Rethinking Inclusion in the Age of Generative AI

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Inclusion has long been a guiding principle in education—yet it remains one of our most persistent challenges. Despite decades of reform, many students still feel unseen or unheard, navigating classrooms that were never truly designed with them in mind (Slee, 2011; Reay, 2017). As generative AI reshapes the educational landscape, it brings with it both new possibilities—and new exclusions.

Inclusion today is not just about who *enters* a classroom, but about who is *recognized* within it. It's about the ways students are represented and addressed in learning—through lessons, feedback, and increasingly, through AI-generated content and interactions. A student's ability to engage is no longer determined only by physical access or formal enrolment but by how well they are positioned to interact meaningfully with these new systems (Watson et al., 2025).

Generative AI can help bridge longstanding gaps. A neurodiverse student may use it to personalise the way they receive information. A learner from a linguistically diverse background can reframe complex concepts in culturally familiar language. These are not technical conveniences; they are acts of recognition. They tell learners: "You belong here."

However, inclusion is never automatic. Generative AI may also replicate biases in its training data (Bender et al., 2021), exclude cultural narratives outside dominant contexts, or subtly shift learning from collaboration toward isolated optimisation (Knox et al., 2019). As Watson and Romic (2024) argue, tools like ChatGPT are not just assisting with learning—they are *reconfiguring how meaning is made*, positioning themselves as semantic partners in education's communicative processes.

This is why we must develop what Watson and Shi (2024) frame as generative AI literacy—not just the skill to operate new tools, but the awareness to engage critically with how those tools shape meaning. Unlike earlier forms of digital literacy, this involves understanding AI as a co-creator of knowledge and experience. It is a call to support learners in becoming active participants in the evolving dialogue of education.

Singal's (2010) exploration of inclusive education in the Global South highlights the importance of contextual understanding and the need to engage directly with learners' experiences. While her work predates generative AI, the principles she discusses remain relevant as we consider how AI tools can either support or hinder inclusion, particularly in diverse educational settings.

Recent research underscores the potential of AI to support inclusive education by providing tailored support for children with special needs and breaking down language barriers (Fitas, 2025). This study emphasizes the importance of ethical implementation and equitable access to ensure that AI benefits all learners.

Inclusion, in this sense, is not a destination but a process—an ongoing negotiation between learners, systems, and technologies. If generative AI is now part of how knowledge is made and shared, then inclusion must involve asking: *Whose meaning matters? Whose voice is amplified or obscured?*

As we prepare for the *Cambridge Generative AI in Education Conference 2025*, let's keep inclusion at the centre of our conversations about AI. Not as an afterthought, but as a foundation. Because in the end, inclusive education is not just about making room—it's about remaking the room itself.

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