

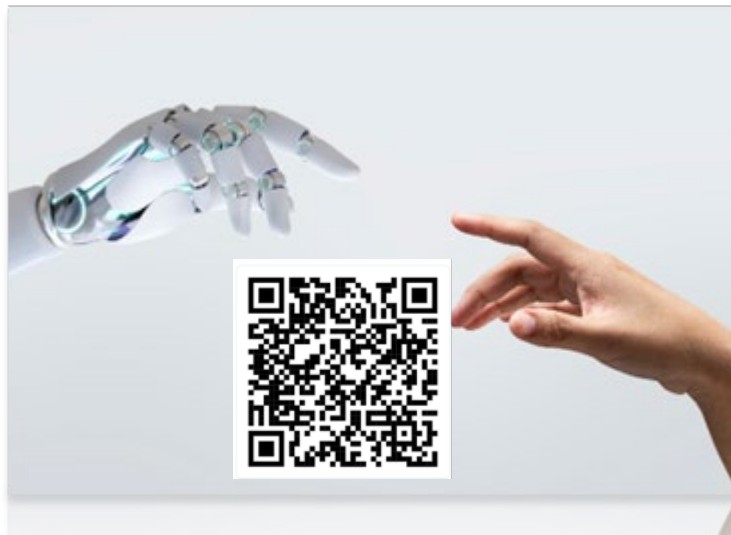
[RE]IMAGINE EDUCATION

A weekly Design.AI newsletter



ABOUT [RE] IMAGINE EDUCATION

In Conversation with Dr. Nachamma Sockalingam, OSP



[Re]Imagine Education is a weekly newsletter that brings you news, insights, events, and opinion pieces on Design AI at SUTD — and beyond. It aims to engage the SUTD community in creatively and collaboratively exploring the adoption of Design AI.

The newsletter spans teaching, learning, research, innovation, and even playful Design AI projects that bring value to the broader SUTD community. This inaugural issue opens with an editorial to set the stage.

We warmly invite you to get in touch — whether to contribute to the newsletter, share suggestions, or express your interest. We look forward to hearing from you — whether through the QR code or by emailing the editor directly.

*This newsletter is produced with ChatGPT and other AI tools as super-collaborators. The authors contribute the core ideas, drafts, strategic framing, pedagogical insights, and design direction, while AI supports creative articulation.
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Editor of Newsletter:

Dr. Nachamma Sockalingam, Office of Strategic Planning



WHAT IS IN THE NAME

The name [RE] IM AGI NE Education holds a meaning that goes beyond simply reimagining education — it invites us to rethink, reframe, and engage with the future of learning in the age of AI.

My Perspectives on Design AI @ SUTD

This infographic details the history of innovation cycles.

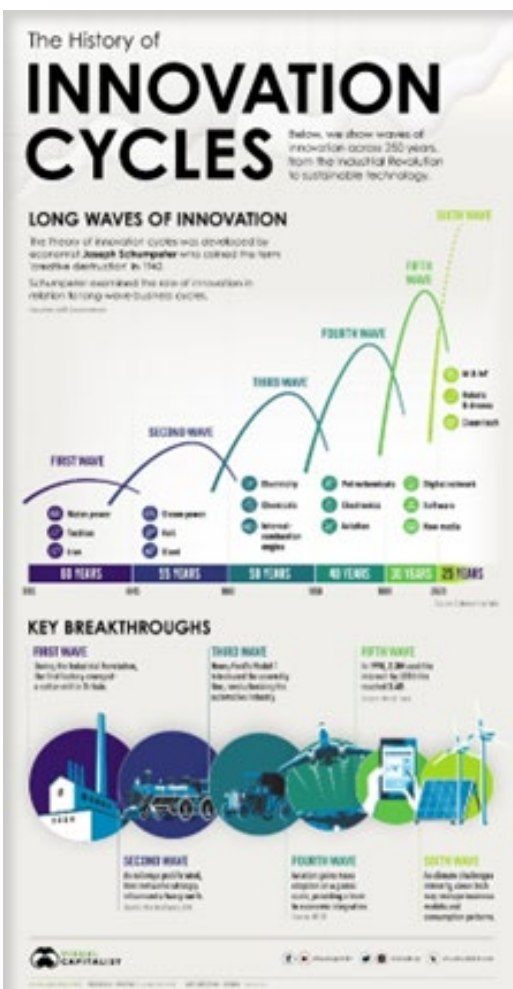
TODAY'S CONTEXT: WAVES OF CHANGES

The past five years have brought unprecedented change. COVID-19 was an epidemic — a global disruption that lasted two to three years and reshaped the way we lived, worked, and connected.

But AI is different. It's not a passing crisis, but an endemic force — steadily embedding itself into every layer of our lives, much like the Internet once did. This is not just a moment; it is the beginning of the AI age.

Change is often said to be the only constant, and we are encouraged to adapt and embrace it. But at a closer view, we see that today's waves of change arrive faster — and hit harder. The “constant” of earlier times and the “constant” of today are not the same.

There's a difference between a wave and a tsunami. **And the current tsunami is AI.**



<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2021/07/this-is-a-visualization-of-the-history-of-innovation-cycles/>

TO AI or NOT TO AI

The answer to this question is clear to us: It is to AI. At SUTD, we Design AI.



We frequently encounter statements such as

- “AI could research better, and write better than humans – So why do we need human assistants?”
- “AI could give all the answers to students, why do we need teachers?”
- “AI will not be able to do certain aspects of work such as prototyping.”
- “AI will never be able to replace teachers because it cannot connect with humans”
- “AI has no empathy – so it cannot be empathetic.”

These statements may sound logical at first glance, but each contains underlying fallacies worth examining. A common one is the false dichotomy — the framing of AI versus humans as mutually exclusive.

While there are certainly contexts where AI outperforms humans, and others where human judgment surpasses AI, there exists a compelling third possibility — one of Human–AI collaboration. When thoughtfully integrated, this synergy can lead to astounding augmentation, creativity, and innovation. **So, shouldn't we be focusing our energy on unlocking that potential?**

IMPACT OF AI



Another set of arguments raises deeper questions — not just about what AI can do, but about what it does to us and the systems we live in. While one perspective envisions a rainbow of possibilities, the other paints a stark, grey future.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/03/technology/ai-futures-project-ai-2027.html>

Which perspective is true? Which side are we on?

But pause for a moment — could both perspectives be true at once? Might they be two sides of the same coin? The Yin and the Yang — distinct yet inseparable, each giving meaning to the other.



If we unpack this duality, we see that in the Human–AI relationship, we are the “subject” — the conscious agent — and AI is the “object” — the tool we shape and apply, even as a partner. In Human–AI collaboration, we do not (and should not) cede full autonomy to the object. The power to interpret, decide, and act must remain with the human in the loop — the subject who holds responsibility.

Even as AI systems become more autonomous and appear to act like subjects — making decisions, generating outputs, adapting in real time — they are not true subjects in the philosophical sense. They lack intention, accountability, and moral judgment. Their so-called ‘autonomy’ is bounded by the objectives, data, and frameworks defined by humans. What may look like subjectivity in AI is still nested within a human-designed system.

The impact of AI, then, is not determined by the object itself — the technology — but by the choices of the subject: how we, individually and collectively, choose to guide, constrain, and apply it. It’s not just about how effectively we use AI, but toward what ends we direct it, and with what ethical compass. How we — the human subject — balance and manage this evolving relationship, this Yin and Yang of agency and assistance, remains one of the defining challenges of our time.

USING AI

This is where Education comes in.

What is the true meaning of education? Is it about the acquisition of knowledge and skills? Is it about getting certificates? Is it about getting a well-paying job? The answer is “yes” to all of these — and much more.

At its core, education is knowing the self, knowing the beyond, and being beyond the self.

This mirrors the vision of SUTD - to be "Trailblazing a Better World by Design," focusing on redefining design, education, and research to make a positive societal impact, nurturing technically grounded leaders who embrace innovation.

PUTTING THINGS TOGETHER

In these unprecedented times of change, as we navigate uncharted waters, it becomes more essential than ever to find our guiding North Star.

Without that anchoring — a clear sense of purpose — we risk drifting without direction, carried by the currents of uncertainty.



The same holds true for our use of AI in education. While it is crucial to develop our AI fluency — learning to use tools, platforms, and prompts, and collaborating with AI as a partner — this remains at the level of navigation techniques. It's the how. But without the why, without a shared compass rooted in our broader educational vision and values, we may sail swiftly, but drift away from what matters most.

Anchored to the North Star of our vision and values, empowered with Design AI knowledge and skills, and strengthened by a resilient mindset, we will be better equipped to traverse uncharted waters — in intended direction.

BRINGING THE TEAMS ACROSS

Readiness to adopt Design AI across the university community will naturally vary — from novices just beginning their journey, to experienced users, to innovative pioneers. Not everyone starts from the same point. The key is to create momentum by bringing colleagues together, fostering shared understanding, and building bridges that help close the gap.

As many questions about AI remain unanswered, we at SUTD have the opportunity to be at the forefront of exploring, understanding, and demystifying the ethical use of Design AI to solve real-world problems. By navigating through the complexities, we go beyond our individual scope, to becoming trailblazers, and being the compass for others.

Are we ready to embark on this exciting journey to redefine education with our colleagues, students, and Design AI?

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Nachamma is the newsletter editor. She is an educator at heart, a researcher by training, and a lifelong learner by nature. Her work lies at the intersection of design, technology, and humanity — helping others make sense of complexity by asking deeper, more thoughtful questions. She listens closely to the stories people carry — their challenges, aspirations, and quiet moments of reflection — drawing out insights that matter. By abstracting patterns and connecting ideas across disciplines, she weaves these insights into learning experiences that are transformative, purposeful, and grounded in human values.