Chapter 8
Human Agency and Empathy at Risk?
Social Constructivist Standpoint

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ABSTRACT

The increasing integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into educational systems has introduced new challenges concerning pedagogical clarity, ethical sensitivity and learner autonomy. This chapter grounded in social constructivist and critical pedagogical approaches explores how core human capacities such as empathy and critical thinking must be carefully safeguarded within learning environments to protect psychological and physical well-being. Rather than reducing education to automated efficiency, it emphasizes the importance of real social presence, ethical transparency and dialogic human interaction in teaching practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

The true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual. -Lev S. Vygotsky

The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in recent years has catalyzed a significant transformation in the educational landscape. This shift compels a reconsideration of traditional pedagogical frameworks, as AI technologies increasingly influence how educational services are delivered and governed. Although GenAI offers clear advantages such as automation, personalized learning and assessment support it simultaneously provokes substantial concern among

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-1195-1.ch008

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stakeholders including administrators, teachers, students and parents (Bozkurt et al., 2024; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2023). These concerns raise complex ethical, pedagogical and sociological questions about when, how and to what extent such technologies should be implemented.

Building on these dilemmas, it is important to critically examine both the promises and pitfalls of GenAI in real-world educational contexts. GenAI tools present opportunities across various domains including content generation, adaptive learning and linguistic assistance. At the same time, these technologies pose considerable risks such as diminishing human agency, algorithmic bias, ethical ambiguity, erosion of trust in information, decline in critical thinking and reduced empathy (Bozkurt, 2023; Turkle, 2021). While artificial intelligence is often associated with enhanced efficiency and convenience, its societal implementation frequently results in job insecurity and economic precarity. As financial gains remain concentrated within a small elite, a pressing ethical question arises: Why are essential human capacities such as thinking and creativity being outsourced to machines in the name of progress?

GenAI's potential to reach singularity further amplifies these concerns, as autonomous decision-making processes may evolve beyond human oversight. This notion of singularity refers to a hypothetical threshold at which AI systems could surpass human intelligence and autonomy, making independent decisions that are no longer interpretable or manageable by humans (Bostrom, 2014). In educational contexts, this development raises significant ontological concerns, as it shifts epistemic authority from the learner to the machine, thereby undermining both human agency and ethical judgment. Such developments risk compromising learners' subjectivity and moral growth. Subjectivity, in this context, refers to the learner's evolving sense of self and agency, shaped through dialogue, emotional engagement and social interaction. Within a social constructivist framework, subjectivity is not fixed but co-constructed through meaningful participation in knowledge-making processes. For example, when students engage in authentic educational dialogue, they develop not only cognitive understanding but also ethical perspectives and personal identities (Biesta, 2006). GenAI-mediated instruction, lacking such intersubjective depth, threatens to reduce learning to transactional outputs.

In response to these challenges to learner subjectivity, a pedagogical reorientation is necessary, one that centers on humanistic and socially grounded frameworks of learning. Therefore, it becomes essential to reaffirm educational values that prioritize emotional, ethical and interpersonal engagement not merely technological integration. Social constructivist theory offers a powerful lens to engage with these pedagogical challenges. Vygotsky's (1979) framework emphasizes that learning is inherently social, shaped by interaction, culture and language. Rather than treating learners as passive recipients of information, constructivist approaches stress the

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