

Education AI Shifts From Chatbots to Guided Workflows

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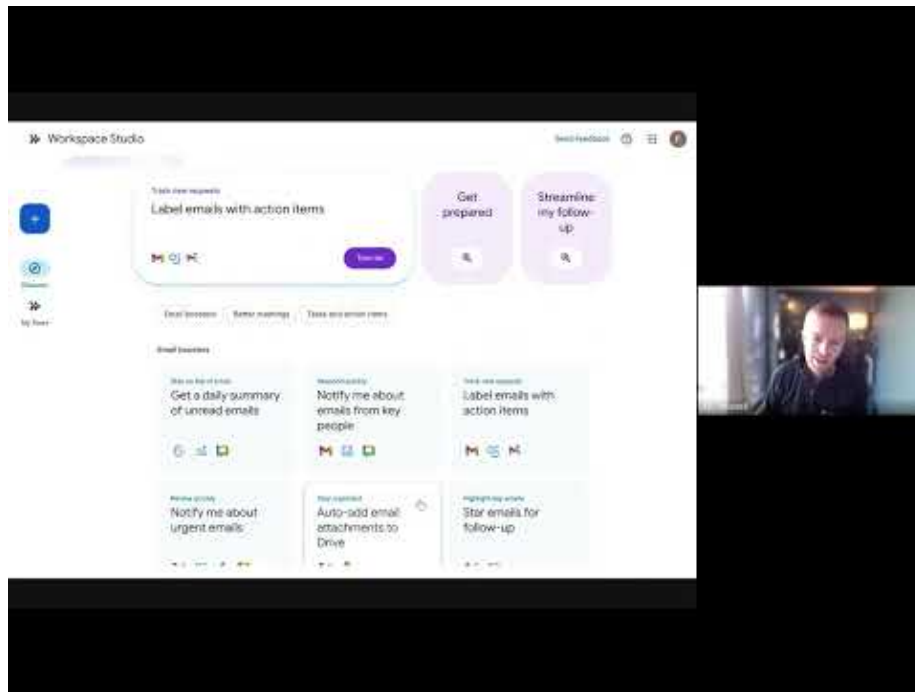
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AI is shifting from a stand-alone chatbot toward guided workflows embedded in classrooms and institutional operations. This brief examines promising evidence for simulated practice, the design choices that preserve learner thinking, and the governance questions leaders now need to answer.

AI moves from stand-alone chat to guided workflows

This week's clearest development is the embedding of AI into the systems where teaching, support, and administration already happen. Google is rolling out Classroom as a connected Gemini app: teachers can ask natural-language questions about class activities, student performance, key concepts, and possible next steps. Gemini is designed to provide analysis and drafts—not to publish assignments or grade on a teacher's behalf. [1]

Google's new Workspace Studio extends that shift to workflow automation across education editions, while allowing administrators to control access by organization, unit, or group and manage flow sharing. [2] In one university demonstration, a flow identified helpdesk emails that might require mental-health support and routed those to a person or Chat space; less-sensitive requests received an AI-drafted response based on university information. [2]



IT Community Meetup: Google Vault [K12] (16:44)

Microsoft is pursuing a similarly bounded model with its Study and Learn agent. Available to education users across licensing tiers, it is built around productive struggle, adaptive scaffolding, active learning, and application; it coaches rather than supplies answers, and can generate practice activities such as flashcards, quizzes, matching, and fill-in-the-blank exercises. [3]

The important design choice is **where automation stops**. The strongest emerging pattern is not “AI runs the class,” but AI drafts, organizes, surfaces patterns, or supplies practice—while educators remain responsible for judgment, publication, assessment, and sensitive interventions.

Simulated practice shows promise when feedback is part of the learning design

A separate body of work points to a high-value use of AI: giving learners more chances to rehearse difficult interactions.

- In a 60-student medical-education study, students using virtual simulated patients improved their theoretical scores by about 6.5 points more than peers receiving traditional case-based training. [4]
- In a study with 94 novice counselors, AI-patient practice **plus AI feedback** improved client-centered microskills; practice without feedback showed no improvement, and empathy declined relative to the feedback

group. [4]

- Columbia’s ACE negotiation system, tested with 374 participants, paired a bargaining counterpart with targeted coaching and outperformed both no-feedback and alternative-feedback conditions. [4]

The shared lesson is that simulation alone is not the intervention. The useful sequence is **attempt, feedback, reflection, and another attempt**. A UC Santa Cruz history exercise using an LLM-enabled medieval-peasant role-play similarly found the activity worked best when embedded in discussion, analysis, reflection, and research—not treated as a one-off novelty. [4]

This is a practical opportunity for professional learning, clinical education, teacher preparation, sales training, and language practice: AI can make rehearsal more available, but the feedback model and human-led debrief determine whether practice becomes learning.

The central learning question remains: does AI extend thinking or replace it?

Rose Luckin draws a useful distinction between beneficial cognitive offloading—where AI handles groundwork that enables more sophisticated thinking—and disadvantageous offloading, where learners bypass thought altogether. Her point is that assignment design determines the outcome: students use AI differently when they must demonstrate understanding rather than merely submit an output. [5]

That distinction is visible in reading as well. An EdSurge commentary argues that AI text-leveling can deny learners access to complex texts and reduce the effort needed for retention and engagement. Its alternative is to keep the original text while using AI for supports such as vocabulary and syntax identification, phrase chunking, fluency-practice selection, and teacher think-aloud scripts. [6]

Guided tools are increasingly built around this principle. Khanmigo, for example, is designed to refuse direct answers and instead use hints and reasoning checks; its math workflow compares a student’s proposed step with expected responses and asks the student to explain discrepancies. [7]

“Learn fast, act more slowly.” [5]

That is also becoming an implementation principle. In Linköping, Sweden, the municipality is preparing mandatory AI-literacy learning for 6,000 education staff before broader student rollout. Its framework emphasizes **agency** (human control), **critical thinking**, and **responsibility** for outputs and data. [8] At the same time, Luckin warns that adoption and policy activity are increasing while gaps in access between advantaged and less-advantaged communities are also widening. [5]

What This Means

- **For education leaders:** Start with bounded workflows that solve a real problem—such as meeting follow-ups, source-grounded staff knowledge hubs, or draft communications. Name the person accountable for checking outputs before automating anything consequential.
- **For learning and L&D teams:** Treat AI simulations as structured rehearsal. Build in a briefing, defined success criteria, feedback, reflection, and a repeat attempt. A conversational agent without those elements is not automatically a learning experience. [4]
- **For instructional designers:** Make student thinking observable. Ask learners to explain their reasoning, evaluate an AI response, revise it, or defend a decision. Avoid tasks where a polished output is the only evidence of learning. [5]
- **For procurement teams:** Examine more than headline capabilities. Luckin recommends asking what data trained a tool, what pedagogical premise shaped it, whether impact studies are well designed and independent, and whether the research population represents intended users. [5]
- **For equity and accessibility work:** Use AI to scaffold access—translation, vocabulary support, alternate formats, targeted practice—without quietly lowering the intellectual demand placed on some learners. [6]

Watch This Space

- **AI-native school models:** A \$40,000-per-year private school opening in Oklahoma plans roughly two hours of AI-led core academics daily, with adult “guides” focused on projects and enrichment. It also says it cannot support students needing intensive behavioral, therapeutic, or one-to-one academic help—an early test of how access and inclusion play out in teacher-light models. [9, 10]
- **Classroom AI transparency:** Google says educators will soon receive insights into how students interact with teacher-created Gems and NotebookLM resources, including topics and questions. The practical value will depend on whether those insights help teachers intervene rather than simply add another dashboard. [11]
- **Automation in sensitive settings:** Triage, student-support, and communications workflows can reduce routine workload, but they also raise the stakes for escalation rules, data governance, and human review.
- **Evidence beyond engagement:** Simulation studies are encouraging, but education leaders will need independent evidence on sustained learning, equity, and implementation conditions—not only faster production of materials or positive user reactions.

Sources

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