachers help students learn that makes technology useful, not just a tool. When students feel supported and encouraged, they start to believe in themselves, take responsibility for their learning, and become independent thinkers. This is what educational care is all about. It's not against using new technology, but it's what makes technology actually work for learning.

This distinction also redefines the role of educators. As intelligent systems increasingly assume functions related to information management and instructional support, the distinctive contribution of teachers lies less in transmitting knowledge than in accompanying processes of interpretation, dialogue and ethical reflection. Educational mediation becomes the space in which learners are encouraged to confront uncertainty, justify their positions and recognise alternative perspectives. The value of teaching, therefore, resides not only in what is taught but in the quality of the relationships through which learning is experienced.

Recent pedagogical reflections have consequently argued that educational innovation should be assessed not only by technological performance but also by its capacity to preserve the relational and ethical dimensions of educational practice (Costa & Murphy, 2025; Biesta, 2020). Artificial Intelligence can enrich educational environments when it supports inquiry, collaboration and reflective dialogue; it becomes problematic when technological efficiency replaces

educational intentionality. The decisive issue is therefore not the presence of technology itself, but the pedagogical criteria guiding its integration into educational contexts.

Educational care thus emerges as the relational foundation of education in the age of Artificial Intelligence. It does not compensate for the limits of technology; rather, it ensures that technological innovation remains oriented towards the development of persons. Precisely because education is always a relational practice, caring becomes the condition through which critical thinking can evolve into responsible judgment and, ultimately, contribute to human development. From this perspective, the question is no longer how Artificial Intelligence can personalise learning, but how educational relationships can preserve the formative value of learning within increasingly intelligent environments.

4. Human Development Beyond Personalisation

One of the most influential promises of Artificial Intelligence concerns its capacity to personalise learning. By processing large amounts of educational data, intelligent systems can adapt content, timing and feedback to individual learners, offering increasingly differentiated learning pathways. These developments undoubtedly expand educational opportunities and may support more inclusive forms of teaching. From a pedagogical perspective, however, a crucial distinction remains necessary: adapting instruction to individual needs does not automatically promote personal development.

Education has never been limited to improving learning performance. Its distinctive task is to accompany persons in becoming capable of interpreting experience, exercising responsibility and positioning themselves critically within the world they inhabit. Human development is therefore not the cumulative result of increasingly efficient learning experiences, but an open and relational process through which identity is continuously shaped. Such development cannot be predicted or programmed because it emerges through encounters with uncertainty, dialogue and difference. These experiences frequently interrupt linear learning trajectories, yet they constitute some of the most meaningful moments of education.

This distinction invites a broader understanding of educational innovation. Artificial Intelligence can optimise learning processes, facilitate access to knowledge and support adaptive educational pathways. Nevertheless, optimisation should not be confused with formation. Educational processes remain irreducibly human because they involve interpretation rather than calculation, judgement rather than prediction, and responsibility rather than automation. The value of education lies precisely in its capacity to accompany learners through situations that resist standardisation and require personal engagement.

From this perspective, educational quality cannot be assessed solely through indicators of efficiency, performance or technological sophistication. A pedagogical perspective requires asking a different question: what kinds of persons are educational environments enabling learners to become? As Biesta (2020) argues, education fulfils its formative function when it creates opportunities for subjectification, allowing individuals to emerge as responsible subjects rather than merely successful learners. This perspective shifts attention from measurable outcomes to the educational conditions that sustain autonomy, agency and participation.

Artificial Intelligence, therefore, challenges educational institutions to reaffirm the purposes of education rather than simply its methods. The issue is not whether intelligent technologies should become part of contemporary learning environments, but whether their use remains guided by educational aims that cannot be reduced to efficiency or personalisation. Human development continues to represent the horizon within which technological innovation acquires educational meaning. Without such a horizon, education risks becoming increasingly effective in supporting learning while progressively losing sight of the person for whom learning ultimately exists.

For this reason, critical thinking and educational care should be interpreted as pedagogical conditions that orient educational innovation towards human development. Together they preserve the formative nature of education, ensuring that technological progress serves not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the cultivation of persons capable of judgement, responsibility and participation. It is from this convergence that a

humanistic pedagogical framework for education in the age of Artificial Intelligence can be proposed.

5. A Humanistic Pedagogical Framework for Educating the Person

The reflections developed throughout this article suggest that the educational challenges generated by Artificial Intelligence cannot be adequately addressed by technological solutions alone. Although intelligent systems are transforming access to knowledge, personalising learning experiences and supporting educational decision-making, these developments do not redefine the educational purposes that give meaning to teaching and learning. They rather require pedagogy to clarify the principles through which technological innovation can remain oriented towards the formation of the person.

From this perspective, the framework proposed here should not be interpreted as a set of educational competences, nor as a model for regulating the use of Artificial Intelligence in educational contexts. It represents a pedagogical perspective through which technological innovation can be critically interpreted.

Critical thinking, care and human development are not independent dimensions but mutually constitutive elements of educational practice. Critical thinking enables learners to exercise autonomous judgement; educational care creates the relational conditions in which such judgement can emerge; human development provides the educational horizon that gives coherence and direction to both. Their significance lies precisely in their interdependence rather than in their individual contribution.

This perspective also invites a reconsideration of the educator's professional role. As Artificial Intelligence progressively assumes functions related to information processing, content generation and personalised feedback, the distinctive contribution of educators increasingly concerns interpretation, dialogue and educational judgement. Their responsibility no longer resides primarily in transmitting knowledge but in creating educational environments where learners are encouraged to question assumptions, confront uncertainty and construct meaning through relationships with others. Far from reducing the relevance of teachers, Artificial Intelligence makes their pedagogical role more visible by highlighting those dimensions of education that cannot be automated.

Consequently, the educational value of Artificial Intelligence cannot be assessed solely in terms of efficiency, adaptability or technological performance. A genuinely pedagogical evaluation requires asking whether educational innovation contributes to the formation of reflective, responsible and socially engaged persons. This shift moves the debate beyond the opposition between enthusiasm and scepticism towards technology, proposing instead a criterion grounded in educational intentionality. Artificial Intelligence becomes educationally valuable not because it performs tasks more effectively than humans, but because it can support educational processes intentionally directed towards human flourishing.

The framework outlined in this contribution, therefore, proposes a different way of understanding educational innovation. Rather than adapting pedagogy to technology, it argues that technology should be interpreted through pedagogical principles that preserve the centrality of the person. This perspective neither rejects Artificial Intelligence nor assumes its educational neutrality. Instead, it recognises technological innovation as a contemporary condition that requires renewed pedagogical responsibility. In this sense, educating the person remains the primary educational task, while Artificial Intelligence becomes one of the contexts through which that task must now be critically reinterpreted.

6. Conclusions

Artificial Intelligence is transforming educational systems at an unprecedented pace, yet its most significant implications remain pedagogical rather than technological. The challenge facing contemporary education is not simply to integrate increasingly sophisticated digital tools, but to preserve those formative conditions through which persons develop autonomy, responsibility and critical judgement. From this perspective, the educational question extends beyond technological innovation to concern the purposes that continue to orient educational action.

The framework proposed in this article argues that critical thinking, care and human development should be understood as complementary pedagogical dimensions through which Artificial Intelligence can be integrated without displacing

the centrality of the person. Rather than interpreting technology as an autonomous driver of educational change, the contribution suggests that its educational value depends on the pedagogical intentionality that guides its use. Technological innovation becomes meaningful only when it supports educational relationships that foster interpretation, dialogue, and responsible participation.

This perspective also invites a broader reconsideration of educational research. Future studies should move beyond evaluating the effectiveness of Artificial Intelligence solely in terms of learning outcomes or technological performance, and pay greater attention to how intelligent systems reshape educational relationships, professional identities, and the conditions for human development. In this sense, the future of education will depend less on the evolution of Artificial Intelligence itself than on pedagogy's capacity to continue interpreting technological change from the standpoint of the person. Educating the person, therefore, remains not only the enduring purpose of education, but also the essential criterion for evaluating educational innovation in the age of Artificial Intelligence.

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