

Hannele Niemi, Author and Education Advocate, Says Social Skills Must Remain at the Heart of Learning in the AI Era

Hannele Niemi says schools must teach critical thinking while preserving the social skills and human connections AI can't replace

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, August 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As educators continue debating the role of artificial intelligence in the classroom, a recent [Solutions Review](#) article argues that the future of AI education is less about teaching students how to use the technology and more about teaching them judgment. [Hannele Niemi](#) agrees that while AI is becoming an indispensable learning tool, schools must place equal emphasis on developing critical thinking and the social skills that technology cannot replace.

Rather than focusing solely on AI, Niemi believes schools should place a greater emphasis on developing students' thinking and social skills, and learn how to live and work with others.



Hannele Niemi

"Everybody must know what AI is and how to use it," Niemi says. "But the real mission of the school is to teach thinking skills, including critical thinking, reasoning, analyzing, summarizing, drawing conclusions, and recognizing misinformation. Equally important is helping students learn to interact, live, and work with real human beings—something AI can support but never replace."

Niemi says that developing critical thinking skills is more important than ever, and that students who do so will have a distinct advantage in the age of AI. Because AI depends on the quality of a user's prompts and the ability to interpret its responses, students who can reason, analyze information, and think independently are more likely to use the technology effectively and produce better outcomes.

"We already know that learners with strong thinking skills and an understanding of how they learn—learning-to-learn skills—benefit the most from generative AI," she explains. "Thinking skills can be learned with AI and for AI."

Beyond developing critical thinking skills, Niemi says schools play an equally important role in helping students become engaged members of society. Every day in the classroom, students learn to communicate, collaborate, resolve conflicts, respect different perspectives, and build meaningful relationships—experiences that prepare them to live and work within their communities.

"Another important task of the school is to educate students for real interaction and for living and working with real human beings," Niemi says. "AI can be a great help in developing these skills, but it cannot substitute for real-life experiences and social skills."

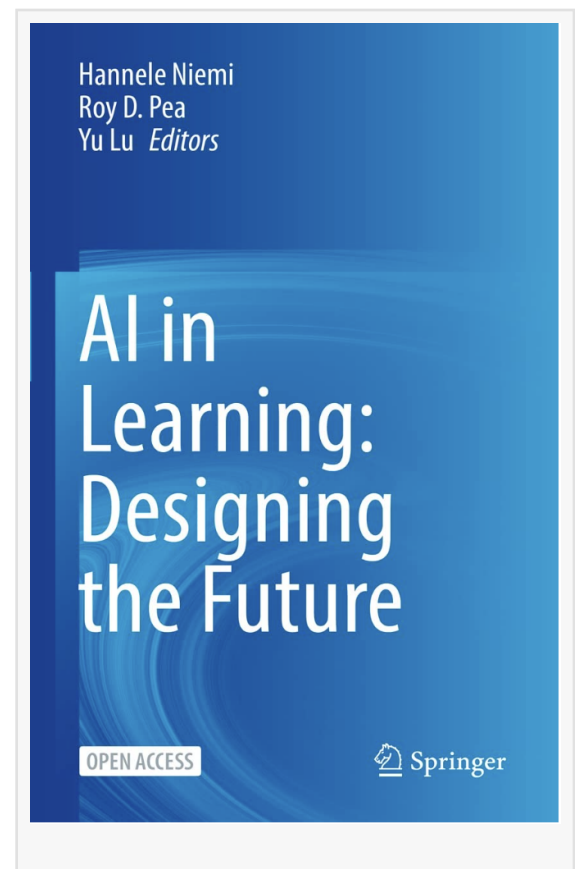
Niemi says schools have an opportunity to integrate AI in ways that strengthen—not replace—the core purpose of education. Instead of relying on AI to provide answers, educators should encourage learners to question information, evaluate evidence, identify bias, synthesize ideas, and solve problems collaboratively.

For Niemi, the future of education is not a choice between humans and artificial intelligence. It is about using AI to enhance learning while ensuring students continue to develop the thinking skills, social abilities, and real-world experiences that only human interaction can provide.

"As AI becomes more capable, human judgment becomes more valuable," Niemi concludes. "Education must ensure students are not only technologically capable but also thoughtful, responsible, and able to work with others to solve real-world challenges. We have much knowledge and information from AI, but thinking and social skills are fundamental for our shared future."

About Hannele Niemi

Hannele Niemi is Professor Emerita at the University of Helsinki and an internationally recognized authority on educational innovation, teacher education, and artificial intelligence in learning. Her research focuses on how emerging technologies can strengthen teaching and learning while fostering critical thinking, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and lifelong



learning. She is co-editor of [AI in Learning: Designing the Future](#) and has advised educators and policymakers worldwide on the future of education.

To learn more, visit: <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/persons/hannele-niemi/>

Hannele Niemi is available for interviews.

Amanda Kent
Boundless Media USA
+1 313-403-5636
[email us here](#)

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