

Gibby's Principle of Pedagogy

In the Age of AI

For the teachers of Mayo College: the argument of the address, 10th July '26

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There is a distinct flavour of panic making the rounds in educational circles these days. It usually sounds something like this: *the machines can write the perfect essay, solve the multivariable calculus problem, and generate flawless code in three seconds. What on earth are we supposed to do on Monday morning?*

The panic is not silly. It is simply pointed at the wrong thing.

A Saturday morning, before lunch

Bikaner Pavilion, the early 1960s. The top deck full of boys, restless for their meal, not one of them thinking about anything except lunch. Jack Gibson, Gibby to three generations of this school, is mid-talk when he suddenly stops, turns to one of the senior monitors, and asks him in front of everyone why he is here in school.

The boy gives an answer. Gibby shakes his head. He goes round the room, boy after boy, answer after answer. To pass exams. To make my father proud. To get into a good college. Not one answer satisfies him. And finally he says it, loudly, so that even the small boys at the back can hear:

“You are in school to learn how to think.”

Ten years old, seated in the very front, and the full meaning of it registered not at all.

In fairness, this was not entirely the boy's fault. The school was sending mixed signals.

The prize-winning parrot

On Sunday mornings at the Temple, Gurudev Pant introduced us to the Gita and the Upanishads, and quoted from the two Epics. The school, being a school, conducted a Gita test. And yours truly won a prize every single year.

The method was flawless. One “*ratoed (रटोed)*” the verses, committing them to memory with roughly the comprehension of a parrot, and reproduced them faithfully on the paper. The prize duly followed. The meaning did not. I admitted as much to Gurudev, and his reply is as vivid today as on the day he said it: *you may not understand these verses now, but one day their meaning will become your pole star.*

He was right, and it took half a century. Two shlokas from the school Assembly book are now the pole stars of our corporate values, and ***Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinaḥ*** stands in every facility of our Group, on every continent. One teacher, one verse, fifty years of compound interest.

But notice what the Gita test itself rewarded. It rewarded a boy for being an excellent information-retrieval system.

Information retrieval has just been automated. Permanently, cheaply, and rather better than the boy managed.

A fable and a myth

In June, the laboratory Anthropic, whose AI our own Group works with every day, did something that deserves more attention from schools than it has received. It built one model, one mind, and shipped it as two products, divided not by capability but by a layer of safety classifiers.

The first, **Fable 5**, goes to the public. Into Fable the engineers built additional safety measures, guardrails, against the most dangerous misuses: systems that detect requests touching cyber attack, biology and chemistry, and quietly route them to a weaker model instead. Fable is the twin the world may use.

The second, **Mythos 5**, is the same mind with those cyber protections lifted. It is not sold. It goes to a vetted circle of cyber defenders and critical infrastructure operators, under a programme run with the American government, and its makers describe it as the strongest cybersecurity model in the world.

Same intelligence. Same training. Same mind. **The entire difference between the twins is the guardrails.** Not capability. Not knowledge. Guardrails.

And note who receives which. The guarded twin is given to everyone. The unguarded twin is entrusted only to those whose judgement has been examined first.

There is an accidental poetry in the naming that no teacher should let pass. A *fable* is a story with a moral at the end. A *myth* is the older, wilder kind: gods and titans, power without restraint, no moral supplied.

Someone has to supply the moral. That has never been the machine's job. It has always been ours.

What the machine will never do

The machine has “*rote*” everything: every verse, every formula, every date, every argument ever written down. It reproduces flawlessly, at three in the morning, in any language, at almost no cost. It would win the Gita prize every year, for ever, without breaking a sweat.

It has never once asked why it is in school.

That is not a poetic flourish. It is a technical description. The machine does not ask *should I*. Hesitation is a moral act, and morality was never in the training data. Point it at a hospital and a power grid and it sees no difference between them, because to a system that finds locks, both are simply systems with locks. It does not hesitate at the hospital door. It does not ask who is on the operating table.

The world has now built, at staggering expense, a perfect version of the pupil our examinations were designed to reward, and discovered that it is not, by itself, safe to leave alone in a room.

Gibby saw this in the early 1960s. He merely had the misfortune to be sixty years early.

The principle

Gibby never wrote a pedagogy. He was far too busy running a school, and would have regarded the phrase “thought leadership” as a symptom of something. What follows is a formalisation of his one sentence, offered for an age he did not live to see. **The sentence is his. The framework is mine.**

Gibby's Principle of Pedagogy

A school exists to form the mind that interrogates, not to furnish the mind that recites.

Three corollaries follow, and between them they answer the Monday-morning question.

First: the question precedes the answer

Industry, especially technology and manufacturing, teaches a law that never fails. The moment a product can be made anywhere, by anyone, at the same quality, it becomes commoditised: the pricing lever collapses, and all the value migrates to whatever remains unique and cannot be copied. Steel became a commodity; design did not. Car assembly became a commodity; trust did not.

It has now happened to explanation itself, the patient, tireless, endlessly available explanation that was our profession's entire stock in trade.

What remains scarce is knowing which question to ask, noticing who benefits from the way it has been framed, and spotting what the answer quietly left out.

So the shift is from problem-solving to **problem-framing**. When the machine produces a thousand pristine answers in three seconds, the answer is worth nothing and the framing is worth everything. Which means the Guru's work no longer ends when the answer arrives.

It begins there.

Second: the struggle is the syllabus

The technical term is **cognitive offloading**, handing a mental task to an external aid, and it is neither good nor bad in itself. Writing was offloading. So were the abacus, the slide rule and the calculator, and none of them destroyed the mind.

What hollows the mind is *indiscriminate* offloading. Researchers at the MIT Media Lab put fifty-four young adults through essay-writing sessions while measuring their brain activity, and found that neural connectivity scaled down steadily in proportion to the help they were given. Those writing unaided showed the strongest, widest-ranging networks. Those using a search engine, less. Those handing the task to a chatbot, the weakest of all. The chatbot group struggled afterwards to quote their own essays. Human graders described their work as *soulless*. The authors gave the effect a name that belongs in every staff room: **cognitive debt**.

It is early work, conducted on adults rather than schoolboys, and it has not yet been peer reviewed, so it should be carried lightly. But every teacher reading this already knew it in their bones, and now there is an instrument that agrees.

The discipline, then, is a single question, simple enough for a ten-year-old to apply:

If the machine does this, is a muscle being freed, or is one atrophying?

From which follows a rather beautiful division of labour.

For teachers, offload aggressively, but only the mundane. Let the machine take the first-draft lesson plan, the differentiated worksheet, the routine marking of closed-ended drills, the date checking, the administrative paperwork that drains the energy out of the day. This is the mechanical plumbing of education and there is no virtue whatsoever in doing it by hand. Offloading it is not laziness. It is how

you reclaim the hours to step away from the blackboard and give a particular child your unhurried, undivided human attention. That, and not the marking, was always the job.

For children, the rule inverts. They may offload the mechanical: the formatting, the retrieval, the conversion of units. They may use the machine as an assistant only *after* they have gone first themselves. The machine may check their thinking. It may never do it for them. And they may never offload the formative: the first attempt at a hard problem, the framing of the question, the decision about what matters, the taking of responsibility for it.

Offload the drill. Never the struggle.

Which is why banning these tools is a fool's errand. The genie is not going back into the bottle, and the boys will use them whatever we decide. The answer is not prohibition. It is **friction**: deliberately putting the difficulty back where the learning lives. Friction is where the spark of original human intelligence actually happens. It is the stubborn refusal to accept the first answer the machine produces.

One warning, and it is for us rather than the boys. A teacher who offloads indiscriminately will lose, within two or three years, the very command of the subject that made her worth listening to. It is harder for the adults than for the children, because nobody is marking us.

Third: conscience is the only durable guardrail

Fifty years in technology and manufacturing teach one law that has never been broken: **every technical lock invites a key**. Firewalls are breached. Regulations are gamed. Safety interlocks are defeated by clever operators within the month. Whatever one group of intelligent and innovative humans can build, another group, or now a machine, can eventually unbuild.

The guardrails around Fable are real, and they are good. Thousands of hours of red teaming by governments and independent institutes went into them, and no one has yet found a universal way through. But look at what they rest upon: a corporate decision, and a government's approval. Both, like locks, can change. Neither is a conscience. An opaque mathematical system cannot possess one.

To rely on an algorithm's built-in guardrails to protect a child's mind is to let the GPS drive the car off the cliff because the screen showed no dead end.

The only guardrails that hold are our *Shashwat* values: ethics, ethos, conscience. And values do not live in software. They live in people, specifically in the leaders who will design, deploy and govern these systems. Those leaders are formed in schools, by teachers, today, in classrooms exactly like the one where a headmaster once interrupted himself before lunch.

For machines, guardrails are engineered by a company in a laboratory.

For human beings, only one factory of guardrails has ever been discovered. It is called a classroom.

Which is why the whole architecture must be anchored in something older than any of it. Before a child learns to prompt an agentic model or deploy a robotic system, he must be rooted in the directive this school has carried in two languages for a hundred and fifty years: ***Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah***, may all beings be happy and free from suffering. The technology serves universal human well-being, or it does not come through our gates.

The instrument

None of this survives as sentiment. It requires a place to be practised, which is what the “*Kapuria Human-Centric Centre of Excellence in AI and Robotics*” was built to be. On the twenty-seventh of November last year, this school’s one hundred and fiftieth anniversary to the very day, we did not unveil a plaque or a museum. We inaugurated the Centre. On the day Mayo turned one hundred and fifty, it chose an instrument over a monument.

The Centre is not a coding school and not a monument to passive screen time. It is a live laboratory for exactly this pedagogy. Phase one: experiential AI and robotics labs where students build, test and question raw technology with their own hands, where a boy designs a system and, in the same breath, debates the bias in its data. Phase two: interdisciplinary units co-designed across departments, rewarding original reasoning over borrowed fluency. Phase three: student-led innovation governed by real-world briefs and mentored by practitioners who have actually faced the dilemmas.

The projects point at three national priorities: primary healthcare, agricultural productivity, and education for all. *Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*, made measurable in what our students actually build for this country. The Centre runs on an ethos we call K-INFINITY, for Knowledge, Karma, Kindness and Kaizen, and it puts one question to every student who enters. Not what can I do with AI, but what should I do with it.

Even the building teaches. It is IGBC Platinum certified, among the greenest school buildings in India, with solar chimneys, passive cooling, and Indo-Saracenic arches over robotics benches. Tradition meeting technology in every brick.

Its doors are open to the teachers before they are open to the boys, because the sequence matters: confident teachers first, transformed students second, a contribution to the country third.

It is not a gift. A gift sits on a shelf. It is an instrument placed in your hands, and it becomes a living programme only on the day this staff picks it up.

The point

There is a temptation to read all this as a defence of tradition against technology. It is the precise opposite.

Technology has not made the Guru obsolete. It has made everyone *else* obsolete, and left the Guru standing alone on the field, holding the one thing that could never be automated.

The parrot has been outsourced. What remains is the boy who asks why he is in school.

Sixty years on, the answer has not changed. He is here to learn how to think, and, in an age that can manufacture intelligence but not conscience, to learn what he ought to be thinking *about*.

Gibby, one suspects, would find the whole business faintly amusing. He said it in a single sentence, before lunch, to a top deck of boys who wanted their food. It has taken the rest of us six decades and a machine to catch up.

Let the machines handle the mechanical optimisation of knowledge. When it comes to philosophy, character, and the messy, beautiful process of human reasoning, let the Guru step up.

After all, technology is merely the instrument. **The human being is the purpose.**

The argument in seven lines

For the noticeboard, and for the Monday when the panic returns.

- 1. Knowledge has been commoditised. Conscience cannot be.** Our value moved from what we know to who we are.
- 2. The answer is now free; the question is the curriculum.** Shift from problem-solving to problem-framing.
- 3. A fable has a moral; a myth does not.** Same mind, different guardrails, and someone must supply the moral.
- 4. Offload the drill, never the struggle.** If the machine does it, is a muscle freed, or does one atrophy?
- 5. Teachers offload the plumbing; children offload nothing formative.** The recovered hours belong to the child, not the paperwork.
- 6. Every technical lock invites a key.** The only durable guardrail is the conscience of the human who governs the machine.
- 7. You are in school to learn how to think.** Everything above is a footnote to Gibby's sentence.

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