Artificial Intelligence: Two Conversations About Learning, Authenticity, and Who We Are

By Dr. Martin Kilbridge

I recently had two conversations about artificial intelligence and education that I found particularly thought-provoking. One was a roundtable hosted by *Albany Business Review* editor-in-chief Melissa Mangini with Turina Parker, District Superintendent of WSWHE BOCES, and Carl Mummenthey, Superintendent of Niskayuna Central School District. The other was with Dr. Beth DeAngelis, a pioneer in emotional intelligence training for corporations and schools whose career included Chair of the Theology department at Holy Names. Both conversations raised questions that go well beyond how schools should use AI. Here is my reflection on those conversations.

The world has changed dramatically, but the fundamental purpose of education has not. We are still trying to form young people who can think, relate to others, contribute meaningfully, and take responsibility for their lives. The challenge is maintaining that focus as expectations of schools continue to expand.

AI makes that work both more complicated and more important. Students will need to use AI effectively in college, careers, and everyday life. But they will also need to know how to ask good questions, evaluate what they are given, distinguish what is real from what is fabricated, and use technology without surrendering their own judgment. The danger may be that we begin to question everything. As Superintendent Mummenthay pointed out, children now question everything they see and hear.

To avoid raising a generation of cynics, we need to teach children to interrogate answers with a desire to arrive closer to the truth. Is this accurate? What evidence supports it? What assumptions are embedded in it? What is missing? How would I know? Dr. Turner drew the apt comparison between AI literacy and Media Literacy – we need to apply a critical lens to the material in front of us.

That requires knowledge. Critical thinking cannot exist without a body of knowledge; you cannot critically evaluate something you know nothing about. AI can be extraordinarily useful, but only when the person using it has enough knowledge and judgment to evaluate its response. I see this in my own use of AI: it can generate ideas quickly, for example give me ten hooks to introduce the concept of Existentialism to my Leadership Seminar students, but I need to know the material and understand my students before I can determine whether those ideas are useful.

My conversation with Beth DeAngelis pushed the question further. AI should not be viewed simply through an academic lens, but through the lens of the whole person: body, mind, heart, and spirit. What makes an idea truly our own? How do we preserve original thought when a machine can produce something that appears original? Where is the person in the context of AI? One way to begin is by asking students open-ended questions that help them develop original thought and an inner life.

Pope Leo XIV takes up this very question in his recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*. “In the era of artificial intelligence, when human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization, ours is the pressing duty to remain profoundly human.” Writing about artificial intelligence, the Holy Father reminds us that technological progress cannot become a substitute for humanity itself. The person remains unique and irreplaceable, capable of freedom, conscience, relationship, and love. The question, then, is not simply what AI can do, but what it means to remain fully human in a world increasingly shaped by AI.

These questions will matter in the world our students are entering. In business, one of the most important questions may be: *Can I trust this person? Are they authentic?* When AI can generate our words, images, ideas, and even aspects of our identity, knowing who we are—and demonstrating that authenticity—becomes even more important.

This brings us back to our motto: *Esse Quam Videri*—To be, rather than to seem. In a world where technology can increasingly create the appearance of knowledge, creativity, intelligence, and personality, our task is to help young women genuinely develop those qualities. We need to help them realize what Pope Leo wrote, ““The dignity inscribed in each of us by the Holy Spirit can…be seen in our capacity to reflect critically, choose and love freely, and form authentic relationships.”

AI can help students learn, create, and work more effectively. But it cannot answer the most important questions for them: What matters to me? What do I believe? What kind of person do I want to be? What do I care about?

Those are human questions.

Our work is not to keep AI outside the classroom, nor to embrace it uncritically. It is to help students learn to live, learn, create, and lead in a world where AI will be everywhere—while remaining fully present themselves.

That is the conversation we need to have—with one another and, most importantly, with our students.