Access vs. Replacement Framework

Evaluating the Appropriate Use of Artificial Intelligence in Education

Created by Ronald G. Leblanc

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Version 1.0

Developed by **Ronald G. Leblanc**

About this Resource

The **Access vs. Replacement Framework** is a practical decision-making framework designed to help educators, accessibility professionals, instructional designers, and students evaluate the appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational settings.

Rather than asking simply whether AI should be used, the framework encourages thoughtful consideration of whether AI is improving access while preserving the intended learning outcomes.

The framework complements the **Participation–Barrier–Pathway (PBP) Framework** by providing a structured approach to evaluating AI as one possible pathway toward participation.

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Leblanc, R. G. (2026). *Access vs. Replacement Framework: Evaluating the Appropriate Use of Artificial Intelligence in Education.* Ronald G. Leblanc.

About the Framework

The **Access vs. Replacement Framework** was developed to support thoughtful decision-making regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence in education.

Its guiding question is simple:

Is AI improving access to learning, or replacing the learning that students are expected to demonstrate?

The framework encourages educators to begin with intended learning outcomes, understand the barriers affecting participation, and evaluate whether AI preserves meaningful intellectual engagement.

It is intended to support balanced conversations around accessibility, academic integrity, and the

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Helping People Participate Through Technology

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly changing higher education. Students are using AI to summarize readings, generate study materials, organize ideas, and even draft assignments. Faculty are understandably asking an important question:

Where is the line between supporting learning and replacing learning?

The Access vs. Replacement Framework provides a practical way to think about AI in educational settings.

Rather than asking:

"Is AI allowed?"

It encourages us to ask:

"What is the student supposed to be learning, and how is AI affecting that learning?"

When AI improves access without replacing the intended learning outcomes, it can be a powerful educational tool. When AI performs the learning for the student, it may undermine the purpose of the activity.

The Framework

Imagine a simple continuum.

ACCESS	REPLACEMENT
Supports learning	Performs learning
Student remains engaged	Student becomes passive
Improves participation	Reduces opportunity to learn
Builds independence	Builds dependence

The goal is **not** to eliminate AI.

The goal is to use AI in ways that support participation while preserving meaningful learning.

The Four Questions

Before recommending or using AI, ask:

1. What is the learning outcome?

What knowledge or skill is the assignment designed to develop?

Examples:

- Critical thinking
- Academic writing
- Reading comprehension
- Research
- Problem solving
- Reflection
- Communication

If we don't know the learning outcome, we can't evaluate whether AI is helping or replacing it.

2. What barrier exists?

What is preventing the student from demonstrating that learning?

Examples

- Dyslexia
- ADHD
- Physical disability
- Blindness
- Language processing
- Executive functioning
- Time management

Remember:

The barrier—not the diagnosis—should guide the decision.

3. How is AI being used?

Examples of AI supporting access

✔ Organizing notes

✔ Simplifying difficult text

✔ Explaining unfamiliar concepts

✔ Creating study questions

✔ Brainstorming ideas

✔ Summarizing long readings

✔ Checking grammar

✔ Creating practice quizzes

Examples of AI replacing learning

✗ Writing the essay

✗ Completing the programming assignment

✗ Solving graded math problems

✗ Producing laboratory analysis

✗ Writing discussion posts

✗ Completing exams

4. Does the student remain intellectually engaged?

This is the most important question.

If AI removes unnecessary barriers while the student continues thinking, analyzing, deciding, creating, and reflecting...

→ AI is supporting access.

If AI performs those thinking tasks instead...

→ AI is replacing learning.

A Practical Decision Guide

Question	Yes	No
Does AI improve access?	✔ Continue	Reconsider
Does the student still perform the intended learning?	✔ Appropriate	Replacement Risk
Is the learning outcome preserved?	✔ Appropriate	Reconsider
Would removing AI unfairly disadvantage the student?	Consider accessibility supports	Standard expectations may apply

Examples

Example 1

Student with Dyslexia

Assignment:

Read a research article.

AI Use:

Reads and summarizes difficult sections.

Result:

✔ Access

The student still evaluates the ideas and participates in class discussion.

Example 2

Assignment:

Write a reflective essay.

AI Use:

Generates the complete essay.

Result:

✗ Replacement

The student is no longer demonstrating reflective writing.

Example 3

Assignment:

Prepare for an exam.

AI Use:

Creates flashcards and practice quizzes.

Result:

✔ Access

AI supports studying while the student still performs the learning.

Example 4

Assignment:

Programming course.

AI Use:

Writes the complete program.

Result:

✗ Replacement

The intended programming skills are not being demonstrated.

Relationship to the PBP Framework

The Access vs. Replacement Framework complements the Participation–Barrier–Pathway Framework.

The PBP Framework asks:

Participation

What is the student trying to accomplish?

↓

Barrier

What is preventing participation?

↓

Pathway

What combination of strategies, accommodations, and technology—including AI—will best support meaningful participation?

The Access vs. Replacement Framework helps evaluate one possible pathway: Artificial Intelligence.

Rather than asking whether AI should be used, practitioners ask whether AI is improving access while preserving the intended learning.

Key Principles

- ✔ Start with the learning outcome.
- ✔ Understand the participation barrier.
- ✔ Preserve intellectual engagement.
- ✔ Use AI to increase access—not replace learning.
- ✔ Technology should support participation, not eliminate it.

Final Reflection

Artificial Intelligence is neither inherently good nor inherently harmful in education. Like any assistive technology, its value depends on how it is used.

The question is not whether AI is involved.

The question is whether the student is still doing the learning.

When AI removes unnecessary barriers while preserving meaningful intellectual engagement, it becomes a powerful tool for participation.

When AI replaces the very learning the activity was designed to develop, educators should reconsider how it is being used.

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