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Learning with AI
Educational uses of
Artificial Intelligence
presented by Deb Howes

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Collaborating with Heritage Institutions is essential to your AI-enhanced teaching practices in the Humanities

A core practice of museums, heritage sites, and other authorized collections of cultural materials is maintaining comprehensive digital archives for public benefit. Their professional staffs also produce educational programs and materials that augment public understanding of these collections and the humanities more broadly. EdTech organizations developing AI tools for learning in the humanities will maximize impact by integrating these digital resources into model training and collaborating with humanities professionals on agent behavior design. **Here are three essential ways these partnerships can invigorate studies in the humanities:**

- **Authority and Accuracy:** Large language models (LLMs) acquire information largely from the Internet and subsequently need extensive training to distinguish factual content from inaccuracies. Agents trained on these LLMs are known to “hallucinate” meaning, for example, inventing nonexistent citations, links, or facts. By contrast, retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) models can be trained using pre-identified, authoritative sources. Imagine building AI agents on top of RAG systems dedicated to such trusted sources as museum databases of collection images, object labels, media documentation, or digital catalogues. Not only would these RAG-based AI agents be valued by students and teachers for their trustworthy and verifiable outputs, but they would also be more energy efficient: RAG agents don’t scour the Internet for each answer—they analyze a contained, high-quality dataset located nearby.
- **Equity:** Prompts sent to generative AI agents can return culturally biased results—for example, displaying a preference for images of white European males over individuals from the Global South. Many museums and heritage collections are broadening their holdings and research to reflect more diverse cultures and perspectives. Recent exhibitions—such as *Foreigners Everywhere*, featured during the 2023 Venice Art Biennale—highlight under-represented cultures, materials, and practices. Cross-sector collaborations between cultural institutions, educators, and EdTech innovators can co-develop AI training protocols and applications that support equity-forward learning experiences reflecting diverse points of view.
- **Experience:** Early AI applications attempted to bring past events and figures “to life” via chatbots conversing as historical figures. Increasing student proficiency in the humanities goes beyond memorizing facts to building expert skills. Humanities professionals are trained to foster critical thinking skills including, observation, comparison, evaluation, debate, experimentation, and discussion. Museum staff regularly mentor emerging professionals, such as interns, to excel in these critical functions. Heritage educators can help train AI agents to guide students along an exploratory, self-directed learning path, mirroring the guidance they provide on public tours or when training classroom teachers in informal learning pedagogies. Multidisciplinary teams creating AI-enabled tools can expand learning goals to include the more elusive “how” and “why” of the humanities, alongside the standard “who” and “what.”

EDEN 2025 annual conference presentation abstract by Deborah Howes

References: EDEN Digital Europe. (2024). *The future of AI in formal and informal education contexts: Inclusion, ethics and new perspectives* [Webinar: see EDEN’s YouTube Channel]