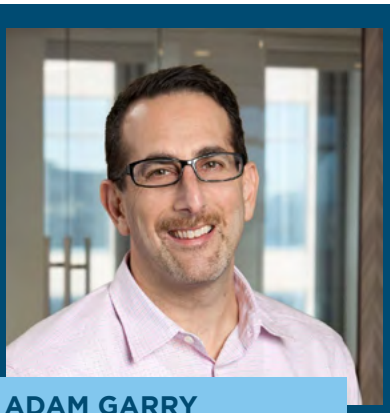

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"[AI] should enhance what humans do best, not attempt to replace it."

AI IN EDUCATION: A SUPPORT, NOT A SUBSTITUTE

My view of AI in education is straightforward: it should enhance what humans do best, not attempt to replace it. Done well, it can deepen teaching and learning, making them more relational and more adaptive, not more mechanical or detached.

I didn't arrive at that belief through theory. I arrived at it through experience, in my own classroom and leading professional development.

When I was a teacher, I was never the stand-and-deliver type. I didn't lecture from the front of the room. I saw my role as a facilitator. My job was to design experiences, ask better questions, and help students wrestle with ideas. But the system around me didn't always make it easy. Too often, teaching felt like delivering content on a schedule, regardless of whether students were ready for it or connected to it.

That tension is what shapes how I think about AI today.

My vision is rooted in three experiences that changed how I see school.

The first is **backward design**. I spent years helping educators think about starting with the end in mind. If we say we want students to be critical thinkers, collaborators, adaptive communicators, what does that actually look like? What would they produce? What performance would demonstrate mastery? For me, learning has always culminated in performance-based assessment. Not just a

test, but something authentic like a presentation, a design, a solution, or a product.

The challenge has always been practical. Designing meaningful performance tasks is hard. Assessing them consistently is even harder. Teachers are already stretched thin. This is where AI becomes interesting, not as a driver of instruction, but as a support. AI can help generate ideas for authentic assessments. It can assist in analyzing patterns in student work. It can help flag where a student may need more feedback. It doesn't replace professional judgment, but it can lighten the cognitive load that often prevents teachers from doing deeper work

The second experience came from writing a book on **personalized learning**. I'll admit, I wrote it out of frustration. I watched the tech community redefine "personalized learning" as students sitting alone in front of screens, consuming content at their own pace. That was never what I meant by personalization.

For me, personalization is about voice and choice. It's about giving students meaningful input into how they learn and how they demonstrate what they know. It doesn't mean total freedom all the time. It means thoughtful opportunities for agency when it makes sense. It means asking students what matters to them and designing learning that connects.

AI has the potential to either undermine that vision or strengthen it. If we use it to simply serve up more content faster, we've missed the point. But if we use it to free teachers from repetitive administrative tasks, to surface insights about student interests, or to help students reflect more deeply on their work, then it becomes a partner in personalization rather than a replacement for it.

The third influence on my thinking comes from my roots in **comprehensive school reform**. I've seen reform efforts succeed, and I've seen them fail. The difference is rarely the model itself. It's the people. When a district is handed a solution and told, "Implement this," it almost always falls apart. When educators are brought into the process, supported, and held accountable in thoughtful ways, change is possible.

About ten years ago, I had the opportunity to put these ideas into practice. I worked with a district in Georgia that wanted to scale personalized learning. I helped them build a personalized learning platform from scratch as a proof of concept. We integrated backward design tools, performance-based assessments, and e-portfolios into one coherent system. Teachers could design with the end in mind. Students could document their growth over time. It wasn't perfect, but it worked. And it taught me something critical: technology can support transformation, but it cannot create it on its own. Adoption only happened with the user input and the right professional development.

"Technology can support transformation, but it cannot create it on its own."

I often think about that platform and imagine what it could have been with today's AI capabilities built in. AI could have helped teachers generate high-quality performance tasks aligned to standards. It could have provided faster formative feedback. It could have helped analyze student portfolios at scale, identifying strengths and gaps without reducing learning to a single score.

But the core wouldn't change. Teachers would still be facilitators. Students would still do the thinking. The technology would simply make the orchestration more manageable.

If we are serious about transformation, we also have to confront the "grammar of school," including age-based cohorts, rigid schedules, and seat-time

requirements. Those structures were built for efficiency in a different era. If we want students progressing based on mastery, engaging in internships, and designing solutions to real-world problems, we need systems flexible enough to support that.

AI can help coordinate that complexity. It can track competencies across experiences. It can connect students to opportunities aligned with their interests. It can surface patterns leaders might otherwise miss. But again, it is infrastructure, not identity.

The goal is not to digitize the old system. It is to design something better, a system where teachers spend more time mentoring and less time grading spreadsheets, students exercise real agency, assessment reflects meaningful work, and technology amplifies human strengths rather than eroding them.

AI will not transform education on its own. People will. But if we use it wisely as augmentation and not automation, it can help us build schools that are more coherent, more humane, and more aligned with what we say we value most: deep learning and human growth.