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Coding For Equity: Click, Code, Change - How AI Empowers Activist Education

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ABSTRACT
This study examines how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be thoughtfully and critically woven into senior secondary classrooms, particularly in accounting, to advance educational equity, affirm student identities, and deepen student-led inquiry. Using an action-based research (ABR) approach, the work foregrounds students' lived experiences as they engage with AI tools to co-design learning projects that reflect their values and communities. Drawing on classroom case studies, this study explores how students react when AI-generated outputs misrepresent or erase aspects of who they are, and how they envision more inclusive and socially responsive technological design. The findings suggest that, when approached critically, AI can catalyze creative expression, ethical questioning, and digital empowerment. At the same time, the research surfaces persistent challenges related to cultural bias, and broader systemic inequities embedded within AI systems. The study ultimately advances a justice-focused vision of AI in education, one that prepares students not only to operate emerging technologies, but also to interrogate and lead in shaping how these technologies are designed and used in society.

KEYWORDS
AI in education; action-based research; educational equity and technology; student voice in AI; culturally responsive artificial intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is reshaping almost every part of our lives—from the stories we tell about who we are, to how money moves around the world. These changes push all of us, especially educators, to stay flexible and thoughtful about how we teach, and learn in both local and global contexts. The rapid growth of digital tools, especially Artificial Intelligence (AI), is transforming how we work and communicate, but also how we teach, and relate to one another in increasingly complex societies.

From an ethical standpoint, Jan-Christoph Heilinger (2022) warns that AI-based solutions are increasingly treated as reasonable, or even default answers to ethical problems. Other scholars point out that AI technologies raise serious concerns about environmental damage, discrimination, as well as cultural exclusion and misrepresentation (Giovanola & Tiribelli, 2023; Wong, 2020; Mehrabi et al., 2022). At the same time, AI is expanding quickly, and the field of AI ethics is attempting to keep pace. This growth has led to more funding, and the creation of ethics committees and advisory groups across political institutions and corporate sectors (Lambrecht & Moreno, 2024).

Education is meant to prepare students for lifelong learning and meaningful participation in a changing world. Yet today's school systems face a difficult task: updating curriculum to reflect new technologies while protecting core pedagogical values. Curriculum writers and classroom teachers must carefully balance the opportunities of emerging tools with the need to sustain student-centered learning. As Fullan and Smith (1999) argue, genuine pedagogical change is necessary if technology remains relevant in the classroom and support students in developing global competencies. Students need more than subject knowledge; they must also build critical thinking skills and ethical awareness to navigate a digital economy.

In our technology-saturated world, there is broad agreement that digital literacy and fluency should be woven into everyday teaching and learning. Guilherme (2019) notes that the ability to understand and work confidently with technology has become an essential part of contemporary education. However, this integration must be approached with a strong commitment to equity, and particularly in examining how technology portrays the identities, and lived experiences of diverse learners.

This chapter examines how AI tools can be brought into a senior-level accounting classroom through action-based research to promote educational equity, and support student-led activism. It is guided by two central questions: (1) How does it feel to interact with an AI tool that misrepresents your identity, or culture? (2) If I could redesign AI to reflect my values and community more accurately, what would it look and sound like?

By positioning students as critical users and co-creators of technology, this chapter investigates the potential of AI to help build inclusive, socially conscious learning spaces where students are empowered to question and reimagine the tools that shape their educational journeys. In doing so, the project treats action-based research itself as a form of scholarship-as-activism: the classroom becomes a site where students systematically investigate algorithmic

tools, surface their inequities, and design responses that challenge oppressive structures rather than simply adapting to them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Recent research provides evidence supporting key design thinking activities that were previously valued but not well understood. Central to this is the idea that every physical product offers a service, and every service is delivered through physical products. The research identifies four essential "rules of design thinking," which now need to be translated into actionable requirements for designing innovation ecosystems (Leifer and Meinel, 2012). Design thinking can be understood as a problem-solving framework that combines empathy, ideation, and prototyping to address user-centered challenges. Liedtka (2015) defines design thinking as a hypothesis-driven approach that balances both problem and solution exploration. Simply put, Jaskyte (2024) characterizes design thinking as a creative and innovative approach to problem-solving, emphasizing its applicability in generating user-centered solutions through iterative processes. It emphasizes experimentation, and constraints by testing multiple possible solutions. The role of design thinking as a driver of value creation has been explored extensively over the past several decades (Verganti et al., 2021). According to Owen (2007), creative individuals typically engage in one of two approaches: as finders or makers. Finders express their creativity through exploration and discovery, motivated by a desire to understand and explain complex or poorly understood phenomena. Makers, on the other hand, channel their creativity into synthesis into combining existing knowledge in innovative ways to form new structures (Razzouk & Shute, 2012).

Design thinking comes in five stages. The stages are, 1) empathy, 2) define, 3) ideate, 4) prototype, and 5) test.

1. Empathize:

The first stage of the design thinking process is empathy. Students are instructed to step into the shoes of the end user, and feel how they would be affected by what product students are trying to introduce. This involves conducting interviews, reviewing case studies, analyzing community data, and engaging with affected stakeholders such as peers, teachers, or community members.

In the accounting classroom, this meant that students interviewed classmates about their experiences with awards, scholarships, and access to extracurricular activities, then used AI tools to help synthesize what they heard. For example, students uploaded anonymized interview notes into an AI assistant and asked them to identify recurring themes related to marginalization, such as feeling overlooked for awards or unaware of financial support options. AI tools were also used to scan school communications and summarize how often issues like “financial aid” or “equity” appeared in newsletters or student handbooks.

Empathy, supported in this way, ensured that students began their inquiry with a deep understanding of the people behind the problem, while also modelling how AI can be used to surface patterns in qualitative data without replacing human judgment.

2. Define:

Using insights gathered during the empathy phase, students then articulate a clear and specific problem statement. For instance, students might define their focus as: “Black students in our school are underrepresented in academic awards and advanced placement courses due to systemic bias and limited support structures.” The ability to define a focused equity-based problem is essential for guiding their research and ideation.

Here, AI again played a concrete role. Students combined interview themes with basic accounting-style datasets and used AI-powered tools to generate simple visualizations and descriptive summaries. In some cases, they asked the AI to “highlight any disparities by race or gender in this table” or to suggest possible explanations that they could then critically evaluate.

While the students ultimately framed the equity problem, these tools helped them sharpen the scope of their questions and see how qualitative experiences and quantitative patterns intersected.

3. Ideate:

In this creative stage, students freely generate ideas without concern for limitations. The aim is to produce a wide range of possibilities and encourage imaginative, expansive thinking. For instance, students might envision a peer mentorship initiative, or a chatbot designed to guide classmates toward academic support. Collaborative platforms and digital whiteboards can further enrich this process, especially in virtual or hybrid learning environments.

4. Prototype:

Prototyping is introduced early in the process, sometimes just hours after a project is assigned. The goal is to clear preconceived ideas or biases about potential solutions, allowing participants to remain open to alternative approaches (Jobst & Meinel, 2012). Once ideas are selected, students begin building versions of their solution. This could include mock-ups of an app, or flowcharts. AI applications may also be prototyped, for example, a chatbot designed to answer equity-related questions. Prototyping makes abstract ideas tangible and sets the stage for meaningful feedback.

5. Test:

Finally, students present their prototypes to a small group of stakeholders for feedback. This feedback loop is critical for refining both the idea and its implementation strategy. During testing, students evaluate whether their solutions truly address the problem and what unintended consequences might arise. Ethical considerations, such as data privacy, bias, and equitable accessibility should be re-examined at this stage to ensure the final product aligns with DEI values.

METHODOLOGY: DESIGN THINKING MEETS ACTION RESEARCH

Data and Sample Collection

This qualitative method drew from students taking part in a grade 11 accounting class at an independent school. There is a total of 26 students in the class. To strengthen the focus on intersectionality, it is important to note that the class was demographically diverse. Of the 26 students, 3 identified as Black, 10 as other racialized students (e.g., South Asian, East Asian, Latinx, Middle Eastern), and 13 as white. A small number of students were the first in their families to attend an independent school.

These intersecting identities shaped how students experienced both accounting content and AI tools and are therefore central to interpreting the findings.

Data was collected through classroom observations, student reflections, and a questionnaire to examine the role of AI tools in supporting student engagement and personalized learning in a class of 26 students. AI platforms, such as ChatGPT and other adaptive technologies, were integrated into daily instruction to assist students with research, writing, and problem-solving tasks. Student interactions with AI were tracked to identify patterns in usage, support needs, and learning outcomes. Feedback from students was analyzed to better understand how AI can enhance learning experiences and foster independent thinking in secondary school settings.

Framed as action-based research, this project is intentionally activist in design: students are not passive recipients of technology but co-researchers who examine AI's role in reproducing or challenging inequities. In this sense, the methodology is scholarship-as-activism, where accounting skills and AI literacy are mobilized to question, rather than normalize, existing power structures in schooling.

Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis approach was used to examine student and teacher perceptions of AI integration in the classroom. Data sources included written student reflections, focus group discussions that occurred once a week, and teacher observation notes. Thematic coding was applied to identify recurring patterns and insights related to student engagement, perceived usefulness of AI tools, challenges encountered and shifts in learning behaviour. Particular attention was given to how students articulated their critical thinking when using AI. The analysis aimed to capture authentic voices and deepen understanding of the nuanced ways AI shaped the learning experience.

Validity of Case Study

I used triangulation in order to make sure my interpretations of findings are accurate. Wilson (2014) defines triangulation as "using more than one particular approach when doing research in order to get richer, fuller data and/or to help confirm the results of the research" (p. 74). To validate this research project, I kept an audit trail of my findings and interviews with participants in this study, along with member checking, where we met with a mentor once a week on

Sundays for one hour. All interview recordings and emails were securely archived to protect both the confidentiality of participants and the audit trail.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Several themes emerged from the research. The following themes were awareness of bias, creativity, and increased confidence in using AI tools.

Bias

While students found AI tools useful and inspiring, many also became critically aware of their limitations, particularly in terms of bias and ethical implications. In the context of creating a webpage for racialized travellers, for instance, some students noted how AI responses favoured Western or mainstream celebrity profiles when asked to suggest destinations or cultural experiences, while underrepresenting racialized or marginalized communities.

One moment, in particular, became a focal point of the project. When students entered prompts such as “create an image of a successful businessman or woman,” the AI tools almost always generated images of white men and women in corporate attire. To obtain images of racialized professionals, students had to add explicit racial markers like “create an image of a successful Black man” or “a successful Black woman.” This small but striking interaction became the study’s clearest evidence of algorithmic inequity. It made visible how “neutral” prompts defaulted to whiteness, while racialized identities had to be specified as exceptions.

This discovery sparked rich discussions about how algorithms reflect the data they are trained on, and what it means for Black and other racialized students to have to “name” themselves in order to appear. Students began to ask: Whose bodies and stories are treated as the norm? Who must be explicitly requested, and who appears automatically?

This awareness extended to other areas as well, such as recognizing when AI tools generated stereotypical or overly generalized responses. These observations prompted students to take greater care in curating and fact-checking their work, rather than accepting AI outputs at face value. For some, this led to a deeper understanding of digital literacy and the importance of human oversight in using AI responsibly. Moreover, it emphasized that AI is a powerful but imperfect tool, and one that must be used with intentionality and ethical consideration. Importantly, students did not shy away from AI because of these flaws; rather, they became more thoughtful and critical in how they applied it.

This specific finding also points to directions for future research. Subsequent studies could systematically track how often and under what conditions AI defaults to white, Eurocentric outputs in different subject areas, or could invite students to co-create alternative training sets and prompts that deliberately centre racialized identities. In doing so, ABR projects like this one could move from documenting bias to collaboratively prototyping more just technological practices.

Creativity

One of the most significant findings from the integration of AI tools in student projects was the noticeable increase in creative output. Students consistently shared that AI tools such as ChatGPT, windsurf and image-generation platforms helped spark new ideas and visualize concepts they struggled to articulate. For many, the AI acted not just as a tool but as a creative collaborator, offering suggestions, asking questions, and generating multiple angles for problem-solving. This was particularly impactful in open-ended projects like ‘Fantravel’, where imagination and innovation were essential. AI tools encouraged divergent thinking, enabling students to explore ideas beyond the obvious and to iterate more quickly. Instead of getting stuck at the brainstorming stage, students used AI to accelerate and diversify their ideation process. For example, a student designing a platform to support people with intellectual disabilities was able to use AI to prototype features tailored to specific needs. By engaging with AI, students also reported feeling less intimidated by blank pages or empty canvases, knowing they could always start somewhere and refine. This suggests that AI can play a powerful role in creativity, especially for those who may not initially see themselves as "creative types."

Confidence in using AI tools

AI tools significantly increased student efficiency in completing academic and creative tasks, while also boosting their confidence in their own abilities. Many students described how tools like ChatGPT helped them clarify their thinking, structure their ideas, and polish their writing. Rather than replacing their effort, AI was used as a scaffold, guiding them through steps they might have previously found challenging. In coding, for example, students who lacked strong programming backgrounds were able to build functional prototypes more quickly, using AI to debug errors, suggest code snippets, and explain technical terms in simple language. This level of support helped lower the barrier to participation in more advanced tasks and encouraged risk-taking. Students who might have avoided trying something unfamiliar were more willing to experiment, knowing AI was there as a safety net. Importantly, the use of AI also reduced students’ dependence on teachers for constant feedback. Instead, they engaged in more independent learning, reviewing AI suggestions and evaluating which were most applicable. This reflective engagement contributed to a deeper sense of ownership over their work. Overall, the efficiency and support offered by AI tools created an environment where students could focus more on developing ideas and less on procedural barriers.

Case Studies

This section outlines the qualitative data collected through interviews with four senior accounting students. The students were selected through a formal recruitment email sent to them via the learning management system these students use at school. Each participant shared their experiences and perceptions of using AI tools to support their learning. The cases are presented in order of students’ familiarity and frequency of them using AI in the classroom and outside the classroom, ranging from the most experienced to the least experienced.

Case of Daniel

A student in his junior year of high school, found the AI approach one that created critical-thinking, and being able to find his passion. Through his experience with the travel website, this student gained clarity about the transformative power of imagination and leadership. His ultimate goal is to inspire others to embrace innovation, rediscover their creative spark, and reimagine the role of AI in shaping inclusive, and forward-thinking communities.

From an early age, this student dreamt of becoming both an inventor and a samurai, two archetypes that symbolize creativity, and discipline. These traits continue to define his personality today, particularly in his approach to leadership and innovation. As a potential senior, he saw a unique opportunity to channel these aspirations into meaningful projects that not only reflect his passions but also aim to empower others.

His first major idea is to create a digital platform that helps people be creative and innovative, especially those who may not have access to many learning tools. Inspired by curiosity-driven learning, he imagines a design system that works like LEGO-building but in a digital CAD format, supported by generative AI. This AI would help users, including people with intellectual disabilities, see their ideas more clearly and build them step by step. A central feature would be an open, sandbox-style coding space with smart assistants that guide users, making it easier to learn and experiment. At its core, the project reflects his belief that as the world becomes more uniform, encouraging originality and curiosity is more important than ever.

His second idea delves into the intersection of martial arts and AI. Focusing initially on kendo, he aims to develop a platform that uses AI for real-time motion and pattern analysis. Unlike mainstream sports that often prioritize entertainment value, his goal is to illuminate the technical artistry of martial arts, by helping both athletes and spectators appreciate its nuanced complexity. He sees this tool not only as a performance enhancer but as an educational bridge between practitioners and a broader audience.

Case of John

John, a Grade 11 student with a growing interest in entrepreneurship and media, entered the project with ambitious ideas but little clarity on how to execute them. He wanted to design a fan-based travel platform but initially struggled to structure his thinking and communicate his vision. Early on, he began using ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas and develop outlines. What started as a tool for organizing his thoughts quickly became a creative partner in the process.

John described AI as “a sounding board that never gets tired.” With it, he was able to develop a complete pitch for his project, including a business concept and end user scenarios. The AI helped him break his large ideas into smaller, more manageable tasks, reducing his sense of overwhelm. He appreciated how the tool gave him the freedom to explore without judgment, something he admitted he was hesitant to do in peer settings.

However, John also encountered limitations. He noticed that some of the AI-generated suggestions felt generic or skewed toward Western commercial norms, especially when

brainstorming culturally diverse travel content. This prompted him to refine his prompts and become more intentional about how he engaged with the tool. He began asking more specific, culturally relevant questions and comparing responses to real-world data. This process led to deeper reflection on the ethical and cultural limitations of AI-generated content.

John's key takeaway was that AI could accelerate and expand creative thinking, but it required human discernment to truly personalize the experience. His ability to iterate quickly allowed him to focus more on refining the 'why' behind his ideas, rather than getting stuck in the 'how'. He concluded that AI is most powerful when it is used not as a shortcut, but as a collaborator that enhances human creativity.

John's experience underscores the transformative potential of AI when paired with vision and critical thinking. It not only boosted his confidence as a communicator and designer but also encouraged him to think more deeply about authenticity, and identity in digital spaces. For students like John, AI offered not just efficiency but empowerment.

Case of David

David, a Grade 11 student passionate about social justice, approached the AI-integrated project with a critical lens from the outset. His team's goal was to design a digital platform highlighting travel experiences based on the preferences of racialized celebrities, aiming to create a culturally relevant resource for young fans. While his peers leaned into the creative potential of AI, David was quick to notice and question its limitations.

When using ChatGPT and other AI tools to research places tied to racialized public figures, David often encountered responses that defaulted to generic or Eurocentric recommendations. Queries about notable Black or Indigenous celebrities sometimes yielded less detailed responses or omitted them altogether. This disconnect prompted David to ask deeper questions about the nature of the data the AI relied upon and whose stories were being privileged in its training.

Rather than abandoning the tool in frustration, David turned the AI itself into the subject of inquiry. He began to document and analyze how different prompts produced biased or limited outcomes, making careful notes on which identities appeared only when explicitly named. He rephrased questions, provided specific names, and compared AI results with primary sources and fan communities online. This investigation became a core component of his final presentation, where he highlighted the strengths of AI alongside its ethical blind spots.

David's case is the most explicitly activist-oriented in the study. He used accounting-style evidence (comparisons, counts, patterns) to make a public argument about bias, treating his classroom project as a small act of resistance against technological systems that normalize exclusion. He articulated that for technology to be empowering, it must also be interrogated. His experience revealed that AI could reflect the very biases students are often trying to challenge in society. Yet, he also saw its potential when paired with critical thinking.

By the end of the project, David reported feeling more confident in both his technical and analytical skills. He acknowledged that while AI cannot replace thoughtful research or lived

experience, it can provoke meaningful questions and support social justice oriented learning when used critically. His case illustrates that students who engage with AI from a place of inquiry, not just convenience, can turn its limitations into teachable moments and activist interventions.

David's experience reinforces the importance of media literacy and student voice in any classroom using AI. His approach sets an example of how students can question systems, not just use them, aligning directly with the broader goal of scholarship as activism that underpins this chapter.

Case of Isaac

Isaac, a soft-spoken Grade 11 student with limited digital literacy experience, initially expressed uncertainty about his role in the AI-integrated project. Assigned to a group working on an accessibility-focused platform for users with intellectual disabilities, Isaac worried that his lack of technical skills, particularly in coding and design, would hold the group back. However, what began as hesitation soon became transformation.

With the encouragement of his peers and teacher, Isaac began to explore tools like ChatGPT, GitHub Copilot, and Canva's AI design assistant. At first, he used AI simply to define terms or explain concepts he did not understand. But soon, he realized he could ask the AI to walk him through processes step-by-step, breaking down what felt like complex tasks into accessible chunks. The anonymity and 24/7 availability of AI gave Isaac the space to learn without embarrassment or fear of asking "silly questions."

As the project progressed, Isaac moved from passive observer to active contributor. He used AI to prototype a basic wireframe for the platform interface, experimented with auto-generated accessibility labels, and even debugged small blocks of code with support from AI prompts. By the midpoint of the project, he was leading parts of the discussion about user design, and AI integration.

In his reflection, Isaac emphasized how AI shifted his mindset from self-doubt to self-efficacy. He stated, "It made me feel like I was not behind anymore, and it helped me catch up in a way that worked for me." While he acknowledged that AI occasionally returned overly technical answers or lacked depth in certain areas, he said the experience gave him the confidence to explore, and try again, something he did not always feel comfortable doing in traditional classroom settings.

Isaac's case shows how AI can be a gateway into learning for students who may feel excluded from more tech-driven spaces. His success was not just in what he built, but in how he grew from hesitant learner to capable co-designer. It highlights AI's potential to scaffold independent learning while affirming that personalized support, reflection, and peer collaboration remain essential.

Isaac's journey is a powerful example of how thoughtfully integrated AI can democratize participation and build confidence in students who simply need a different kind of entry point into the learning process.

Project Overview and Objectives

The project was framed around two core goals: (1) to apply accounting principles and data analytics to identify patterns of inequity, and (2) to communicate findings through accessible visualizations and action-oriented presentations. Students were introduced to basic AI tools such as machine learning-powered data analysis platforms and natural language processing tools capable of analysis on school feedback forms and social media posts.

Implementation Process

Students began by identifying possible areas of concern based on lived experience, such as disparities in academic performance, extracurricular participation, disciplinary actions, and access to financial support. Using the ABR framework, they consulted with various stakeholders, teachers, administrators, support staff, and peers through interviews and surveys to ground their inquiry in community voice.

Next, students gathered datasets that included club rosters, disciplinary records disaggregated by race, and gender. AI-powered tools helped students visualize patterns, identify trends, and flag anomalies. For instance, one group discovered that while Black students made up 22% of the school population, they accounted for only 6% of academic award recipients over a three-year period.

Outcomes and Impact

The immediate outcome were heightened awareness. I, and the mentor that was working with us, acknowledged the clarity and urgency of the data presented. The school's DEI committee requested a presentation from students as they were curious about the algorithms, and racialized individuals.

Perhaps most importantly, the project empowered students to see themselves as knowledge producers. They experienced firsthand how accounting and AI could be mobilized for social change, challenging the notion that these disciplines are purely technical or apolitical.

The project also sparked interest beyond the classroom. Parents were quite interested in the work their child was involved in. The initiative demonstrated how participatory, data-driven inquiry can scale from classroom learning to institutional reflection and reform.

IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATORS

When we discuss improving teacher pedagogies in the classrooms that is often done either through professional development or workshops. Often teachers are excited to implement what they have learned in the classroom, but we see these strategies seem to phase out over a period of time and teachers resort back to traditional methods of teaching. However, Thomas Guskey (2002), a Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Kentucky, came up with a conceptual model regarding staff development and Teacher Change, and how we can sustain new initiatives within the classroom. His model is in sequential order starting from 1) Professional development, 2) change in Teacher’s classroom practices, 3) change in student learning outcomes, and 4) change in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes. In regard to the last two

stages of Guskey's model, teachers' beliefs and attitudes change only when student learning outcomes have changed. As a result, Guskey emphasized teacher feedback in order to aide with the change in beliefs and attitudes regarding the new pedagogies. Guskey believes that feedback is an important factor when it comes to implementing change, and if feedback is not readily available, pedagogies that are new and somewhat unfamiliar to the students will eventually be abandoned.

The integration of AI into the high school accounting classroom challenges educators to rethink not only what they teach, but how and why they teach it. Accounting instruction always asked students to focus on transactional knowledge, with debit credit entries, along with the accounting cycle which consists of; identifying transactions, recording transactions in a journal, posting to the general ledger, taking off a trial balance, making corrections, making adjusting entries, creating financial statements and closing the books. While these fundamentals remain essential, AI invites a pedagogical shift toward inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and ethical reflection (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017).

One major implication is the need for digital and ethical literacy. Educators must become familiar with the capabilities and limitations of AI tools such as chatbots, data visualization platforms, and predictive analytics software. This fluency is necessary not only for instruction but for guiding students through complex questions around algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the social impact of financial decisions (Crawford, 2021; Eubanks, 2018). In the accounting context, this may involve teaching students how to analyze financial datasets using AI tools while also critiquing how such tools might perpetuate systemic inequalities if left unexamined (Pasquale, 2015).

AI integration also demands a reimagining of assessment practices. Traditional tests may fail to capture the depth of understanding students demonstrate when engaging with AI to solve real-world problems. Alternative assessment models, such as portfolios, inquiry projects, and peer-reviewed presentations, better reflect the collaborative nature of AI-enabled learning (Arden 2019). These models value the process as much as the product, encouraging students to ask critical questions about financial systems and societal structures.

Equity is another critical consideration. Not all students have equal access to technology or support systems that enable effective engagement with AI. Educators must advocate for inclusive infrastructure ensuring devices, software, and internet access are equitably distributed, and embed digital equity into classroom discussions (Selwyn, 2016). Moreover, students should be taught to critically examine how AI tools themselves can exacerbate or expose inequities, particularly when applied to financial decision-making, credit systems, or educational funding models (Noble, 2018).

Pedagogically, teachers are increasingly positioned as facilitators of inquiry, rather than gatekeepers of content. AI tools allow students to explore data-driven questions relevant to their communities, such as disparities in school funding or differences in technology access across neighborhoods. Teachers must create a learning environment where these explorations

are supported, guided by frameworks such as action-based research or design thinking (Williamson & Eynon, 2020; Ritchhart et al., 2011). This role shift requires comfort with ambiguity, openness to student-led learning, and a commitment to nurturing civic-minded problem-solvers.

Lastly, integrating AI in accounting classrooms offers an opportunity to bridge disciplines. Teachers can collaborate with colleagues in computer science, social science, or media literacy to create cross-curricular experiences that enrich student understanding. For example, a project on school budget inequities might draw from accounting skills, AI analysis, social justice frameworks, and digital storytelling.

Lastly, AI has the potential to transform high school accounting education into a dynamic, justice-oriented space. Educators who embrace this shift can cultivate students who not only master financial concepts but also use them to interrogate and change the world around them.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A CULTURE OF CLICK, CODE, CHANGE

As we move deeper into an era shaped by artificial intelligence and automation, education must evolve to foster not only digital literacy but also digital agency. This research highlights the potential of action-based inquiry and AI integration in the classroom to do just that. By positioning students not simply as users of technology, but as critical thinkers, designers, and change agents within it.

A culture of "Click, Code, Change" invites a pedagogical shift. *Click* represents accessibility, lowering the barrier to entry so that all students, regardless of background, can begin engaging with AI and digital tools. *Code* reflects the deeper work of understanding, experimenting, and building encouraging students to shape technology, not just consume it. *Change* demands action, it pushes learners to ask whose stories are told, whose voices are missing, and how they might redesign tools and systems to be more equitable, inclusive, and just.

The case studies of Daniel, John, David, and Isaac underscore the complexity of this journey. While some students felt empowered by AI's creative potential, others experienced frustration with bias and exclusion. Yet in both cases, AI became a site of reflection, resistance, and reimagination. Their experiences affirm that equitable AI education requires more than teaching technical skill, it demands that we embed questions of identity, ethics, and justice into our digital learning environments.

To build a sustainable culture of Click, Code, Change, educators must be willing to take risks, co-learn with students, and challenge the assumptions embedded in technology. Through this shift, classrooms can become not only spaces of innovation, but also free of transformation where students do not just adapt to the future, but help build it with intention, creativity, and care.

Taken together, these findings suggest several directions for extending this work. Future cycles of action-based research could include students from other subject areas, involve families and community partners as co-researchers, or formally test student-designed strategies for

mitigating algorithmic bias. Longitudinal studies could also explore how repeated exposure to this kind of activist AI pedagogy shapes students' sense of agency, career aspirations, and relationships to mathematics and accounting.

In all cases, the commitment remains the same: to use action-based research not only to study AI in education, but to enact AI education as scholarship-as-activism, a sustained, collective effort to dismantle oppressive structures by empowering students to interrogate and reshape the tools that shape their lives.

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