

# EDUCATION IN THE ERA OF AI

*Nik Popgeorgiev – Feb 2026*

## **The Two Camps of Thinking**

I want to start by framing this conversation around two camps of thinking.

The first camp - many CEOs and people deeply involved with AI - believe that most jobs, maybe even all jobs, will eventually be replaced.

Recently at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the CEO of Tesla said that if you're planning to become a surgeon, you might reconsider - because within one to five years, robots could outperform humans at precision surgery.

In this camp, all labor is ultimately replaceable.

The second camp says: don't worry. Jobs won't disappear - they'll change. New jobs will emerge. And people who work with AI will outperform people who don't.

Personally, I sit with the second camp in the short term - and the first camp in the long term.

## **So, What Does This Mean for Education?**

Right now, there is no shared vision of the future. Traditionally, education has served two main purposes:

First, to prepare people to function in society - reading, writing, basic math.

Second, to produce specialists - experts with specific skills ready to take a job.

But what job? We genuinely don't know what the job market will look like in five years. Never in human history have we faced this kind of uncertainty - not decades ahead, but just five years ahead.

This about it. Education takes time. Twelve years of school, plus four to eight more in higher education. That's sixteen to twenty years before someone enters the workforce as a specialist.

When I was a kid, I said I wanted to be an airport bus driver. Seventeen years later, that job still existed. I could have taken it if I wanted. Today, my son is in middle school. He has nine years of education ahead of him. And I honestly struggle to advise him what to pursue - because I can't confidently say which jobs will still exist when he's done.

That's a fundamental problem.

So, our task today is not easy. It is to be visionary and realign education so that in twenty years it produces the right outcomes. And twenty years is a very long time by today's standards.

## **Education Is Already Falling Behind**

Education - and businesses too - are already falling behind technology. And that's understandable. AI has accelerated progress at a pace that is extremely difficult to follow. Every few months, there's a breakthrough.

Many school assignments are already becoming irrelevant. When a task can be completed instantly by AI - and we still pretend it measures understanding - something is off. The world has changed, but the assignments haven't.

Take for example essay writing. I recently provoked my son, "If they give you an essay to write at home, why not use ChatGPT?" He was shocked. He said, "That's cheating. We are not allowed to do that."

My personal stance is this: we cannot build a system where we intentionally avoid the most powerful tools ever invented. Avoiding or policing AI doesn't make sense. If students are competing for limited opportunities, take college admissions, of course they will use every available tool. If they don't, others will. And they'll fall behind. And the truth is, we can't any more reliably detect how something was written anyway.

Using powerful tools isn't a moral failure by students. It's a system asking questions that no longer make sense. Avoiding AI is unnatural. It's like saying:

*"Go to the store, but don't take a car." or: "Come up to the 10th floor, but don't use the elevator."*

Even if I convince someone it's better for their fitness, it might work once - but not long term. If a shortcut exists, humans will take it. If we have the tools, we must incorporate them.

Instead of pretending AI doesn't exist, education must bring it into the open - and redesign learning for a world where intelligence is no longer scarce.

## **The Rise of AI Personal Tutors**

Another trend I see emerging is AI personal tutors.

Until now, education has been one-to-many: One teacher for 20 or 30 students - sometimes more. It's impossible for one teacher to deeply personalize education for every child. It is a scaling problem. AI tutors can help here. An AI tutor could deeply understand each student - where they struggle, where they excel, how they learn best. Some students fall behind in math.

Others in chemistry. Some need more time. Some need more challenge. I see a future where one teacher guides 30 AI tutors - each working 1-to-1 with a student.

The scaling problem disappears.

In a world where learning can be personalized, forcing everyone through the same curriculum at the same speed no longer makes sense.

## **So, What Should Education Focus On?**

Not memorization. Information is instant and free. Available at fingertips.

What matters are skills that survive uncertainty. Foundational skills that would put you on a success path no matter in which way the world turns.

### **Critical Thinking**

Critical thinking means not just consuming information - but questioning it. In an era where AI can generate essays, research summaries, images, even fake videos, the real skill is not producing information - it's evaluating it.

*Is this true?*

*What assumptions are hidden here?*

*What is missing?*

*Who benefits from this answer?*

AI will give us answers. But it won't give us judgment. That remains human. If we lose or not instill critical thinking, we don't just become less educated - we become easily manipulated.

### **Problem Identification**

AI is very good at solving problems that are clearly defined. But who defines the problem? In many cases, the hardest part is not solving the problem. It's identifying the right one. Education should train people to ask:

*What is the real issue here?*

*Are we solving the right thing?*

*Is this even the problem we should be focusing on?*

The future will belong not just to problem solvers - but to problem finders.

### **Adaptability**

If jobs change every few years, the ability to adapt becomes more valuable than mastering one fixed skill. We should be training people to become comfortable with change. To say:

*“I don’t know this yet - but I can learn it.”*

That mindset will matter more than any single specialization.

## **Discipline and Grit**

AI makes many things easier. But ease is not the same as growth. Some things still require effort, deep work, focus, persistence. If everything becomes instantly assisted, the danger is that we lose our tolerance for struggle. Education must still teach people how to work through difficulty - even when a shortcut exists.

## **Curiosity**

Above all - curiosity. My personal favorite. A curious person, in an era of unlimited access to information, is powerful. Curiosity drives lifelong learning. Curiosity drives reinvention. Curiosity makes uncertainty less frightening.

Maybe that’s the real job of education now. Not preparing people for a specific role, but preparing them to keep learning, rebuilding, and reinventing themselves again and again.