

The work technology does not do

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This editorial introduces Volume 42, Issue 2 of the Australasian Journal of Educational Technology and develops a theme that draws its eight papers together: as educational technologies become more capable, the human work surrounding their use becomes more visible and more consequential. Across studies of mathematics learning, collaborative learning design, medical education, programming education, language research, English language teaching, mathematical creativity, and immersive interventions for anxiety, we trace this human work in three forms: relational, metacognitive, and ethical. We argue that the value of a technology depends less on what the technology does than on the pedagogical, relational, and self-regulatory work that surrounds it, and that this work must be deliberately designed rather than assumed. A second thread runs beneath the first: several contributions are concerned less with immediate learning outcomes than with sustained learner qualities such as agency, motivation, metacognition, and wellbeing. Taken together, the papers suggest that the question worth asking is shifting from what work technology can do to what human work we must do to make technology worth it. We offer the issue not as a set of resolutions but as an invitation to ask better questions.

Keywords: educational technology, generative AI, human–AI interaction, self-regulated learning, learning design, AI ethics, editorial

It is tempting, when assembling an issue of AJET, to read each contribution as a separate, research-informed discursive space on what technology can or cannot accomplish. The papers we have assembled for Issue 2 resist that approach. Together, they offer a broader and timely theme: the more capable our technologies become, the more visible and consequential the human work surrounding them becomes.

Consider the problem that Borges and colleagues (2026) document in a first-year mathematics course. Students, many of whom are frequent users of AI, engaged in group problem-solving work using AI tools they were comfortable with. However, only one in six groups produced a correct solution. This was less a failure of AI itself than in human engagement with it. AI did what AI does: produced fluent, plausible outputs (Vendrell & Johnston, 2026). The students, lacking foundational knowledge and the disposition to question these solutions, uncritically accepted them. Only after a scaffolded teacher intervention shifted the epistemic role of the student, from consumer to evaluator of AI solutions, did their performance climb. The technology was constant throughout; what changed was the human work around it (Bozkurt et al., 2026).

Sometimes this work is relational. Papageorgiou and Bennett (2026) note that the nature of learning design involves integrating the technological with pedagogical and content expertise. The success or

failure of collaborative learning design in universities, however, depends less on adopting an a priori model of these integrated elements, and more on whether we commit to the human and adaptive nature of relational work (Kickbusch et al., 2025). Success necessitates the slow construction of trust, openness, and provision of affective support. The interdisciplinary team is therefore not a structure to be installed but a relationship to be sustained. Rathleff and colleagues' (2026) findings are adjacent. In their study on medical students' podcasting, students engaged with technology, but that technology played a minor role in the enablement and value of the work. Instead, it was the human-to-human epistemic and relational elements of the work that defined success.

Sometimes the work is metacognitive, which is where the most provocative finding in this issue may be found. Liu and colleagues (2026) report that the use of ChatGPT enhanced students' mathematical creativity, self-efficacy and interest, while making the task feel easier and less effortful. At the same time, they found that use of the AI tool weakened students' metacognitive skill of accurate self-evaluation. This finding should give us pause, as it raises a troubling and generalisable issue: using technology to get better at something is not the same as gaining metacognitive or other self-regulatory competencies. The implication is not that we should withhold AI tools, but rather that metacognitive work needs to be consciously scaffolded by teachers for students to develop as self-regulated learners (Efklides & Schwartz, 2024). Co-creating with AI will not automatically supply this and may even actively undermine it.

This finding fits within a larger, emergent pattern in AI-related research. Baig and colleagues' (2026) systematic scoping review of ChatGPT use in programming education examines this pattern. They find increased student engagement and accessibility on one side, overreliance and the erosion of critical thinking on the other. The authors confirm across 59 studies what the empirical papers here in Issue 2 show in miniature: AI technology is double-edged, and which edge gets prioritised depends less on the technology, and more on us.

This points to a second thread running beneath the first. Several of these papers are not primarily focused on immediate learning outcomes; they are concerned with learner qualities, such as agency, motivation, metacognition, and even wellbeing (Stenalt & Lassesen, 2022). Cui and colleagues (2026) operationalise therapeutic principles in virtual reality and show measurable reductions in anxiety and negative affect among university students. Nugroho and colleagues (2026), working through cycles of technology-enhanced action research in English language teaching, focused more on student agency and engagement rather than test scores. The thread demonstrates that when the goal of our work shifts from immediate performance targets to learner qualities, the role of technology must shift with it. Technology becomes a design element that must be critically evaluated for its role in developing learner qualities that advance deeper and more self-regulated learning (Fawns, 2022).

This shift from immediate outcomes to sustained competencies includes researchers, too. Demir and Aydın (2026) step the reader through the construction and validation of an AI ethical awareness scale for language researchers. The authors focus on what constitutes ethical use of AI in tertiary language research, and how accurately researchers can gauge their own awareness of the relevant issues. Their underlying premise is that the ability to operate AI as a research-assistive technology to produce results is not, by itself, a sufficient aim. Digital literacy, both in general and in specific relation to AI, requires a more holistic view, including ethical dimensions (Xu et al., 2025).

At this stage it is impossible to offer conclusive resolutions to any of these themes and questions raised. Instead, we offer eight papers that explore these themes and help us ask new questions. We suggest that the emergent question in Issue 2 is not, *what work can technology do?* Instead, we are offered a compelling alternative: *what human work must we do to make technology worth it?*

Human work is also central to AJET's operation and we acknowledge the great work done by our editorial team to continually engage with the emerging ideas and challenges in this space. We have recently welcomed several new Associate Editors on board to help manage the rapidly increasing numbers of submissions – which we suspect can be attributed, at least partly, to a boost in productivity when

technology and human input are more seamlessly aligned, despite the ambiguities, risks, and grey areas involved in that process. As we discussed in our previous editorial entitled “Are we there yet? Identifying saturation points in generative AI research” (Huijser et al., 2026), the substantial increase in the quantity of AI-related research submissions is making it more challenging for authors, reviewers, and editorial teams to find unexplored aspects of the research landscape. This has also led us to question what else people are researching aside from AI, which will be the focus of an upcoming AJET editorial.

The good news is that AJET continues to provide impactful articles to the community as evidenced by the increase in our SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) impact indicator score to 1.788, our highest ever! This makes us the number one education journal in Australia and number one Diamond Open Access Journal in educational technology. The latter is particularly pleasing given the importance of being an open access journal to our identity as a community journal. This recognition of the quality work of our authors and editorial team reminds us that AJET continues to play an important role in surfacing innovation, identifying areas of scarcity or overabundance of investigation, and critiquing trends, approaches, and tools, so we can continue to shape discussion of how the use of educational technology can best support learning going forward.

Author contributions

Chris Deneen: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing; **Feifei Han:** Writing – review and editing; **Henk Huijser:** Writing – review and editing; **Linda Corrin:** Writing – review and editing.

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