Teaching Teachers in the Age of AI: A Faculty Reflection on Lesson Planning

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"This discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories." (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 275a, as cited in Cooper, 1997, p. 551)

In this selection from one of Plato's dialogues, the mythical King Thamus critiques the written word which has been presented to him by the Egyptian god Theuth. He argues that writing- the latest technology of the times- would lead to forgetfulness. The written word was debated because it was perceived as a threat to true knowledge. With centuries of hindsight, we now recognize that writing has propelled human understanding. Still, my reflections on today's latest technology—artificial intelligence (AI)—echo these ancient tensions. On one hand, I regard AI with awe at its potential to complement and enhance the way we access information, analyze, synthesize, and communicate. On the other hand, I am concerned about what we could lose by relying on computer processing to do this important and uniquely human work. As a teacher educator, I worry about what my students, who are preservice teachers, will miss in their preparation. The role of teachers is immensely complex, requiring the ability to immediately respond to students in ways that facilitate thinking and growth within each individual student. They need not only an understanding of their content but also must become so fluent in a range of teaching and classroom management strategies that they can make split-second decisions that are likely to support learning and development (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007).

From this position of concern, one of the first chats I had with Chat GPT was about lesson planning. I wanted to test the software on a task that is challenging to my undergraduate early childhood education majors. In a matter of seconds, it was clear to me that AI was up to the task. Writing lesson plans is a foundational skill I teach slowly and deliberately each fall in my Integrating Curriculum course. I have adapted the gradual release of responsibility model to the process (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). I first offer a foundational demonstration. Then, my students evaluate my work using a rubric, and we discuss areas of strength and areas in need of improvement. Next student thinking is scaffolded when I collaborate with students to create a lesson plan, referring to the

1

rubric I will use to evaluate their work. I next invite them to work in pairs or teams to create a plan with peer support. I teach the students about the value of critique in improving their work and facilitate structured peer feedback, allowing students to apply my lesson plan rubric which challenges them to engage deeply with my expectations. Finally, hopefully, teacher candidates achieve independence, writing a lesson plan that meets all requirements without outside support. They are well prepared for the submission of their first lesson plan which they either develop successfully or are given constructive feedback and asked to resubmit.

I devote this time, effort, and high expectations to lesson planning because I believe it develops the thinking processes that later allow teachers to be responsive and adaptive (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2006). Now, AI can shortcut all of that deliberate thought and creativity. Viewing its impressive work, I worried. How can I teach preservice teachers to think like a teacher without them struggling through this essential rite of passage for aspiring teachers? Would they become dependent on AI? Will they miss out on the joy of using their creativity to plan for students and thus burnout early? Will they grasp alignment? Will they fail their students? Because if they do fail their students, I will have failed to do my job to prepare them for their sacred role as educators.

Problems are often opportunities for self-study of teaching education practices, the empirical study of one's own teaching (Pinnegar & Russel, 1995). With this perspective, I quickly adopted a stance of curiosity. I contacted colleagues, listed as co-authors on this manuscript, who also were scheduled to teach a course entitled Integrating Curriculum in the approaching semester and proposed that we design a study of our use of AI to teach lesson planning. We collaboratively developed a template and rubric to structure our expectations. The results of our pilot use of this method will be presented in another manuscript. The following outlines a three-cycle gradual release of responsibility structure we collaboratively designed to incorporate AI into teaching lesson planning:

1. "I Do" Cycle
   a. *Model* After supplying students with a lesson plan template and rubric, the faculty demonstrates lesson planning through direct instruction, explicitly modeling the thinking processes for each component of the lesson plan as they complete the lesson plan template.
   b. *Critique* The faculty teaches the value of critique in improving creative work using the video Austyn's Butterfly (KQED, 2016) and introduces McDonald and Allen's Tuning Protocol described in Kushman (1997), a sequence used by PBL Works (2019) and makes revisions to the lesson plan.
   c. *AI Feedback* The faculty then uses AI to solicit feedback which is then used for revision. Queries may include "Evaluate this lesson plan using the attached rubric," "Provide feedback on the developmental appropriateness of this lesson plan for preschoolers."

2. "We Do" Cycle
   a. *Collaborate* The faculty provides some sections of the lesson plan but invites students to help complete other sections of the template, using questioning to facilitate the thinking processes necessary to make instructional decisions.
   b. *AI Feedback* The class brainstorms prompts to generate AI feedback on the lesson plan and collaboratively makes revisions.
   c. *(Optional) Paired Planning* Candidates plan a lesson in pairs then partner with another pair for critique. They can also generate AI feedback before developing a final lesson plan which is presented to the class for assessment using the rubric.

3. "You Do" Cycle
   a. *Independent Planning* The student is assigned an individual lesson plan to be completed on their own. They are permitted to use AI and entrusted to do so ethically following the course policy.
   b. *Peer evaluation* Each student's lesson plan is evaluated by a peer using the rubric. Feedback can inform revision.
   c. *Final submission* The final submission is graded as Pass/ Fail. Students who fail are given constructive feedback and may revise their lesson and resubmit it until they develop mastery.

As a result of my effort to intentionally incorporate AI use in lesson planning, the course has improved. With the addition of more feedback and critique generated by AI, students benefit from repeated practice and facilitated reflection. They demonstrate mastery faster, allowing more time to explore other course content, such as project based learning. Due to the thoughtful introduction of the use of AI, many aspects of this change have gone well. Following my curiosity with openness to challenging myself to do something new has resulted in improved preservice teacher lesson plans. Since we complete the planning process in class, I can balance the value of their productive struggle to create a lesson plan with the addition of artificial intelligence as an additional source of critique and support without losing focus on the development of their teacher-thinking. Use of a well-developed AI-use policy (Lisy & Masri Zada, 2025) supports the process.

With each year, every new cohort of preservice teachers will have more experience with AI than the last and likely will be more dependent on it for support with brainstorming, writing, and editing. AI will simultaneously continue to improve exponentially. These ongoing and rapid changes make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of my approach over time and force ongoing revision of my course to ensure that the difficult mental work of aligning goals, writing detailed procedures, and planning for assessment is developed in the teacher preparation program. I end this reflective narrative with a playful dialogue Chat GPT offered to write for me when I asked it to interpret the quote that began this essay and make a modern parallel. Here, AI has captured the essence of my internal tensions about this new technology and the need for human intellectual struggle for learning to take place. My role as

faculty remains unchanged. I must adapt to whatever technologies emerge to guide students toward authentic understanding.

Plato Visits the 21st Century

(A Lost Dialogue, definitely not edited by Socrates)

Plato (examining a glowing screen):

What is this oracle that speaks without thought, yet claims to know all?

User:

That's Google. You can ask it anything.

Plato:

Even the nature of justice?

User:

Mostly trivia, shopping, and cat videos.

Plato:

And this Chat…GPT?

User:

It writes essays, poems, even mimics philosophers.

Plato:

So a mimic of wisdom—without struggle or soul?

User:

Only if you don't prompt it right.

Plato:

A dangerous tool. Do students still wrestle with ideas?

User:

They wrestle with due dates. GPT helps… the night before.

Plato (sighing):

From speech to script to simulacra… You've made shadows of knowledge.

User:

But we still read Plato.

Plato (smiling):

Ah. Then there's still hope.

– (OpenAI, 2025)

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