Title: Exploring AI and the future of digital learning through fiction

Neil Dixon, Anglia Ruskin University and Andrew Cox, University of Sheffield

Introduction

The increasing integration of AI in higher education necessitates nuanced discussions, to move us beyond simplistic utopian / dystopian narratives (Bearman, Ryan & Ajjawi, 2022; Hermann, 2023). Dang & Liu (2021) found people can hold both negative and positive views towards AI (e.g. as a threat to jobs, or as increasing convenience that will free us from mundane work). These binary views significantly influence perceptions, design, and development of AI, often overlooking crucial social contexts. The assumption that technology offers easy solutions (Andrews, 2015), coupled with a sense of technological inevitability, ignores critical concerns about 's do dehumanization (Reid, 2014), loss of agency, and the potential for exacerbated inequalities (Blythe et al., 2016). By creatively imagining future uses of AI (Selwyn, 2020; Houlden & Veletsianos, 2023; Cox, 2021), we can gain critical insights into the present, creating proactive engagement with the practice and politics of digital technologies in higher education, rather than passive acceptance.

Aims for the session

This workshop aims to explore future, imaginative AI applications. We will use a participatory approach that incorporates creative writing prompts. You will begin by writing your own story, followed by a collaborative sharing within small groups to envision ideal uses. Our goal is to move beyond common technological narratives and deepen our understanding of AI's potential. In the workshop we will use the relatable example of AI agents. AI agents are systems designed to make independent decisions on our behalf (Maedche et al., 2019). These systems have the potential to enhance productivity and allow for more meaningful work (Khaokaew et al., 2022). The workshop proposes that fiction offers a unique, detached environment to examine underlying perceptions of this emerging technology. The benefits of engaging with a subject imaginatively through fiction allows for the exploration of hidden narratives, values, and assumptions that may not surface in traditional discussion-based participant engagement.

Expected outcomes

Participating in this workshop offers you a distinctive opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of your own perspectives on AI, especially the ethical and practical implications. By using fiction to surface often-unspoken concerns, you will learn from the experiences of others and can share your insights. Prior workshops (Dixon & Cox, 2025) revealed a broad optimism about AI, with minor changes to work anticipated, and trust being a key factor in technology acceptance. This workshop

will build on that work by developing an understanding of our evolving values associated with these increasingly available new technologies.

Plan for engagement

The workshop will include a brief overview of the research and an explanation of the fictional prompt activity. Participants will engage in several short writing exercises, followed by sharing their reflections in a facilitated group discussion. We will conclude by exploring the usefulness of fiction in this context. Consent will be sought to analyse the anonymised written responses for a future research article. The findings will contribute to understanding the perceptions and limitations of AI agents, empowering stakeholders to adopt a purpose-driven rather than technology-first attitude to technology implementation.

Keywords: AI, AI Agents, Digital learning, Creative writing

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