

REFLECTIONS FROM THE 30 UNDER 30: INSIGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION AT OEB 2024

AI AND TECHNOLOGY: TOOLS, NOT REPLACEMENTS

As AI and other technologies become more embedded in education, many of us are reflecting on their true potential and limitations. While AI is a powerful tool, it cannot replace the human qualities that are central to education: empathy, creativity, and critical thinking. AI can help us generate ideas and solutions, but it cannot think, feel, or innovate in the way people can. AI's true value lies in how we—humans—use it creatively. During OEB AI in education was a big topic. Our insight was that educationalists and AI experts must continue to use AI as a tool to add to education, not as a replacement for human engagement. Moreover, we recognised that AI in education requires thoughtful, ethical considerations. We need spaces where these discussions can take place, moving beyond commercial interests to focus on the deeper implications of using AI in educational contexts. OEB provided us exactly that: a space to discuss, reflect and learn from other educational and AI experts.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT: LEARNING IS CONNECTION, NOT JUST INFORMATION

As higher education continues to explore the integration of technology in learning, we think that human connection is a fundamental part of education. Technology can certainly enhance and support learning, but it is the relationships—whether between teachers and students or among peers—that truly drive meaningful educational experiences. While

tools like AI and VR are exciting, the most effective learning environments are those where emotional connections and real human interaction are central. In our own experiences during the conference, the conversations we had with experts and mentors were some of the most valuable moments. We recognise that learning is not just about what we know but about how we connect, challenge, and inspire each other (not just in the classroom but also at OEB). The discussions, especially within the 30 Under 30 cohort, were where we learned the most and gained new perspectives that we will carry forward in shaping the future of education.

BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE: A CALL FOR MORE ACTIONABLE TOOLS

While the conference provided a wealth of theoretical insights, we found there was a gap when it came to practical, actionable takeaways. We recognise the need for more sessions that bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly when it comes to implementing educational technologies. While discussions around emerging tools like AI and immersive learning were fascinating, we would have appreciated more hands-on workshops that allowed us to directly engage with these technologies and explore how to integrate them into real-world education settings. We also see the value in live demonstrations of cutting-edge tools, paired with opportunities to try them out ourselves or ask questions about their implementation.

RETHINKING ENGAGEMENT: PRESENCE OVER PARTICIPATION

One of the most thought-provoking insights that has emerged is the idea that education should focus less on engagement and more on "presence." While engagement is often prioritised as a key element in learning, it is not always a prerequisite for deep understanding. Rather than solely pursuing engagement, we learned that cultivating presence—the sense of being truly "there" in the learning experience, whether physically or virtually, can be very meaningful. This can be achieved through various techniques, including immersive technologies like VR, or even through more subtle forms of sensory engagement. When we are truly present, we are more likely to internalise knowledge and apply it in meaningful ways. We believe this perspective should be given more attention in future discussions around education. While engagement definitely has its place, fostering a genuine sense of presence can create impactful and lasting learning experiences.

NETWORKING: MORE TIME FOR MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Another highlight of the conference for us was the networking and collaboration, particularly within the 30 Under 30 cohort. The opportunity to connect with like-minded professionals from

around the world, share our challenges, and discuss our visions for the future of education was invaluable. The most impactful moments often came from informal conversations after the sessions, where peers, mentors, and industry leaders shared their experiences and insights. We also encourage OEB to facilitate even more opportunities for collaboration within the next 30 Under 30 cohort. Such as dedicated workshops or structured sessions, where one can dive into shared challenges and brainstorm solutions, would have been incredibly valuable for us to have.

FINAL THOUGHTS: AN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER

The 30 Under 30 programme at OEB 2024 was an unforgettable experience, allowing us to connect with passionate professionals and gain fresh insights into education's future. We hope future OEBs provide more hands-on sessions, practical tools, and networking opportunities. We believe OEB should continue to emphasize the human element of education, as the connections we make and ideas we share ultimately shape its future. We leave OEB inspired, eager to continue pushing the boundaries of education.

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