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The Prompt is Not Enough: Rethinking AI-Learner Interaction in the Post-Prompting Era

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Abstract: The rise of generative AI marks a fundamental shift in human-AI interaction, where learners are no longer limited to prompting static tools but engage dynamically with agentic AI partners. This conceptual paper introduces the notion of the Post-Prompting Era, characterised by AI systems that co-regulate learning, scaffold reflection, and evolve across dialogues. Moving beyond prompt engineering, we argue that both teachers and students must develop new forms of interactional and co-regulatory literacy. We examine how this shift redefines pedagogical roles, learning task design, and human-AI orchestration. Practical implications include rethinking teacher professional development, lesson planning, and techno-pedagogical co-design with AI agents. We also outline a research agenda that calls for interdisciplinary inquiry into the cognitive mechanisms, methodological innovations, and ethical boundaries of agentic AI in education. While emerging features such as ChatGPT's Study Mode offer promising instantiations, our analysis cautions against oversimplified automation. Instead, we advocate for a nuanced reconceptualisation of AI's role as a co-participant in learning – one that complements human agency rather than replacing it.

Keywords: Post-prompting Era, LLMs in education, Agentic AI, co-regulation, prompt literacy

1. Introduction

The recent surge of interest in large language models (LLMs) in education has triggered a wave of innovation centred around the practice of prompting (Kasneci et al., 2023; Rane, 2024). Early bibliometric and altmetric evidence (Wong et al., 2024) also shows that scholarly attention initially mirrored this hype before gradually moving toward more rigorous examination. In classrooms and professional development (PD) settings alike, educators and learners are experimenting with how to craft better prompts to generate better responses – from lesson plans and feedback rubrics to summaries and creative writing (Hashem et al., 2023; Walter, 2024). This phenomenon reflects what we term the Prompting Paradigm and define it as a framework where human users initiate interactions, and the AI responds. It is a paradigm that foregrounds human control, intentionality, and often, a need for technical mastery of prompt engineering.

However, even as the field explores the many possibilities of LLM-assisted teaching and learning, a new wave of systems is emerging that challenges this interactional asymmetry. Agentic AI systems – LLMs equipped with autonomous goal-setting, self-prompting, and multi-role coordination capabilities (Sapkota et al., 2025) – are reshaping how we imagine the division of labour between humans and machines (Hinsen et al., 2022). These systems, such as Auto-GPT, Manus AI, and multi-agent LLM orchestration frameworks, not only generate content but actively plan, reflect, and adapt. Their growing presence prompts a critical question: Are we still prompting, or are we entering an era where prompting gives way to partnering?

In this conceptual paper, we argue that the rise of agentic AI is not merely a technological evolution but a pedagogical provocation. It invites us to rethink how LLMs participate in education – not only as responsive tools but as potential co-learners,

collaborators, or even orchestrators. We explore how agentic AI could act as a catalyst for a "Post-Prompting Era", where the educational focus shifts from prompt quality to interactional quality, from instruction to negotiation, from tools to partnerships.

While most studies today remain situated in the prompting era – understandably so, given current implementation realities – this paper offers a forward-looking lens. By examining the affordances of agentic AI through selected examples and proposing key techno-pedagogical shifts, we aim to expand the discourse beyond optimisation of prompting techniques and toward a more relational, co-evolutionary vision of human-AI interaction in education.

2. Prompting Paradigm Revisited

The widespread adoption of ChatGPT and similar LLMs has ushered in a new era of educational interaction design – one centred on the human act of prompting. In this paradigm, learning and teaching with LLMs hinge on how well a user can formulate an initial input. From a functional perspective, prompting is seen as the key to unlocking the power of generative AI: the better the prompt, the better the output.

This logic has informed a flurry of research and practice. Prompting has become both a skill and a pedagogy. In teacher PD, much attention has been paid to prompt engineering techniques – ranging from zero-shot and few-shot prompting to chain-of-thought and role-based prompting. Classrooms have witnessed growing interest in developing students to write more effective prompts, often through trial and error or curated prompt libraries. Entire tools and platforms have been designed to scaffold prompting, reflecting a belief that prompt quality equates to learning quality.

But this belief carries implicit assumptions: that humans initiate, and AIs respond; that humans think, and AIs generate. The AI, in this view, is a reactive tool, albeit a highly intelligent one, whose creative potential remains largely dependent on human articulation. This asymmetry of agency is central to the Prompting Paradigm.

Yet, as powerful as this paradigm is, it has limitations. First, not all learners or teachers possess the same prompting literacy, creating new forms of digital gap. Second, the reliance on carefully crafted prompts risks reinforcing procedural thinking – "what to ask next" – rather than cultivating deeper dialogic engagement. Third, the burden of control remains largely on the human side, even in scenarios where co-construction or exploration would be more pedagogically valuable (Bozkurt, 2023; Chiu, 2023; Maloy & Gattupalli, 2024).

Furthermore, prompting as a pedagogy has struggled to move beyond a one-turn mindset: the assumption that an initial prompt and a single AI response form the basic unit of interaction (Dai et al., 2023). While iterative prompting and follow-up refinement are possible, they are often ad-hoc and cognitively taxing for novice users. As a result, the full potential of LLMs as dialogic partners – capable of guiding, nudging, and sustaining inquiry – is rarely realised in practice.

The emergence of more autonomous and proactive AI systems challenges these limitations. When LLMs begin to take initiative – by asking clarifying questions, generating multiple solution paths, or re-engaging users with reflective prompts – the interaction no longer fits the classical prompt-response frame. In such contexts, the boundary between "prompting" and "being prompted" begins to blur. This shift marks the beginning of a transition: from the Prompting Paradigm to a Post-Prompting imagination, where mutual responsiveness and co-agency become central to educational design.

In the next section, we turn to agentic AI as a potential catalyst for this shift. By analysing selected examples and their pedagogical affordances, we examine what it would mean to move beyond the prompting mindset – and what new roles, responsibilities, and risks such a move entails.

3. Agentic AI as a Catalyst: Rejuvenating an Old Dream

The technological genre of *agentic AI*, i.e., systems that exhibit goal-directed behaviour, respond autonomously to user input, and adapt to dynamic contexts, is not a novel concept. Its roots can be traced back over two decades to early explorations of intelligent tutoring systems, pedagogical agents, and multi-agent learning environments. These earlier systems could simulate conversational behaviour, offer scaffolded feedback, or even coordinate group work.

We use the term *technological genre* here not merely to categorise artefacts, but to highlight a dynamic assemblage of design conventions, user expectations, and functional affordances that are co-shaped by evolving sociotechnical conditions. In this light, agentic AI today can be understood as a rejuvenated genre which unleashes new forms of techno-pedagogical potential.

What sets current-generation agentic AI apart is not the conceptual foundation, but the underlying technological stack. Modern agents are powered by LLMs with advanced language understanding and generation capabilities, often integrated with memory modules, planning engines, retrieval augmentation, or action-execution APIs. This infrastructure enables unprecedented levels of fluency, persistence, and contextual awareness. LLM-powered agents can now initiate questions, propose ideas, recall prior student inputs, and flexibly shift roles over time – functioning not unlike a highly responsive co-teacher or research collaborator.

This marks a significant techno-pedagogical shift. Where earlier pedagogical agents were constrained by rigid scripts and narrow domain coverage, LLM-enhanced agents offer open-domain, open-goal dialogic support. Unlike static platforms that require user-initiated queries, these agents can co-navigate ill-structured tasks, co-construct meaning, and even prompt humans into deeper reflection.

This expanded agency redefines the design space for educational interaction. No longer confined to responding, the agent can now initiate, steer, and regulate dialogue. This emergence of agent-initiated prompting positions the AI as a co-regulator of the learning process, rather than a passive tool.

This shift challenges conventional techno-pedagogical logics in three ways:

- **From control to co-regulation**: Current prompting frameworks assume learner or teacher control. Agentic AI introduces reciprocal dynamics, where the system can steer, pause, or challenge – raising new design questions about pacing, timing, and scaffold calibration.
- **From static to evolving roles**: In current prompt-response settings, the AI's role is fixed. Agentic AI systems, by contrast, assume dynamic, context-sensitive roles: brainstorming partner, Socratic interlocutor, friendly critic, summariser – often within a single session. This fluidity calls for new orchestration frameworks..
- **From prompting skills to interactional fluency**: Current paradigms valourised prompt engineering. The emerging paradigm prioritises the ability to sustain meaningful exchanges—knowing when to follow, push back, or reorient the dialogue..

This is not merely a matter of improved functionality. The deeper shift lies in reconfiguring how agency is distributed between humans and machines, and what forms of learning become possible when such distributions are more flexible, fluid, and co-constructed. Agentic AI, in this sense, is not just a technological upgrade. It represents the reinvigoration of a long-standing pedagogical ideal: the creation of responsive, personalised, dialogic learning environments – now enabled by a techno-pedagogical ensemble in which AI agents play an active, generative role.

4. From Prompting to Co-Regulation: Towards Shared Meta-Task Awareness

The emergence of agentic AI agents marks the beginning of what we earlier termed the Post-Prompting Era – a paradigm shift that challenges the longstanding asymmetry of human-AI interaction. No longer confined to the prompt-response logic, this new phase demands that we rethink how agency is distributed, how intentions are negotiated, and how interaction unfolds over time.

At the heart of this shift is the transition from prompting to co-regulation – a concept introduced earlier, which we now turn to unpack in greater detail. While current prompting frameworks, however refined, are still predicated on a unidirectional model (humans prompt, AI responds), co-regulation foregrounds interaction as a mutual, evolving process, in which AI may take initiative and humans must learn to interpret, negotiate, and steer such behaviours in real time.

This reconfiguration compels us to move beyond treating AI as a reactive tool, and toward designing co-participatory ecologies where students and educators co-manage the AI's contributions in pursuit of shared goals. In such ecologies, co-regulation becomes essential: the ability to sustain productive, value-aligned interaction with AI agents through a blend of directive, reflective, and meta-communicative strategies.

Pedagogically, this calls for new sensibilities – not only scaffolding students to express their intents more clearly, but also equipping them to monitor, interpret, and shape the evolving interactional dynamics between themselves and AI.

To further unpack the implications of human-AI co-regulation, we present two scenarios. These highlight how the distribution of meta-task awareness (MTA) (Wong, in-press) – the ability to monitor, manage, and redirect one's engagement with the task and its evolving demands – shifts from being human-led to being jointly orchestrated in collaboration with agentic AI.

<u>Scenario: Co-Regulating a Writing Companion in a Secondary Classroom</u>

In a lower secondary language classroom, a student is working with a LLM writing companion to develop a personal narrative. After drafting their opening paragraph, they prompt the AI for suggestions on how to continue. The AI responds with a dramatic plot twist – the protagonist gets into a car accident. The student hesitates. They hadn't planned for such a turn and felt it doesn't align with the emotional tone they intended. Instead of accepting or discarding the suggestion outright, they initiate a dialogue with the AI: "That's not quite the direction I had in mind. Can you offer something gentler, maybe involving a misunderstanding between friends?" The AI revises its response accordingly, but the student again senses a mismatch, this time in style. They highlight a few sentences and ask the AI to rewrite them in a more reflective tone, explaining what they mean by "reflective" (e.g., introspective, calm).

Over the course of this interaction, the student is not merely issuing commands or evaluating outputs. They are actively modulating the AI's behaviour – explaining intentions, setting constraints, and iteratively shaping the trajectory of co-authorship. The teacher, meanwhile, scaffolds this process not by teaching better prompts per se, but by drawing attention to how the student notices and redirects the AI, asking questions like: "How did you know that suggestion wasn't working?" or "What did you say that helped the AI change its tone?" In doing so, the teacher helps externalise metacognitive moments, fostering students' emerging capacity to monitor and guide AI interactions with greater intentionality.

This scenario illustrates what co-regulation looks like in practice. The student is learning to engage with the AI as an evolving interlocutor, rather than a fixed tool. They build a working relationship with the agent through a sequence of interpretive and corrective moves – ones that go beyond prompt engineering to encompass awareness, negotiation, and alignment of intentions. In such contexts, agency is no longer frontloaded in the human prompt, but distributed across turns of interaction, where meaning and direction are constantly re-shaped.

While this scenario illustrates the potential of prompt-based co-regulation, it also underscores its limitations. The student still bears the primary burden of steering the interaction, constantly needing to reframe, refocus, and realign the AI's behaviour. This kind of high-order prompting requires not only deep domain awareness, but meta-cognitive fluency few students possess. The Post-Prompting Era, as we envision it, calls for agentic AI systems that do not merely wait for prompts, but proactively support co-regulation – initiating, adjusting, and scaffolding the interaction in ways aligned with the learner's evolving needs and goals.

<u>Now imagine the same student working with an agentic AI tutor</u>

As they begin to outline their essay, the AI gently reminds them, "Earlier you mentioned exploring economic and ethical trade-offs — would you like to build that into your first paragraph?" When they hesitate, the AI offers, "Would it help if I suggest a possible structure based on your current ideas?"

Midway through writing, the student starts drifting into descriptive elaboration. The AI picks up on the pattern and interjects: "I notice the argument is becoming less focused — shall we review your stance again?" Instead of prompting the AI, the student is prompted by the AI - but in a way that respects her autonomy, and scaffolds her decision-making.

Later, when they rewrite a section, the AI comments: "This revision improves clarity, but slightly weakens the counterpoint. Want to consider restoring part of your earlier phrasing?" This agentic AI doesn't wait passively for commands; it tracks, remembers, and supports reflective regulation. It acts not as a compliant tool, but a co-participant in their thinking process.

This scenario illustrates how the cognitive load of task monitoring and strategic regulation, previously shouldered almost entirely by the student, is now partially offloaded to the AI. Yet such co-regulation does not arise from mere technological sophistication; it stems from a convergence of MTA across both the human and the AI agent. The student must still be metacognitively attuned to the writing goals, knowing when to heed, negotiate, or override the AI's suggestions. Meanwhile, the agent must maintain a form of situational MTA, that is, the ability to track prior moves, infer learner goals, and offer context-sensitive prompts that guide without dominating. In this mutual awareness loop, the AI becomes not just responsive, but responsible in its participation – a shift that redefines the very ethics of human-AI collaboration in education. Understanding such co-regulatory dynamics is crucial for designing future learning environments, as we explore in the following section on practical implications.

5. Design and Pedagogical Implications

The rise of agentic AI systems poses not only technical challenges, but also pedagogical ones. As learning shifts from prompt-based transactions to co-regulated trajectories, we must reimagine the roles of teachers and learners, the structure of learning activities, and the techno-pedagogical logics embedded in AI systems. In this section, we outline three interlocking shifts required to realise the potential of post-prompting learning environments.

5.1 Rethinking Teaching and Training: From Prompting to Co-Constructing

Current teacher PD efforts often emphasise prompt engineering, i.e., how to write effective prompts for lesson plans, rubrics, or explanations. However, as AI becomes more autonomous and embedded, teachers must learn not only to prompt but to co-construct learning trajectories with AI agents. This requires a new kind of teacher readiness:

- Understanding how agentic AI behaves across contexts and over time;
- Interpreting when AI support enhances or distorts learning intentions;
- Scaffolding students to interact critically and reflectively with AI over multiple turns.

Likewise, students must move beyond prompt literacy toward **interactional fluency**. This includes the capacity to:

- Respond to AI suggestions with reflection rather than blind acceptance;
- Explain their evolving intentions to the AI;
- Monitor and redirect the flow of AI-assisted work as tasks unfold.

These capacities, which we refer to as **co-regulation literacy**, form the foundation for sustaining autonomy and agency in increasingly AI-mediated learning environments.

5.2 Redesigning Activity Logic: From Prompting to Agent Management

Pedagogical design must also evolve. Most current AI-integrated activities are still single-turn and output-oriented: students prompt for a result, then revise or submit. In the post-prompting

context, learning tasks must be reconceived as multi-turn, agent-mediated, and evolution-oriented. This means designing tasks that:

- Invite students to collaborate with evolving AI roles, e.g., an AI that begins as a brainstorming partner, then shifts into a devil's advocate, then a summariser;
- Emphasise iteration and reflection across time, with students returning to AI outputs not as final answers, but as co-constructed drafts for refinement;
- Encourage students to experiment with agent prompting, response framing, and conversational role-switching.

For example, a classroom might implement a "role-evolving AI companion", in which the same agent takes on different personas, such as idea generator, critique facilitator and synthesis coach, across a design cycle. Students not only complete the task, but learn to manage the evolving affordances and constraints of AI agency.

A promising early example of such techno-pedagogical integration is ChatGPT's newly introduced *Study Mode* (launched in July 2025). Designed to support student reasoning rather than direct answer retrieval, it engages learners through multi-turn Socratic questioning, knowledge checks, and reflective nudges. While still operating under scripted system prompts, *Study Mode* illustrates how dialogic scaffolding, situational responsiveness, and pedagogically framed agent behaviours can be embedded in consumer-facing AI systems. It highlights the feasibility—and urgency—of designing AI companions that prioritise interpretability, co-regulation, and learner autonomy from the ground up.

5.3 Techno-Pedagogical Co-Design: Making Agentic Systems Learnable and Teachable

If AI agents are to become true co-participants in learning, their behaviour must be designable, transparent, and educative. This calls for closer collaboration between educators and system developers, through what we term techno-pedagogical co-design.

Three design principles are particularly critical:

- **Behavioural boundaries**: What kinds of autonomy should agents have? How can systems be designed to offer initiative without displacing human agency?
- **Tunable scaffolding**: Can agent feedback vary in tone, detail, or pacing depending on learner profile, task phase, or detected struggle?
- **Explainability and alignment**: Can students and teachers understand why the agent made a suggestion—and challenge or adapt it when needed?

Equally important is the role of educational data. Rather than using learning analytics solely for student monitoring, post-prompting systems can harness data to modulate agent behaviour—e.g., adjusting scaffold complexity, revising task trajectories, or even co-evolving pedagogical strategies over time.

Such dynamic feedback loops require not only technical infrastructure, but ethical and pedagogical foresight. Who gets to define the "ideal" learning trajectory? How are teacher intentions and student voices preserved in the orchestration of agent support?

The Post-Prompting Era demands more than new tools. It requires new ways of thinking about pedagogy, participation, and system design. Teachers must become orchestrators of AI agency. Students must cultivate interactional literacies to navigate multi-turn dialogue with evolving partners. Designers must embed pedagogical values into the architecture of AI systems.

These shifts are not just aspirational—they are urgently necessary as educational institutions grapple with the accelerating integration of AI. In the next section, we outline a research agenda to investigate, validate, and deepen these design principles across diverse contexts.

6. Conclusion and Future Research Agenda

The emergence of agentic AI in education represents more than a technological inflection point. It signals a deeper pedagogical and epistemic shift. As this paper has argued, the Post-

Prompting Era calls for a reconfiguration of how learners and educators engage with AI: not merely as tool users, but as co-regulators, co-designers, and dialogic partners.

Through the constructs of MTA and co-regulated interaction, we have outlined the need for new teacher roles, new task logics, and new techno-pedagogical architectures. But these implications also point toward an open frontier of research. Below, we outline four key trajectories to guide future inquiry.

6.1 Theoretical Exploration: Modeling Human–Agent Co-Regulation

While prior research has developed cognitive models of self-regulated learning and human tutoring, far less is known about the shared regulation that occurs between humans and AI agents – particularly those with planning, memory, and adaptive dialogue capabilities.
Future theoretical work should aim to:

- Develop cognitive and interactional models of mutual scaffolding, where both learner and agent adjust their behaviours based on evolving task states and intentions;
- Clarify the boundaries and types of agentic support: When does AI guidance foster learner agency, and when might it displace it?
- Extend existing frameworks of distributed cognition and co-regulated learning to account for semi-autonomous AI entities with persistent memory and dialogic roles.

Such theoretical development is essential to move beyond vague metaphors like “AI as partner,” and toward actionable design principles for human-AI co-agency.

6.2 Methodological Innovation: Capturing Multi-Agent Learning Processes

Studying AI-mediated learning presents methodological challenges that cannot be fully addressed by traditional classroom observation or survey methods alone. In post-prompting contexts, the interactional unit is no longer limited to student–student or teacher–student dyads, but includes AI agents with evolving roles, histories, and contributions.
Future methodological directions may include:

- Hybrid analytical approaches that combine learning analytics (e.g., agent logs, prompt-response sequences), temporal discourse analysis, and cognitive mapping;
- Integration of Epistemic Network Analysis (ENA) with system-generated agent trajectories to reveal how student–agent interactions co-evolve over time;
- Design of new protocols for tracing distributed meta-task awareness—e.g., when students override or reinterpret AI suggestions, or when agents respond differently based on inferred learner needs.

These methods must capture not only outcomes, but processes: the subtleties of negotiation, breakdown, alignment, and redirection in dynamic human-AI dialogues.

6.3 Empirical Evaluation: Testing Agentic AI in Real Classrooms

While prompting-based AI applications (e.g., writing assistants, feedback generators) are already entering classrooms, studies of agentic AI in authentic educational contexts remain scarce.

We see several urgent research questions:

- How do students respond to persistent, role-shifting AI companions compared to traditional prompt-based tools?
- Under what conditions does agentic AI foster sustained engagement, deeper reflection, or more strategic learning behaviours?
- What forms of teacher orchestration are most effective when multiple students interact with different AI agents simultaneously?

These questions require iterative field trials, combining classroom-based experimentation with longitudinal data collection to assess both cognitive outcomes and changes in learner dispositions over time.

6.4 Ethical and Governance Considerations: Agency, Control, and Value Alignment

In line with recent calls to advance the generative AI in education research agenda from an Asia-Pacific perspective (Wong & Looi, 2024), this paper extends the conversation by theorising the Post-Prompting Era and introducing the construct of MTA to guide future inquiry. As AI systems grow more proactive, the risk of misattributed agency increases—especially among young learners. If students perceive AI suggestions as authoritative or "intelligent," how might this shape their confidence, criticality, or sense of ownership?

Key ethical issues include:

- How to design transparent AI behaviours that reveal rationale, uncertainty, or pedagogical stance;
- How to maintain human primacy in defining learning goals, especially when AI-generated scaffolds may appear pedagogically plausible but subtly misaligned;
- How educational institutions can govern agent deployment, ensuring alignment with cultural values, developmental needs, and inclusivity.

Rather than dismissing agentic AI as risky, we advocate for a design-for-trust approach: building systems that foreground reflection, user override, and pedagogical explainability.

As educational AI enters a new phase, i.e., shifting from promptable tools to proactive interlocutors, the learning sciences must also evolve. We need new theories, new methods, and new safeguards to ensure that human agency is not only preserved, but expanded. The Post-Prompting Era is not a destination, but an unfolding horizon—one that demands deep pedagogical imagination and cross-disciplinary collaboration to realise its full potential.

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