

From Answer-Getting to Sense-Making: Guiding Non-Tech Students in the AI Era

The Educator & His Philosophy on GenAI

Dr. WT is an educator tasked with a unique challenge: teaching information technology to students majoring in Chinese language. This context, where students are not tech-savvy but are increasingly tech-reliant, has shaped his pragmatic and facilitative approach to AI in education. He sees the rise of AI not as a threat to be contained, but as a fundamental shift in the learning process that requires a new kind of guidance.

His philosophy centres on moving students from passive “answer-getting” to active “sense-making.” He recognises that his role is evolving from a primary source of information to a facilitator who equips students with the critical thinking skills needed to navigate an AI-saturated world.

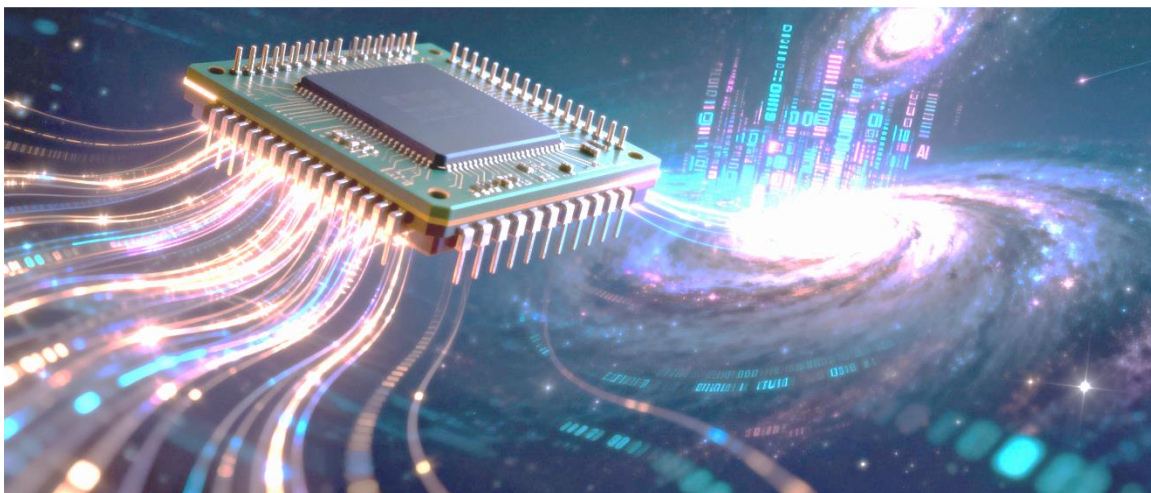
“ My job has shifted. It’s not that it’s more troublesome; it’s that my work has been transformed. I used to brainstorm with people; now I brainstorm with AI. But afterwards, I have to find ways to verify if what it provides is correct and truly meets my needs. ”

— Dr. WT

Course Overview

Dr. WT’s teaching environment is a microcosm of this new educational landscape, where practical application and critical discussion are paramount.

Item	Description
School	School of Education and Languages
Course	Information Technology and Teaching
Student Profile	50 undergraduate students, majoring in Chinese Language
Class Format	3-hour sessions in a PC Lab, combining mini-lectures, discussions, and hands-on practice.
Learning Goals	To build students’ AI literacy, enabling them to use digital tools effectively and ethically for educational purposes.
Assessment Focus	Students’ ability to design digital materials, critically evaluate information, and apply technology to teaching scenarios.



The Driving Change Factor

The primary driver for Dr. WT's pedagogical shift is a direct observation of his students' changing habits. For many students, the default for finding information has moved from Google to AI chatbots like POE. However, this convenience has introduced a significant challenge: a lack of critical verification.

“The biggest problem right now is their inability to comprehend the authenticity of the content within AI. They will directly place easily found information into their assignments. They don't really think to confirm if the content is true or false.”

This issue becomes particularly apparent during class discussions, where students often parrot AI-generated answers without having read or understood them. Furthermore, for these non-technical students, the desire to create aesthetically pleasing designs is often met with the intimidating complexity of AI tools like Playground, leading to frustration and a reluctance to engage.

Strategies in Practice: The “Guided Inquiry” Method

To address these challenges, Dr. WT has developed a structured, multi-step “Guided Inquiry” method. This process is designed to scaffold the students' interaction with AI, transforming it from a simple Q&A into a reflective learning cycle.

1. **Initial AI Exploration:** He begins by encouraging students to use AI as a starting point. “Don't think too much,” he advises, “just use AI for the first step.” This removes the initial barrier and allows them to get raw material to work with.
2. **Critical Evaluation:** The crucial next step is to turn a critical eye on the AI's output. Dr. WT prompts them directly: “I will ask you, what in this AI answer is acceptable, and what is not? What parts require you to do more in-depth research?”
3. **Deepening the Inquiry:** Based on their evaluation, he guides them to formulate better follow-up questions and to seek out external information to verify or challenge the AI's claims.
4. **Synthesis and Ownership:** The final stage is synthesis. Students are tasked with integrating the AI's credible points with their own ideas and research findings to construct a new, more robust answer that is truly their own.

This practical method is embedded within a broader **AI Literacy Framework** that Dr. WT teaches, which covers three core domains: a foundational **Understanding** of what AI is, the effective **Use of AI Tools** (including prompt engineering), and an awareness of the **Ethical Issues** involved.

Outcomes & Challenges

Dr. WT's approach has led to a more mindful use of AI among his students, but it also highlights systemic challenges in the broader educational environment.

	Students	Staff (Educator)
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn a structured process for using AI critically. • Move from passive copying to active synthesis of information. • Develop a foundational understanding of AI literacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI tools (Perplexity, Canva AI) serve as effective brainstorming partners for designing assignments and rubrics. • The educator's role is elevated from information delivery to facilitating higher-order thinking. • AI helps deepen content and produce higher-quality teaching materials.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Paywall Barrier: Free tiers of powerful AI tools are extremely limited, often allowing only a few interactions, which stifles experimentation and learning. • Interface Complexity: Non-technical students are easily intimidated by complex AI interfaces, hindering their willingness to explore. • The Prompting Paradox: While prompt engineering is becoming less critical as AI improves, students still tend to input low-effort questions, limiting the quality of the output. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource and Support Needs: There is a growing need to bridge the gap in providing both financial resources (for subscriptions) and technical support for educators. • Colleague Reluctance: Many in-service teachers are hesitant to adopt AI due to a lack of time, trust issues, privacy concerns, and the perceived burden of verifying AI-generated content. • Tool Fragmentation: Educators lack a centralised platform that recommends the right tool for the right pedagogical task.

Reflections & The Road Ahead

Dr. WT offers a nuanced perspective on the future. He astutely observes that the frantic focus on “prompt engineering” is already fading as AI models become more intuitive. “Four or five months ago, I would have said learning prompt engineering is very important,” he reflects. “But now, it seems not so important anymore.”

Looking forward, he envisions AI’s ideal role as a “**Teaching Assistant**,” one that can handle first-level tasks and free up educators to focus on more profound aspects of teaching. He believes AI holds two key promises for his profession: to reduce administrative workload and, more importantly, to deepen the quality of educational content by helping educators explore ideas they previously lacked the time to consider.

His ultimate vision is for an integrated platform that not only aggregates tools but intelligently recommends them based on a teacher’s specific needs—a “Magic School” that is more versatile and powerful. However, he remains pragmatic, acknowledging that without addressing the fundamental issues of cost and institutional support, the full potential of AI in education will remain just out of reach for many.

