sciendo International Conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION
Vol. XXXI No 2 2025

ENACTING AN INITIATIVE *CASTALIA* TO FULFILL NEW TEACHING AND LEARNING DEMANDS AMIDST ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) AND THE EMERGENCE OF ARTIFICIAL GENERAL INTELLIGENCE (AGI)

Sever AVRAM*, Eric GILDER**

***EUROLINK, Bucharest, Romania**
****Papua New Guinea University of Technology, Lae, PNG**
severavram@gmail.com, eric.gilder@pnguot.ac.pg

Abstract: *The authors posit that the educational sciences in the new age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can best be founded upon the epistemological paradigm of Weak Thought (as contrasted to Strong Thought), This conceptual framework also has advantages regarding the flexibility it can offer in terms of teaching and learning within pluralistic societies and institutions across many academic disciplines and field applications. From the point of view of the risks related to the lack of intellectual rigor and proper student training, many professors are aware, but AI also presents a wider risk of creating an entire knowledge universe of simulacra, which passes as true knowledge via its growing ability to accurately mimic expected scholarly semantic structures. Add to this the possibility of a false ideational/ideological neutrality being created by it of an unlimited permissiveness towards new ideological groundings, at least, as well as, especially, of a "decisional entropy", which is currently faced not only by numerous individuals, but even entire cultures and societies, presumably in full systemic transformation. Finally, the transformations that education should integrate in the future evolution of AI into a more complex landscape, i.e., Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).*

Keywords: Teaching and Learning, Higher Education, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Philosophical and Literary Implications, Castalia (H. Heese)

1. Introduction

The authors posit that the educational sciences in the new age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) can best be founded upon the epistemological paradigm of Weak Thought as defined by Gianni Vattimo (as contrasted to Strong Thought as articulated by D. Caputo) [1], This conceptual framework also has advantages regarding the flexibility it can offer in terms of teaching and learning within pluralistic societies and institutions across many academic disciplines and field applications. From the point of view of the risks related to the lack of intellectual rigor and proper student training, many professors are aware, but AI also presents a wider risk of creating an entire knowledge universe of simulacra, which passes as true knowledge via its growing ability to accurately mimic expected scholarly semantic structures. Add to this the possibility of a false ideational/ideological neutrality being created by it (based upon the large-scale language model databases employed in training the AI system used), of an unlimited permissiveness towards new ideological groundings, at least apparently, as well as, especially, of a "decisional entropy", which is currently faced not only

DOI: 10.2478/kbo-2025-0057

by numerous individuals, but even entire cultures and societies, presumably in full systemic transformation.

Each generation of students or lifelong learners aspires to exceed the boundaries of previous knowledge, to break certain canons or at least inconvenient clichés, while also trying to self-edify, to establish themselves as a person and as a "strength of character", as an emotional-affective consolidation, principled and acting from ethical-moral rules and the search for so-called constructive vs. destructive landmarks in the process of learning, knowing, representing and self-representing one's own identity in relation to the world around them. An improper use of AI could prevent an individual's self-concept from developing.

2. Philosophical Background

In this context, we could take cues from the ethical and aesthetic areas, capable of supporting the idea of the importance of the role of the Master and of ethical models in the training process, especially of adolescents and young people. Obviously, let us recognize that we no longer aspire to the previous models of classical or Renaissance humanism (Picco della Mirandola's "uomo universale"), to forms of aesthetic apprenticeship (see the Rodin - Brancusi relationship model) or intellectual anchoretic (see Constatin Noica's "School of Paltinis" and the mini-utopia developed through the "performance culture" model popular in the 1980s in Sibiu). In other words, although or precisely because we no longer talk today, in a brutal "mass society" (cf. Herbert Marcuse), hypnotized by images (cf. Jean Baudrillard, "Cool memories"), desacralized, in which the Sacred has strongly camouflaged itself in the Profane (cf. Mircea Eliade "The Sacred and the Profane"), about Initiation in Education, about ritual practices, it does not mean in the least that their importance has been anaemic or pulverized as meaning, as significance and especially as a stimulating-exploratory, guiding role (the need for "Forward Walker" towards the Luminous Being, as Martin Heidegger would have said) and even soteriological/therapeutic. In other words, although we rely on a pluralistic perspective, in an extended sense, such as that of several key concepts on Good and Evil [2], which we inherently accept generically, in education we almost inevitably restrict ourselves to a narrow-utilitarian, stereotyped perspective, which does not allow for takeoff towards real social innovation [3].

3. Pedagogical Innovation of Hesse's *Castalia*

With these understandings, we estimate that the model of the "pedagogical province" imagined by the novelist Hermann Hesse in "The Glass Bead Game" could be of real use as an example. There, we remember that 'Castalia' represents "a utopia of pure knowledge", a space where wars and conflicts have disappeared, and life unfolds in an almost timeless silence. But that world presents itself as one "deeply separated from the social and economic reality" of the rest of society, existing at the expense of the efforts of others [4]. This fact is criticized even by one of the characters in the novel, such as Designori, but this is far from the configuration of the utopia of world autarchy promoted in our days by the anarcho-technocratic ideology in the USA by Peter Thiel and the Heritage Foundation [5].

In contrast, the model of Castalia in Hesse's novel has proven, even in the test of time, to be an allegory of "intellectual utopia", a world of pure spirit and knowledge (called 'noocracy' by Camil Petrescu), but which, precisely through its isolation from reality, ends up revealing its limits and self-denying itself. Through the fate of Josef Knecht, Hesse suggested that, unfortunately, neither spiritual perfection nor total involvement in the World would ultimately offer an "absolute answer", and the search for balance between the two

remains a fundamental dilemma of human existence itself, a tragedy in itself [6].

Here, it would be worth focusing a little on the end of the character Joseph Knecht, described as a "return to the wilderness", a "reintegration into the natural order" of existence, somehow in the lineage of the symbolic disappearance of the wise Euthanasios from Mihai Eminescu's short story "Cesara", of a becoming beyond the rigors and artificiality of Castalia. This return symbolizes the acceptance of the limits of pure knowledge and spiritual isolation, as well as the recognition of the value of "life lived in the world", and not in self-reclusion, even if this is deeply and lucidly assumed. There, the main hero, "Magister Ludi" Knecht became "the connecting link between the world and the enclave of scholars", choosing to leave the safety and comfort of Castalia to get involved in the destiny of others, especially of the young Tito. Knecht's sacrifice symbolically marks in the novel's economy the overcoming of spiritual egoism and the assumption of responsibility towards other people. Knecht's dramatic ending thus becomes a "key" to a true "spiritual awakening", of ethical authentication above all, an act of self - renunciation and giving, which transcends the limits of Castalia and opens the way to an authentic existence, anchored in responsibility and love for the Other, the personalist sense of Emmanuel Mounier (cf. "Manifesto in the service of personalism") or of giving in Togetherness of Zygmunt Bauman (cf. "Falling In and Out of Love" or in "Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds"). Thus, taking such a starting point resulting from the difficult dual relationship between "giving" and "human responsibility", the entire debate on the future of education, in an already emerging world dominated by AI and mostly by augmented reality, becomes even more provocative and captivating to study [7].

4. Moving towards Generative AI

Paradoxical or not, in a world of Generative AI/Augmented Reality, much more lush, prolific, but somehow also confusing for those who are still learning, who are still "initiating", the demand and rigor of reporting to integrative, trans-dual ethical models (theory-practice), which should give us a measure of the complexity of the World we live in. The virtual as well as the use of virtual applications ty from augmented reality strive and even partially succeed, within many museums or training techniques, to "reconstruct" reality to a good extent, as part of its resources that dominate our need for authentication. We are talking here about those sources of inspiration or public utility to which we would not physically have access or unrestricted access. However, no matter how consistently and synthetically AI compresses or essentializes the original, primordial sources of our collective or individual memory, reduces our momentary lapses, of course, memory, like collective forgetting, will always require the disciple to confront some contexts and even paradigms in motion. Such confrontation can take place according to his own representations and especially the disciples' capacity to imagine symbolic forms (cf. Gilbert Durand "Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary") or in a broader sense, as in the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, who emphasized the creative function of our social Imaginary and of social institutions as an integrative way of accessing the significant unity, the one that generates meaning of the "lived world"[8]. In other words, an education aimed at facilitating for the disciple, truly, a path destined to glimpse, even mediated, some true "imaginary countries" (mythical-symbolic ones), according to the aesthetic and critical terminology of Albert Beguin [9].

Unfortunately, as humanity, in the ultra-hedonistic, ultra-consumeristic era we plunged into after the Second World War, in many respects it seems we remained

tributary and confined, unfortunately, to multiple atavisms, neo-tribalisms or conjunctural neo-barbarisms, failing to perform in the integrative direction recommended by Anton Dumitriu of reaching an axiomatic consensus as was once already suggested in "Eleatic cultures, Heraclitean cultures"[10].

5. Educational Ethnology under AI

Such a stake, so vast in terms of investigative scope and depth, would imply in the future a much more energetic and palpable connection to the Imaginary as such, as it appears defined by C.G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, Gaston Bachelard or Gilbert Durand. To begin with, in this sense, we would recommend a reorientation towards the development of an approach and set of tools adapted - including or especially through AI applications - both towards a revisitation of the original sources evoked as the foundation of all the above-mentioned approaches, and towards a guided educational path regarding the development of creative imagination or with a creative-stimulating premise among students [11].

In other words, focusing on imagination and stimulating imaginative thinking should not constitute a brake on the cultivation of creative and ethical values, but only a remedial approach on the way of an excessive instrumentalization, of a narrow-minded utilitarianism, which is ultimately harmful to the Collective Well-being, first of all, of a mature person, during his personal and professional life.

Obviously, since the 1990s and 2000s, in France and Italy, as a matter of interesting study-case, the sociological premises of an ethnological/ethnographic analysis applied to the educational process have been developed. The approach of the "educational ethnography" [12] in the French tradition has already been consolidated especially thanks to the scientific works of professors Georges Lapassade [13] and Patrick Boumard [14], who promoted the traditional sociological analysis. This, however, implied an alternative ethnological approach in order to study the School, the community, the class and even the school establishment, in explicit contradiction with the structuralist and statistical sociological analyses. Boumard had the courage to propose that by the School one should understand a cultural community, with "its own rituals, rules, values, hierarchies and customs, somewhat similar to those of the "tribes" studied by classical anthropology from Frobenius to Levi Strauss.

In this approach, the school became not just a simple territory for the transmission of knowledge, but for the construction of social and cultural identities. In the same framework, Boumard proposed that the teacher assume an "active role" as an ethnographic researcher, approaching his students and reflecting in parallel on "his own involvement and identity". This self-reflection of the teacher allows him to better understand the entire context in the construction of the school curriculum from a double perspective, deeply significant. What we consider to be relevant and to be taken up in this work in relation to AI crucially refers to the need to understand Education from within, micro-cosmically, through the interaction and shared "construction of signifiers".

Also, Georges Lapassade's legacy, in particular, taken up and developed as an approach by Boumard, has the merit of manifesting an "articulated opposition" against the reproduction of social inequalities and social alienation/anxiety [15] by proposing an Education based on a "co-participatory observation" as well as on the "shared construction of Knowledge" in accordance with "institutional pedagogy" and also with "critical institutionalism" [16].

We believe that the educational ethnography and the processes involved in AI develop complex relationships, focused in particular on understanding real "socio-technological practices" and anticipating

ethical challenges/stakes. The most recent research highlights three key connections in particular:

• understanding the real uses of educational technologies with a particular focus on the following aspects: academic data organization (format management, synchronization of multiple devices); hybridization of private/professional spheres with effect on digital well-being.

• identifying new challenges/ethical stakes in the process of integrating AI applications in education.

• involving a collaborative approach in favour of a human-centred AI (teachers' contribution to the development of training assessment tools, students' participation in usability tests to validate "cognitive ergonomics" [17], integration by executive teams of the necessary institutional logic elements).

The development of such potential, so needed synergy between these dimensions shows us that the educational ethnography can prove to be a cardinal "lever" regarding the evolution of educational AI applications towards becoming increasingly efficient, equitable, and pertinently possible to transpose into contexts of diversity and social inclusion at the European level.

In essence, we propose as worthy of remembering and highlighting the fact that the ethnographic approach can illuminate the way of conception and the capacity of influence of AI on education, thus bringing a more consistent understanding of the real interactions of education with AI.

Such an approach should take into account the real practices and needs of users in favour of also meeting the related ethical and critical stakes. On the other hand, the tensions between the technological dimension of AI and the human and social realities/contexts of education are quite serious and numerous, such as:

• complexity of educational contexts vs algorithmic standardization

• agency of school actors vs technical automation

• equity in school vs purely technical rationality

• respect for the dignity of school actors vs exploitation of personal data [18].

These observations are significant in view to avoid biases, discriminations and dilution/self-isolation of the school space in relation to the use of AI systems in education. The protagonists of the school space, as suggested by the approach proposed by the educational ethnography, have the chance to gradually adopt a more "reflexive and collaborative" position that can involve teachers and students in the "co-creation process" of content and related ethical implications. This would allow for a better adaptation of the tools used according to local contexts and the specific needs of the users. At the same time, it could lead to the development of more understandable, more ethically oriented and more trustworthy educational AI applications for the participants in the educational process.

The transposition of the educational ethnography would also allow for a more consistent and unified assumption of the introduction of AI applications in educational systems, vis-à-vis the strategies of "economic actors" such as EdTech, Big Tech and the potential transformations of educational practices themselves in terms of the conception of the role of creativity and of appropriate assessment methods.

Our comments on the previous case study have provided us with an essential framework for future educational approaches to AI that can thus comply more rigorously with the demands of "human complexity", on social equity and harmonious inculcation within different school contexts/environments, while also overcoming a purely technical and neutrally instrumental approach to the role of AI in education.

6. Practical Application of Our Ethnological Approach to AI

At The Papua New Guinea University of Technology (PNGUoT), author Gilder

teaches periodic seminars for the pedagogical training of academic staff from a variety of faculties (Engineering, Natural Sciences, Natural Resources, Built Environment, and Humanities/Social Sciences) within a Teaching and Learning Methods Unit (TLMU) [19]. In Semester I, 2025, he led multiple discussions with teaching staff on the ethnological application of AI in the varied classrooms. It was an engaging endeavour, with colleagues expressing both hope and fear of the technology. Like some AI adepts (such as Bill Gates) [20] have indicated, it is possible that much of what university teachers and scholars now perform as part of their jobs will be thoroughly transformed (if not eliminated) by the ubiquity of AI use in academe, research, professions, and industry, and the predicted quick arrival of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) by 2027 [21]. With oracles speaking of both optimistic and pessimistic possible futures for humanity worldwide, our strong opinion is that only such a philosophical and literary consideration will provide us with the tools to tilt the programming of the AI models to good ends and to weather whichever outcome eventuates [22].

7. Conclusions

The transformations that education, especially the lifelong-learning approach, should integrate in the future, the evolution of AI into a more complex landscape, including decisional, societal, of a *holistic-integrative* evolution of the social, cultural and ethical dimensions of education.

Although, apparently, in contemporary educational approaches, the components of initiation and, correlatively, mystery or secrecy have been pulverized or camouflaged in the profane by the societies, in fact, also in a world dominated by artificial intelligence and by the augmented reality, there is a strong need for a revitalization and a new vibe that would refresh perspectives through a re-sourcing in relation to the deep structures of the collective imaginary. Nevertheless, an educational reinvention of such scope demands a revisiting of our civilizational fundaments and mentalities by detaching from massified and ultra-consumerist approaches in order to thus provide new opportunities for connection through intellectual/spiritual curiosity. This should be seen in correlation with both the prismatic complexity of knowledge and the imagistic and decisional entropy that is so deeply responsible for our own needs for personal/intimate identity and a much wiser civic legitimacy.

Acknowledgements

The authors give thanks for the technical assistance of Sandu Zamfirescu of EUROLINK, and author Gilder gives thanks to his faculty colleagues at PNGUoT who participated in his “International Trends in Higher Education Teaching” seminar in Semester I 2025.

References

[1] Caputo, J. D., & Vattimo, G. After the death of God. Robbins, J.W, editor. New York: Columbia University Press; 2007.

[2] Calder, T. The concept of evil [Internet]. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Zalta, E. W. & Nodelman, U., editors. Winter 2022 Edition: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/. Accessed May, 23, 2025.

[3] Bauman, Z., & Demos (Organization). Alone again: Ethics after certainty. London: Demos; 1994.

[4] Heese, H. The glass bead game. New York: Vintage; 2000.

[5] Cf. Turner, K. From technocracy to governance: How Peter Thiel's vision aligns with Project 2025 [Internet]. Medium blog. December, 23, 2024. https://kellyjoturner.medium.com/from-technocracy-to-governance-how-peter-thiels-vision-aligns-with-project-2025-a89bbc4826a0. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[6] Madách, I. The tragedy of man: A dramatic poem in fifteen scenes. New York: Corvina Press; 1998.
[7] Cf. Tzitzis, S. Chapitre 15. Emmanuel Mounier. Existence et personne. De l'idéal communautaire in Qu'est-ce que la personne?. Collection U [Internet]. Paris, CNL, July, 18, 2024. https://shs.cairn.info/qu-est-ce-que-la-personne--9782200016104-page-239?lang=fr. 239-252. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[8] Castoriadis, C. L'institution imaginaire de la société. Paris: Seuil; 1975.
[9] Cf. Mogenet, R. Albert Béguin et le rêve romantique prospectif. Notes de lecture [Internet]. Chambéry: Lettres du Mont-Blanc. June, 26, 2023, https://doi.org/10.58079/rmt4. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[10] Dumitriu, A. Culturi eleate și culturi heracleitice. Bucharest: Cartea Românească; 1987.
[11] Avram, S. & Gilder, E. New times, new knowledge, and finding the 'NorthStar' of success in a changing world of learning. Logos universality mentality education novelty - section: Philosophy and humanistic sciences. March, 2024; 11(1): 01-11.
[12] Boumard, P. & Bouvet, R.-M. La Société européenne d'ethnographie de l'éducation. Histoire et enjeux [Internet]. Ethnologie française. 2007; 37(4): 689-697. https://doi.org/10.3917/ethn.074.0689. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[13] SEEE - European Society of Ethnography and Education. Hommage a Georges Lapassade. [Internet]. Sociedad Europea de etnografía de la educación. 2019; http://riethno.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Lapassade-monografico1.pdf. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[14] Boumard, P. L'école, les jeunes, la déviance. Paris: PU; 1999.
[15] Avram, S. & Gilder. E. Is the pursuit of well-being and happiness possible in organizations under stress using the hybrid communication format?. Language, culture and change. 2022; 3 (Communication vs Hybridization). "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași.
[16] Cf. International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC). Collection: Challenges of critical institutionalism. Nov, 27, 2020. https://thecommonsjournal.org/collections/challenges-of-critical-institutionalism82819. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[17] Falzon, P. (Ed.). Cognitive ergonomics: Understanding, learning and designing human-computer Interaction (Computers and People). Oxford: Academic Press; 2015.
[18] Cf. U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Technology. Artificial intelligence and the future of teaching and learning: Insights and recommendations. [Internet]. Washington, D.C.; May 2023. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/documents/ai-report/ai-report.pdf. Accessed May, 23, 2025, and Miao, F., Holmes, W., Ronghuai, H. & Hui, Z. Zhang. AI and education: Guidance for policy-makers. [Internet]. Paris: UNESCO; 2021. https://doi.org/10.54675/PCSP7350. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[19] Cf. [Internet]. https://www.pnguot.ac.pg/faculties/ and [Internet]. https://www.pnguot.ac.pg/non-academic-departments/tlmu/. Accessed May, 23, 2025.
[20] Bill Gates predicts only three jobs will survive the AI takeover: Here is why. [Internet]. Panache ET Magazine. March, 28, 2025. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/bill-gates-predicts-only-three-jobs-will-survive-the-ai-takeover-here-is-why/articleshow/119533999.cms?from=mdr. Accessed May, 23, 2025.

[21] Kokotajlo, D., Alexander, S., Larsen, T., Lifland, E. & Dean, R. AI 2027. [Internet]. 3 April 2025. https://ai-2027.com/. Accessed May, 23, 2025, Buchanan, B. (Interview). The government knows AGI is coming. [Internet]. The Ezra Klein Show. 4 March 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Btos-LEYQ30. Accessed May, 23, 2025, Hassabis, D. (Interview). Google DeepMind CEO worries about a 'worst-case' A.I. future, but is staying optimistic. [Internet]. Time. 23 April 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2W-fHE96tc. Accessed May, 23, 2025.

[22] Winthrop, R. (Interview). Educating kids in the age of A.I. [Internet]. The Ezra Klein Show. May, 13, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQQtaWgIQmE. Accessed May, 23, 2025.