Japan Bilingual Publishing Co.

Journal of Education and Learning Environments

https://ojs.bilpub.com/index.php/jele

ARTICLE

Using Classroom Surveys to Align Grading Practices and Self-Directed Learning in the Age of AI

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ABSTRACT

The rapid saturation of research on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the classroom reflects concerns with the even more rapidly developing AI in many aspects of society. Framing the parameters of AI literacy can serve as an important context within which educators can guide students toward critical engagement with AI tools in order to develop their self-directed learning. Before this can happen, however, an aspect to consider in order to harness the potential of AI tools includes the necessity of aligning grading practices with self-directed learning. This article explores how such an alignment may foster a learning environment that shifts the use of AI away from merely generating substitutive text and toward actually harnessing its potential as a tool for helping authentic learning to happen. Drawing on relevant research and two survey responses from secondary students, this article aims to establish a context in which reflective classroom surveys can help teachers implement process-based grading structures to empower students in their growth as authentic learners instead of defaulting to passive users of AI. In such a context, the secondary classroom would remove the barriers created by hierarchical grading practices, evolve with emergent technology, train students to interact meaningfully and ethically with it, and ultimately prepare them for the ongoing challenges of using AI in the humanities and society, overall.

Keywords: Grading Practices; Self-Directed Learning; Surveys; Secondary Classrooms; AI in Education

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 15 May 2026 | Revised: 23 July 2026 | Accepted: 30 July 2026 | Published Online: 12 August 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55121/jele.v2i2.101339

CITATION

Powell, E.N., 2026. Using Classroom Surveys to Align Grading Practices and Self-Directed Learning in the Age of AI. Journal of Education and Learning Environments. 2(2): 45–55. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55121/jele.v2i2.101339

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1. Introduction

Among the quickly accelerating and increasingly complex discussions regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI) in every facet of society, Culatta [1] offers a profile of "an AI-Ready graduate" to focus the aims of educators and the crucial role they play in guiding learners, and particularly those at the secondary level, toward mature, critical thinking and, ultimately, self-directed learning, which arguably stands as the primary goal of education. Secondary schools reside at the heart of this work, both as training grounds and microcosms of society, especially as AI's omnipresence and rapidly growing capabilities challenge educators to consider safe, ethical, and strategic ways to help students engage with various AI tools to develop as self-directed learners.

This article explores one crucial aspect concerning Culatta's profile as it attempts to help educators guide students toward becoming mature, self-directed learners that can make or break not only their schooling experience but also their attitudes toward AI, learning, and education altogether: namely, grading. The method used in this article to explore the topic will be classroom surveys and the role they can play in helping educators establish grading practices that develop self-directed learning in an AI world. The article will tackle this question in the following order:

- First, the article will delineate Culatta's profile of an "AI-Ready graduate" and situate it relationally within the framework of secondary education's crucial goal of developing independent and, ultimately, self-directed learners [2].
- Second, after establishing that relationship, the article will show how the structures of traditional grading are incompatible with Culatta's profile and self-directed learning.
- Third, the article will address how traditional grading has not only robbed students of the opportunities to engage in authentic self-directed learning, but also how that old framework must be queried and challenged with new practices in order to foster more authentic learning experiences and grading for students to engage critically and productively with AI tools and develop as strong, independent, and self-directed learners.
- Finally, the article will highlight a couple of classroom surveys that can help educators query and challenge harmful grading practices by soliciting and partnering with students to develop self-directed skills in the context of an AI world. The article will show how collecting such information from students can serve as an informal yet informational method to help teachers guide students toward self-directed learning.

2. Context and Methodology

2.1. Culatta's Profile of an AI-Ready Graduate and Self-Directed Learning

Culatta, the CEO of ISTE+ASCD, argues that instead of focusing on the instruction of discrete and ever-evolving AI skills in schools, educators should instead focus on some of the most basic and enduring aims of education that develop the critical skills necessary not only to work with AI tools such as ChatGPT, Co-Pilot, Canva, Claude, and the many others that are rapidly developing, but also to filter productive and unproductive ways to engage in the technology and the rapidly evolving landscape of that technology. The six areas Culatta lays out in the profile include the following: Learner, Researcher, Synthesizer, Problem Solver, Connector, and Storyteller.

According to Culatta, these skills will not only help students engage critically with various AI tools, but will also help them to develop the necessary skills of a proficient, independent learner who can "maximize their human potential" in and beyond the framework of formal education. **Table 1** provides a brief overview of these key skill areas, or "roles," and reveals fundamental characteristics of independent learners and how they use AI tools:

Table 1. Culatta's Profile of an AI-Ready Graduate.

Learning Role	Characteristics
Learner	Set learning goals, create plans for learning new skills, identify strategies to get unstuck, and seek targeted feedback to improve performance and understanding
Researcher	Investigate and analyze topics, evaluate claims, and compare sources of information

Table 1. *Cont.*

Learning Role	Characteristics
Synthesizer	Synthesize, remix, and refine information into formats and levels of complexity that best meet their unique needs and capabilities
Problem Solver	Generate new ideas and explore a wide range of possibilities with AI as a brainstorming partner
Connector	Increase human collaboration, including overcoming language barriers and finding common ground among divergent perspectives.
Storyteller	Present and communicate complex ideas through text, image, audio, video, and other media

The key verbs in Culatta's description highlight learners who exceed the capabilities of mere competence in discrete skills and, instead, know how to engage in learning experiences reflective of the traditional liberal arts education [3]. Such learners manifest the same skills that demonstrate critical thinking in ways that "prioritize the ability to ask new questions, connect and interrogate new ideas, evaluate, iterate, and adapt to new response" [3] (p. 55). In other words, they are adept at critical thinking and, thus, in the process of AI literacy [3] (p. 69).

To extend this description further, learners who know how to exercise these skills reflect the traits described by Knowles [2] as self-directed learners. While Knowles primarily focused on adult learners in his seminal study, educators have since applied his framework to multiple disciplines and grade levels. Regardless, the aim remains to develop students who can set learning goals, investigate and analyze topics, remix and refine information, generate and explore new ideas, increase collaboration, and communicate complex ideas in order to demonstrate the process of self-directed learning. In other words, they engage in a "process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals... and evaluating learning outcomes" [2] (p. 18).

The goals of AI literacy, then, as delineated by Culatta, reflect the best traits of the liberal arts tradition of critical thinking as well as the ultimate goal of education, which is to develop strong, self-directed learners. Impeding those aims, however, is a structure that has entrenched itself firmly in formal education systems since at least the eighteenth century [4, 5], that is, a grading system that labels and ranks students based purportedly on objective learning measurements but in reality relies on subjective judgment and has the potential to hinder any sense of authentic, self-directed learning. In this context, the term *authentic* includes learning experiences that position students to explore ideas by taking initiative, forming goals, and determining outcomes, with or without the help of others. As such, the practice of traditional grading, which places hierarchical ranking in the hands of an external, subjective agent instead of in the hands of students to determine and achieve their outcomes, systemically works against that process.

2.2. The Problems with Traditional Grading

In the secondary classroom, grades in general not only represent academic achievement but also stand as perceived tickets to higher educational opportunities, gatekeepers to involvement in extra-curricular activities, and carrots that parents hold in front of their children to earn privileges such as driving, phones, and video games. For better or worse, grades can even shape the self-image of adolescents and cause a great deal of anxiety for many. They have come to mean many things over the years in schools, and academic achievement is merely one of them [6]. Furthermore, traditional grading systems place the above matters in the hands of teachers to decide, fairly or unfairly, the fate of their students.

Granted, this comes with the territory. Teachers use their professional judgment as content experts to determine the degree to which students have demonstrated certain academic proficiencies in their classes. Based on those demonstrations, teachers can evaluate the overall progress of students and place a symbolic marker of their work in the gradebook. Teachers use learning targets, standards, and their own experiences within the subject area to make their evaluations. In the end, the mark is supposed to stand as an objective determination.

However, many readers will quickly draw on their own experiences in school to see the problems with such explanations of grading. For example, in most schools, students quickly find out which teacher is "an easy A" or which

teacher is a difficult grader. According to Bonner and Chen, "all grades contain a measure of unpredictability due to the specific idiosyncrasies of the teachers who award them"[7] (p. 58). This goes both for high schools and colleges, and it's been this way for generations. An A in one class is different from an A in another, even in the same subject; and an A at one school is different from an A in another, again, even in the same subject. Attempts at structuring consistency with fixed grading scales and percentages should ensure objectivity; however, that simply isn't the case. One teacher will deem a student's submitted work as an 88%, or a B+, while another teacher would possibly judge that same piece of work a 92%, which could be an A or A− depending on how the particular scale is set. An Honors teacher might determine that students need to get a 94% for an A, while another sets the mark at 90% yet is known as *the hard* grader. Earning a 90% in their class, therefore, is much more difficult than the 94% in the other class.

Such problems with this approach to grading are rooted in an educational history that purported to measure and communicate objective progress for student achievement. However, almost from the start, its flaws appeared and have persisted without much resistance, to the detriment of students and any meaningful attempts to develop them into people driven by an internal drive toward inquiry.

As several researchers have pointed out over the years, the practice of assigning percentages as grade indicators emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as population growth in countries such as England and the United States created challenges for teachers who wanted to provide feedback but found it time-consuming to write narratives for the performance levels of each student[4, 8–11]. It did not take long, however, for the practice to come under scrutiny. As early as 1912, studies came out questioning the approach and demonstrating its flaws. For example, the attempts at objectivity by way of the percentage system were quickly undercut by the vast range of scores teachers assigned the same essay in a given study. Some teachers assigned the essay "a failing mark" while others "gave the same paper a score of 90 or above"[10] (p. 4). Doubts about the study arose, suggesting that essay grading was "naturally subjective." The study was retried using a supposedly more objective content: geometry. The results, however, were even more troubling: "scores on one paper ranging from 28% to 95%" raised multiple questions about the reliability of grading through percentages and ranking[10] (p. 4). Similarly, marks such as A, B, C, D, and F can only approximate a sense of objectivity, even with the use of grading guides or rubrics, while ultimately residing in the subjective judgment of the one assigning the grade. Kohn accurately described this as "spurious precision, a subjective rating masquerading as an objective assessment"[12] (p. 201).

Further research has shown that such purportedly objective grading systems driven by rankings, percentages, and letter grades carry even more incriminating root practices that reinforced social hierarchies and racist frameworks[11, 13, 14]. These approaches were (and are) not simply flawed; they were (and are) harmful and even dangerous. Nevertheless, they quickly rooted themselves in education systems in various formats around the world and have been the standard method of grading ever since. This has established and maintained unhealthy practices for generations with effects obviously well beyond grading[12, 15]. Such practices not only influence the perceptions students develop about their academic learning but can also threaten to resonate "as some kind of statement of their worth"[11] (p. 11).

When venturing into the territory of self-directed learning, teachers find these long-established grading practices to be challenges and even obstacles that hinder attempts to implement genuine self-directed learning experiences. The assumptions and attitudes of teachers regarding assessment—learned from their own experiences in school—carry over to those of their students, who might see schoolwork and assessments less as a means toward developing self-directedness and more toward achieving certain grades that will allow them to advance to the next grade level[16]. In other words, grades can easily come to represent little other than markers and gateways to advancing through the system and not as indicators of any actual student understanding or proficiency.

When teachers stand as the gatekeepers along this route through the education system, the idea of authentic, internally motivated learning frequently loses out to more externally motivated goals such as advancement, personal privileges, and career paths that might have little to do with learning, other than learning to work through a particular system. The temptation and convenience of AI tools as quick and effective substitutes for actual student work become apparent quickly.

2.3. Alternatives to Traditional Grading

Over the years, researchers and educators aware of the flaws associated with traditional grading have sought various alternative ways to code student progress and achievement. Knowles offered a range of self-assessment and rating scales to move marking and grading away from percentages and points. He also put forth grading contracts to help instructors and adult learners navigate a way through the institutional requirements of higher education and the need for self-directedness [2] (pp. 129–130). While his seminal work established a crucial divergent path away from traditional grading, more work awaited educators, especially those in the secondary classroom.

Several educators have built on Knowles's work to devise methods of grading that attempt to prioritise the learning process and emphasise student-centred practices while shifting grading away from the subjective realm of teacher judgment. Additionally, labor-based and engagement-based grading have also aimed to create more just practices of grading for students [13, 17]. Taken together, the variety of systems can be somewhat bewildering and daunting for educators interested in adapting alternative grading practices. The following table (**Table 2**), therefore, while not exhaustive, attempts nonetheless to clarify the differences among these approaches through brief descriptions of each as well as some of their key proponents.

Table 2. Some Alternative Grading Practices.

Alternative Practice	Description	Key Proponents
Contract-Based	Uses a contract between the student and instructor on what must be completed and to what level of mastery to earn a specific grade in the course.	Tchudi [18] Danielewicz and Elbow [19] Potts [20] Litterio [21]
Process-Based	Values learning process as much as final result. Assesses student learning not only through assignments and assessments, but also through demonstrated effort and proficiency.	Schinske and Tanner [22]
Labor-Based	Final grades based on a contract between an instructor and student that focuses on the amount of work completed in an attempt to create a more equitable approach to grading.	Inoue [23]
Engagement-Based	Measures student engagement through labor and reflection on course content and often includes engagement contracts, but also allows students to choose their forms of engagement and be assessed based on those activities, valuing diverse ways of learning.	Carillo [17]

All of these approaches take into account the shortcomings of traditional grading and aim to code student achievement through more just, equitable, and student-centred methods by honouring students as individuals with various needs, abilities, and interests [20, 24, 25].

The above approaches have generated stimulating and important thinking and strategies for secondary teachers seeking better ways not only to assess student work but also to code it in gradebooks and, in fact, to align grading practices with beliefs about teaching and overall learning that champion student-centeredness and the development of inquiry in those students.

2.4. Grading for Self-Directed Learning

Any formulation of self-directed learning and grading would be well served by Knowles's foundational description of a "process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals... and evaluating learning outcomes" [2] (p. 18). Several key words in his description establish a path toward instructional design and ultimately how to grade it. First, the word *process* establishes a type of education that does not settle for a one-time event or product; rather, it focuses on learning as an experience of growth, setbacks, revision, and multiple attempts—that is, a true process. Second, the word *initiative* activates learners in roles reflective of the problem-posing approach to learning delineated by Freire [26], as does the notion that this active and process-based learning would happen with or without help. Teachers play a crucial role not only regarding what to learn and how to learn, but also how to assess the learning [2, 27]. Third, the word *evaluating* addresses the heart of this paper and its specific line of inquiry regarding grades and aligning them to the overall philosophy behind self-directed learning. These key words all work to make plain the need for educators to design and implement grading methods that reflect

that philosophy.

If, in fact, the philosophy behind self-directed learning compels educators to partner with students and guide them one step closer to being people of inquiry, then a grading system that aligns with that view would need to honour process, inquiry, personal interest, meaningful connections, and authentic demonstrations of understanding. Students would need the chance to access different levels of achievement based on their choices and investment in learning. They would need opportunities to rethink their work, revise, and choose ways to show their understanding in ways that play to their strengths. The focus of learning and assessment would shift from *getting grades* and toward developing paths to levels of self-assessment, reflection, and revision. Grades would become markers of those levels of investment rather than symbols of a teacher's approval or disapproval.

Acknowledging that such attempts would also most likely need to find ways to work within the well-embedded structures of traditional grading systems that are not going anywhere anytime soon, the grading scale would need to function nonetheless within that structure, adopting some of the traditional codes but shifting their meaning in order to empower students as active learners of their own design instead of inhibiting them as performers for someone else's protocols.

With that in mind, I developed a grading method in my secondary classes over several years and saw full implementation at the start of the 2023–2024 school year. Specifically, the classes included three sections of English 10 co-taught and two sections of an Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition. In total, between 140 and 150 students were enrolled in these courses. A blend of process-based and contract-based grading, the method attempted ultimately to reflect the tenets of Knowles' description of self-directed learning in the context of a secondary classroom that was bound by certain traditional grading structures in place (e.g., percentages and letter grades).

The grading method itself offered students the opportunity to determine their level of achievement in the class based on the amount of work they did, the level of proficiency at which they did the work, and the ways in which they chose to demonstrate improvement throughout the course [20]. Based on the percentage of proficient assignments submitted, students could earn the grade of their choice—a D, C, B, or A. Rather than earning points or grades on individual assignments, students saw grading move toward a credit/no-credit approach to collected work. Students would either receive a completion mark for submitting work that demonstrated proficiency on a given learning target, an incomplete mark for making an effort but needing to do further work to demonstrate proficiency, or a missing mark for not turning in the work. Feedback from the teacher in the form of short notes or one-on-one conversations attempted to clarify expectations and encourage students to revise to demonstrate proficiency. The grade book would include three marks: complete, incomplete, or missing. Students would have the opportunity to complete assignments marked as incomplete in a timely manner to see their grades modified; students with missing assignments would also have the opportunity to turn in their work within a timely manner (usually about a week) to modify their grade to *complete*.

Students who wanted to achieve a D would submit at least 60% of the course's assignments at a minimal proficiency level based on established learning standards. C work would include at least 70% of the course's assignments submitted at proficiency. For a B, students would submit 80% of the assignments and significantly revise one piece of writing from the course. The highest grade for the course, that is, an A, would include a 90% submission rate plus two revised writing assignments as well as a self-directed project. Doing so would engage students in new learning built on and channelled from their prior learning experiences, allowing their brains to assimilate and make more meaningful connections [28].

The approach attempted to reflect the research on alternative approaches for grading by honoring process, creating agreements (if not formal contracts), and placing students in control of their achievement level in class, empowering them to develop their self-directedness as learners [25]. For instance, by establishing one revision as a key step toward achieving a B, the plan championed the process of learning instead of the products of *doing school* and guided students into self-reflection and self-assessment. By making a second revision and a self-directed project the qualifiers for an A, the plan continued to highlight the importance of revision and placed student inquiry at the heart of the class. Students were encouraged to draw on their own interests, play to their strengths, engage in their own inquiry, reflect on their

own experiences, and make meaningful connections to the concepts explored in class.

Accordingly, the role of the instructor in these courses (and instructors for the co-taught courses) focused on feedback for growth. Instead of students passively asking what they needed to do to *fix* their writing for better grades, instructors tended to ask students questions such as "What would you like to do next with this writing draft?" or "How would you change this paragraph if you had the chance?" or "If time weren't an issue for this in-class essay, what would you do differently to develop your ideas?" Students were intentionally empowered as independent thinkers and writers to choose which routes to take in their learning, and teachers served as guides for those routes.

Students overwhelmingly took to the method and provided anonymous feedback in a semi-formal course survey after the completion of a semester. For them, grading became significantly less stressful and allowed them to focus on their craft as writers, take smart learning risks, and not worry about the pressures of grades.

Of the fifty-four students enrolled in two sections of AP English Literature and Composition during the 2024–2025 school year, twenty-eight signed consent forms and volunteered to complete the anonymous survey that was formally approved by the school district's Executive Director of Assessment, Analytics, and Program Evaluation, Becky Ramsay, on 30 January 2025. The survey responses affirmed the goals of the method and instilled confidence going into the second semester that this approach worked to reduce stress and empower students to take control of their learning. The following comments portray less of an attempt to conduct a major research study or to collect quantitative data about grades (which remained typically high for AP students) and more of a strategy to gather responses from students to gauge whether the approach seemed to help them feel more self-directed and empowered in their learning experiences. A sampling of their responses includes the following:

- "This approach to grading takes away a lot of the anxiety around doing the assignments."
- "Knowing that the value of the work is in the effort ... rather than ... an arbitrary set of expectations makes doing the work ... more enjoyable. It replaces a lot of the anxiety with a kind of excitement."
- "The system has helped me track my progress ... by having less stress of the grade ... it allowed me to focus on learning and understanding."
- "I have more control because it's my effort and intent, not entirely my success. The success arises from less stress and more control."
- "I like the one-on-one aspect between teacher and student. I got to come in and discuss my writings and revise/apply my learning based on the conversations we had that were about MY writing."

Overwhelmingly, student feedback reflected a reduction in stress, a focus on authentic inquiry instead of grades, and an empowerment in learning. Their work throughout the course reflected it, too, as they took more risks and developed stronger voices while learning to trust themselves as self-directed writers and understand the teacher as more of a guide and coach instead of the gatekeeper whom they must satisfy. Some students even asked for more critical feedback, which was wonderful because, again, it put them in control of the process and empowered them to determine just how much input they needed to grow as writers. Such feedback helped shape modifications for the second semester in terms of feedback and ways to guide students during revisions and their work, overall.

2.5. Implications for Implementing AI Tools

How, then, can this approach to grading open opportunities for authentic, self-directed learning that operationalizes AI tools productively? Several immediate applications present themselves.

Process-based grading itself aligns with recommendations of researchers advocating for using AI tools to enhance writing instruction in the class. According to Ehrenworth and Seyfried, for instance, teachers can shift away from one-shot, high-stakes writing assignments (which can easily be churned out by AI tools) toward low-stakes, process-based writing assignments that value revision, exploration, and an authentic writing process that champions "taking risks, learning from missteps, and gradually refining" the writing craft[29] (p. 156).

From here, AI tools can actually function as thought partners that offer feedback and give student writers individual coaching in that process. As instructors establish parameters through custom bots for how the AI tools can

offer feedback, they can see the tool serve as assistant writing coaches of sorts who can work with the volume of student work in faster, more efficient ways than they could ever possibly achieve [3] (pp. 292–400). Furthermore, knowing how to prompt AI can lead toward successful design of differentiated instruction for students with a wide range of interests and learning needs [30]. According to Bowen and Watson, such work can assist teachers in achieving the ultimate goal of formal education, that is, self-directed learning, in which, "students will eventually be able to guide themselves and not depend on us" [3] (p. 300).

This does not mean, however, that teachers will become increasingly obsolete. On the contrary, the role of the teacher remains central and more critical than ever, helping students navigate smart choices, filter bad feedback, and develop strong, independent people of inquiry [29]. When teachers know their students well—their strengths, interests, activities, and thresholds for handling stress—they can guide students along the path of critical engagement with appropriate AI tools, including which tools to use, which to avoid, and how frequently to employ them strategically in coursework [31].

2.6. A Survey to Gauge Student Attitudes and Needs for AI Literacy

Perhaps one of the simpler ways to gauge student needs and varying degrees of comfort level with AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and others, is to ask them. Again, surveys can serve as invaluable tools toward this end. One that I recently gave my seniors asked them questions about their attitudes toward AI and their frequency of AI use, and any other thoughts they had about the technology and its role in their education. Their responses were affirming of what I somewhat suspected yet insightful, nonetheless. Similar to the survey shared earlier in this article, this one was anonymous, voluntary, and approved by the school district. It was not intended to be a formalized collection of quantitative data; several larger, international studies have already been conducted effectively on this topic [32–36]. The survey I used was meant as a quick tool to help my students. Others might be encouraged to create similar surveys when working with their own students.

The survey, having received approval from the school district, consisted of five questions:

1) Have you ever used an AI tool in your schoolwork (for any class) outside of structured class exercises?
2) If you have not used it, why not?
   (a) General lack of interest in AI technology
   (b) Belief that AI use is cheating
   (c) Confidence that I can do the work without AI
   (d) Other reasons (explain)
3) If you have used AI, why?
   (a) Saving time to complete busy work
   (b) Saving time to complete tasks that are larger than busy work
   (c) Feelings of stress about the grade you might receive
   (d) Other reasons (explain)
4) Does process-based grading influence your choice to use AI in this course to complete tasks, including your optional self-directed project?
   (a) No influence
   (b) Less likely to use
   (c) More likely to use
   (d) Other (explain)
5) Would you like to add any other comments about AI, grading, and self-directed learning?

Out of fifty-three students enrolled in the two sections of the course during the 2025–2026 school year, twenty-two responded to the survey. Among those respondents, 27% said they have not used AI in their schoolwork, while 72% said they had used it. Among those who had not used it, 31% stated the belief that doing so would be cheating, 23% said they lacked interest in the technology, and 15% were confident in their own ability to do the work.

Those who said they had used AI tools overwhelmingly said they did so (50%) to complete busy work, while the next highest option was for tasks larger than busy work (13%), followed by a lack of confidence in their own ability (10%). In response to the fourth question regarding process-based grading, 52% said they were less likely to use AI in a course that used process-based grading, while 34% said their decision was not influenced by grading. The other options received minimal responses.

Throughout the survey, the "other" options as well as the open-ended comments in question five prompted several insights, including students who did not use it due to concerns about the toll AI takes on the environment; a strong

preference for human, and specifically, teacher interaction and feedback over AI; a sense that the tool was best for last-minute, bail-out work; and some who thought the tool was valuable and deserved time and class instruction.

Among the responses, several points stood out. First, the 72% of students who use AI on their own seem to do so to avoid busy work. This is a call to instructors to make sure they are designing and implementing learning experiences that are not only engaging but also meaningful [3] (pp. 323–324). Second, the concerns several students offered regarding environmental concerns are worth carefully considering not only for teachers but also for all stakeholders when dealing with this quickly developing technology and the toll it takes on the environment [37–39]. Third, the honest feedback of students who said they strongly preferred human interaction should assure instructors both of the important role they continue to play in education and their duty to guide students toward independent learning that will affect every aspect of an AI-informed society for the foreseeable future.

3. Conclusions

The ongoing development of AI tools challenges educators to strategically consider effective ways to help students navigate the opportunities and pitfalls of new technologies to maximize their learning experiences. Before this can be done, however, a fundamental challenge must be waged against deeply entrenched grading practices that act counter to the principles of critical thinking, mature learning, and self-directedness. Simple surveys can engage students in this work and position them as partners in their learning. Even as research continues to explore the effects of AI tools in education and society at large, educators are encouraged to devise and distribute such surveys specifically aimed at checking student attitudes, practices, and needs in order to help them develop into the AI-literate learners, researchers, and problem solvers that Culatta describes, and ultimately into self-directed learners.

Funding

This work received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for research involving human participants. The two anonymous and voluntary student surveys used in this article were granted permission according to the formal process in place at Spokane Public Schools by the Executive Director of Assessment, Analytics, and Program Evaluation, Becky Ramsay, on 30 January 2025 and 9 April 2026, respectively. Participation was voluntary, and no personally identifiable information was collected or shared. A formal protocol code was not issued, as the study was conducted within a public school district approval framework rather than a university-based Institutional Review Board (IRB) system.

Informed Consent Statement

Students who voluntarily and anonymously participated in the surveys included in this article did so after signing an informed consent statement. Students under the age of 18 also obtained the signed approval of their parents.

Data Availability Statement

Data from the student surveys are available upon request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this article, no AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of content. The author takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of this work.

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