

The paradox that changed everything: My journey from AI enforcer to AI advocate - from catching cheaters to championing change

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I still remember the moment the irony hit me. There I was, sitting in yet another academic integrity meeting, reviewing a student's assessment flagged for high AI usage - a clear case of misconduct according to our policies. The numbers told the story for me, 86% AI-generated content. As I began to write a carefully worded email to the student, outlining the consequences of their actions, I paused mid-sentence.

The email I was writing? Polished by AI for clarity and tone.

The stack of research papers on my desk? Summarised by AI to save me hours of reading.

The personalised feedback I had sent to thirty students just that morning? Structured and refined with AI assistance.

The realisation was uncomfortable, even embarrassing. Here I was, enforcing a 'do as I say, not as I do' approach to AI. How could I, in good conscience, penalise students for using the very tools that made me more effective in my role? This was not just hypocrisy - it was a fundamental misalignment between policy and practice - between education and reality.

That moment of internal contradiction set the stage for everything that came after.

The questions that would not stay quiet

Initially, I tried to rationalise the difference. *I'm an educator, I told myself. I know how to use AI appropriately.* Students, I reasoned, were trying to cheat. But the more I thought about it, the more those justifications crumbled. Were students really cheating, or were they simply using available resources to complete their work - just as I did? Were we punishing them for adapting to a world we, as educators, had failed to adapt to ourselves?

The questions in my mind multiplied like a rolling snowball -

- If AI makes me more efficient without diminishing my expertise, why wouldn't it do the same for students?
- If the real world expects graduates to work with AI, why does academia insist they work without it?
- What if the problem wasn't student misconduct, but outdated assessments that no longer measured what they claimed to measure?

These questions kept me awake at night. They followed me into meetings. They transformed every academic integrity case from a simple matter of policy enforcement into a complex ethical dilemma.

Finding the framework: Constructive Alignment meets the AI Age

My brain began rotating around the core issues - assessments, learning outcomes, teaching methods. I was not researching to enforce rules - I was researching to understand, to question, to rethink. That is when I came across *constructive alignment*, John Biggs' framework that ensures learning activities and assessments are directly aligned with the intended learning outcomes.

The breakthrough came on a particularly frustrating day. If AI had fundamentally changed the context of learning, then our learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessments could not remain the same. We could not simply slap AI policies onto a twentieth-century educational framework and expect it to work. Everything had to evolve together.

What if, instead of fighting AI, we redesigned education around it?

What if assessments and teaching methods were rebuilt from the ground up for an AI-driven world?

What if embracing AI now could prepare students for the world they will actually live in?

And just like that, my PhD topic was born.

AI as a Tool, not a replacement

The fact that a calculator can handle 345×56 effortlessly does not mean basic math should be skipped in education. Similarly, AI can perform complex tasks, but it is up to educators to decide when and how to integrate it, ensuring students learn to use these tools responsibly and ethically.

In my own work, I use AI extensively, and I am completely transparent about it. But here is the critical distinction - I am *always* the controller, never the controlled. AI amplifies my capabilities, but the decisions, the interpretations, and the ethical judgments remain firmly in human hands.

What this looks like in practice

When I need to *review literature*, AI helps me search across vast databases, identifying relevant resources I might have missed. But I decide which sources are credible, which arguments are sound, which methodologies are robust.

When I am drowning in *research papers*, AI provides summaries that help me quickly assess relevance. But I read the full papers that matter, I identify the gaps in the research, I synthesise the insights.

When I am *analysing data* or identifying patterns, AI processes information at speeds I never could. But I ask the questions, I interpret the findings, I draw the conclusions.

AI has transformed how I work. Tasks that once consumed hours now take mere minutes - and the quality has only improved. With AI managing the routine and repetitive tasks, I can devote more energy to the creative, analytical, and inherently human dimensions of research and teaching.

The vision - ethical AI integration across education

My PhD research focuses on developing a framework for ethical AI integration in higher education through the lens of constructive alignment. It is not just theoretical, it is deeply practical, born from my daily work in learning and teaching, shaped by every academic integrity meeting I conduct.

The goal is in three parts -

1. **For Students:** Help them understand how to use AI as a legitimate learning tool rather than a shortcut to avoid learning. Teach them to leverage AI for enhanced understanding, deeper analysis, and more sophisticated thinking, not to replace their own cognitive effort
2. **For Educators:** Provide practical frameworks for designing assessments that are AI-resistant not through prohibition but through sophistication. Create learning activities that incorporate AI meaningfully, teaching students to work with these tools rather than pretending they don't exist
3. **For Institutions:** Develop learning outcomes that prepare students for an AI-integrated workplace. When our graduates enter industry, they will be expected to use AI fluently and ethically. Our responsibility is to prepare them for that reality - not shield them from it.

The irony is that the academic integrity meetings I once found 'frustrating' have become my most valuable research site. Every case teaches me something about the gap between policy and practice, between what we say we value and what we measure, between education as it is and education as it needs to be.

The comfortable contradiction

I have made peace with the paradox that started this journey. Yes, I use AI in my work. Yes, I still conduct academic integrity meetings. No, this is not hypocritical – it is *evolutionary*.

The difference now is that I am not enforcing outdated rules, I am helping to write new ones. I am not punishing students for adapting, I am creating pathways for appropriate adaptation. I am not pretending AI does not exist – *I am ensuring we use it wisely*.

Looking forward - the work ahead

The research journey is just beginning, but the direction is clear. Through my PhD work, I aim to -

- Develop an evidence-based framework for redesigning assessments in the AI age
- Create guidelines for ethical AI use that students can follow
- Bridge the gap between academic policy and professional practice

Most importantly, I want to help shift the conversation from "How do we stop students from using AI?" to "How do we teach students to use AI well?"

Because the truth is, *we cannot stop them*. We should not want to. The world they are entering will not just permit AI use - it will require it! Our job is not to prepare students for a world that no longer exists. It is to prepare them for the world that does.

The invitation

To my fellow educators who feel caught in the same paradox I experienced - you are not alone. The discomfort you feel is not a sign you are doing something wrong – it is a sign that something needs to change.

To students navigating confusing and contradictory AI policies: I see you. Your frustration is valid. The gap between what we tell you and what the working world expects is real. We are working to close it.

To institutions grappling with AI policies: *prohibition is not protection*. We need frameworks that acknowledge reality while upholding academic integrity. We need assessments that measure learning, not just the absence of AI.

The future of education is not AI-free - it is AI-wise. It is about humans and machines working together, each doing what they do best, with humans firmly in control of the outcomes that matter.

That is why I am committed to helping students not only embrace and integrate AI into their lives but to do so responsibly, ethically, and with critical awareness, fostering thoughtful, meaningful applications, while also using it myself as a purposeful tool in everyday life.

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