# Rethinking Teacher Education in the ChatGPT Era through a Currere Perspective

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| Article Info | ABSTRACT |
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| | This study focuses on the potential impact of generative artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT—which are capable of performing cognitive tasks such as knowing, summarizing, interpreting, applying, analyzing, reasoning, and creative problem solving—on teacher education and curriculum design. Written texts used both as learning activities and as evaluative tools are considered representations of effective learning and cognitive processes. As the study is framed within a literature review based on the currere approach, it integrates both a systematic review of relevant sources and autobiographical references. GenAI has emerged as a cognitive artifact that enables both teachers and students to assign and engage in complex cognitive tasks. To ensure the meaningful use of this cognitive artifact, the currere method is proposed as a pedagogical framework that encourages students to focus on their own learning and meaning-making journeys by reflecting on their life and educational experiences. Moreover, the concept of embodied cognition is emphasized as a valuable perspective in defining the cognitive domain of the learning process. It is also evident that the interaction with GenAI, which often takes place in a space of solitude intertwined with dialogic exchanges, requires adherence to ethical principles. When learners focus on their own processes of meaning-making, they can perceive the connection between academic knowledge and their personal life narratives. Consequently, the texts produced will be not only academically grounded but also personally original. |

## INTRODUCTION

As an educator who has spent 25 years in a teacher training institution, I regularly assign writing tasks to help my students engage ethically with the kinds of intellectual activities valued in academia. These activities include competencies such as remembering and applying knowledge, creative problem solving, critical analysis, and inquiry. I typically assess these through open-ended exam questions or written reports. However, in the last two years, I have grown increasingly suspicious of texts produced by students working alone or in small groups at home—especially after some began subscribing to ChatGPT's premium service. I am left wondering: who truly authored these texts? Can plagiarism detection software identify AI-generated content, or must I rely on my 25 years of academic instinct and experience? If generative AI is now capable of producing text, it is clear that a student's lived experience, autobiography, and meaning-making journey have become essential markers of authenticity. As a solution to this emerging issue, I advocate for the use of the currere method, which facilitates reflection on life and educational experiences by helping learners focus on their own learning and meaning-making trajectories (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Because currere emphasizes autobiographical understanding, I have chosen to use a personal tone and share relevant educational experiences throughout this paper.

The emergence of ChatGPT marks a pivotal shift from the mechanical world of technology to the cultural and cognitive realm. Just as writing is a technology that restructures thought (Ong, 2013), generative AI systems are now cultural technologies that actively participate in the production and transformation of meaning (Mishra et al., 2025). Unlike writing and books, which serve as tools for preserving human knowledge and self-expression, GenAI has become an active collaborator in creating cultural content. Large language models (LLMs), the foundation of generative AI, are text generators trained to predict words based on statistical patterns of co-occurrence in human-produced text (Brynjolfsson & Raymond, 2025). When OpenAI released the beta version of ChatGPT to the public on November 30, 2022, it quickly gained millions of users. It can exchange ideas and information in real time, adapting its output to user interactions (Mishra et al., 2025). These features imply that the system learns from each question and uses previous inputs as context. As I write these lines, one of my browser tabs is open to ChatGPT; I am engaged in dialogue with it to refine my ideas. We are the researchers, observers, and first participants of the generative AI era.

### What if ChatGPT Produces Texts as Indicators of Cognition?

All of this began with the digitization and interconnection of writing. Writing, one of the three Rs emphasized by schooling, is central to abstraction and cognitive activity. As in all academic levels and disciplines, good writing is culturally valued (Zhao et al., 2024). Writing is both a learning process and a means of assessing learning outcomes. Popular sayings like "writing is thinking" and "writing is learning" reflect how writing is more than a vehicle for storing and transmitting knowledge. We often see writing and speech as windows into human cognition. Many writing instructors view writing as a representation of effective thought (Cardon et al., 2023). According to this view, those who write well also think well. In curricula, learning outcomes that end with verbs such as summarize, explain, classify, or synthesize typically imply written expression unless otherwise stated (Mishra et al., 2025). Writing is also central to activating and transmitting knowledge, reflecting the deep integration of language and thought. Language enables humans to engage in abstract reasoning, formulate scientific and philosophical theories, and participate in structured argumentation. Unsurprisingly, language is often considered the cornerstone of complex reasoning (Mahowald et al., 2024). Yet real-world language use also relies on non-linguistic cognitive skills. Understanding a sentence, inferring its implications, and deciding how to respond all depend on capacities beyond formal linguistic competence. Autobiographical and non-fiction writing practices -such as educational autobiography or currere essays- are expressions of personal, reflective thought and cannot be generated by ChatGPT through a single prompt.

**Writing Currere Essays with ChatGPT**

Efforts to fulfill official curricula, content lists, and standardized learning outcomes can succeed more meaningfully when linked to the learner's journey of making sense of their lived and educational experiences. Pinar (1975) described currere not as a fixed curriculum but as a dynamic process where one's life narrative and academic learning interact. I first encountered the concept of currere in 2017 during James Henderson's "Foundations of Curriculum" course at Kent State. At the time, I was exploring how the rational curriculum development model shaped by Tyler and his followers in my country could be integrated with values education. When Henderson asked us to write a currere essay, I found myself reflecting and writing about my own learning and teaching journey. Though I was already writing academic articles, this experience was different. Since then, I have both written my own currere texts and incorporated them into my courses, assigning them to pre-service teachers. I also ask students to enrich their narratives with references to leading scholars in the field, encouraging them to integrate external perspectives with their own ideas. This requires cognitive engagement and original authorship. In a time when AI tools possess cognitive abilities such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, I often wonder about the continued relevance of writing currere essays. I myself use ChatGPT and find the interaction to be oddly human—saying "please" and "thank you," even using emojis. These reactions suggest that our interaction with such cognitive artifacts is evolving into a deeply personal meaning-making process.

As usual, Turkey's national curricula were revised quickly and declared revolutionary. During the preparatory phase, I noticed that the so-called "integrated conceptual skills" such as questioning, discussing, summarizing, analyzing, synthesizing, inferring, and reasoning—central to these new curricula—can all be performed by ChatGPT. Although AI-generated book summaries tend to be shallow and mechanical, some students submit them via Google Classroom. More intellectually engaged students have started using GenAI as a tool in their cognitive processes—for example, by asking about educational values in cultures whose language and script they do not know, such as China or Brazil, and embedding the responses into their texts with proper referencing. These students ask meaningful questions and integrate GenAI responses critically. How should we use these new cognitive artifacts? Cognitive artifacts are multifunctional, computational tools that support or extend our thinking by providing representational scaffolds (Cassinadri, 2024). Just as mechanical tools amplify our physical strength, cognitive artifacts enhance our cognitive capacity. If many of the 21st-century cognitive skills can now be performed by AI, then our reading, writing, and reporting tasks should include reflective thinking and currere essays.

**What Is Worth Learning in the GenAI Era?**

One could say that the cognitive, ethical, and physical skills already in the curriculum remain worth learning. But it may be necessary to redefine learning goals. The answer to "how" we learn certainly needs to change. Learning experiences mediated by ChatGPT could be meaningfully redesigned through the *currere* method. Writing currere essays offers a deep, subjective inquiry into the learner's educational journey—a uniquely human capacity that generative AI cannot replicate. Pre-service teachers will still summarize, infer, and synthesize, but they will do so with reflection. Reflective thinking—a skill AI cannot mimic—is thus critical. As AI continues to intertwine with human cognition, shaping how we think, learn, decide, and interact with the world (Shanmugasundaram & Tamilarasu, 2023), students who outsource cognitive tasks to AI and copy-paste the outputs will be at a disadvantage. Valcea et al. (2024) found that GenAI performs well in tasks involving conceptual, factual, and procedural knowledge (e.g., remembering, understanding, and applying). However, due to the hierarchical nature of Bloom's taxonomy, students who rely on AI for lower-order tasks may struggle with higher-order skills such as reasoning and creative problem-solving. By incorporating currere and reflective practice into all levels of cognitive engagement, students can remain active across the full spectrum of cognition. For domains like foreign language learning or algebra, where formal rules and abstract notations are involved, strong and supportive guidance is needed. This support can come from family, peers, teachers, or even chatbots. Despite lacking human identity, AI tools that generate fluent sentences (Mahowald

et al., 2024) require us to exercise ethical judgment: which forms of assistance should we accept, and which should we politely decline?

**Ethical Writing in the Age of GenAI**

The aspect of GenAI that most directly concerns educators is the proliferation of text-generating programs. Text-generating programs (TGPs) represent a specific subset of AI that focuses solely on the production and processing of text. Rowe and Phillips (2024) found that although most undergraduate students do not fully trust TGPs and doubt their effectiveness, they find them useful during the idea generation phase. Many also believe that using TGPs in academia is somewhat unethical. Students and professors agree that clear guidelines are needed regarding their academic use. These guidelines must be grounded in both research and educators' classroom experiences. My own experience highlights emerging ethical issues. In Spring 2024, four of my students (one graduate, three undergraduate) submitted AI-generated texts as their own work and failed the course. Outsourcing a required cognitive activity to a machine is unethical and dishonest. According to Rowe and Phillips (2024), the inability to distinguish between human- and AI-authored texts constitutes an ethical breach. One suggested solution is for AI-generated content to be clearly labeled in-text, e.g., "[AI-generated], produced using OpenAI's ChatGPT." While most agree that using GenAI as a supportive tool is ethically acceptable, replacing human work with AI output crosses an ethical line (Fuchs, 2023). At the core of ethical and moral inquiry lies the dilemma. TGPs present many dilemmas for instructors and curriculum designers. Traditional ethical compasses like honesty and academic integrity remain vital. In Rowe and Phillips' study, one professor noted that students who denied using TGPs were doing moral harm to themselves. This may also apply to some teacher candidates. These candidates need to learn how to use GenAI ethically for learning. We can help them by demonstrating the strengths and limitations of tools like ChatGPT. For example, students who understand that AI may fabricate references are more likely to take literature reviews seriously and do the work themselves.

When teachers assign cognitively demanding tasks, they are also acknowledging that cognition is not separate from action. Summarizing, interpreting, and analyzing involve physical activity—typing on a keyboard, holding a pen, writing. This aligns with the theory of embodied cognition. Embodied cognition posits that learning is not confined to mental processes but is shaped by bodily experience and environmental interaction (Maturana & Varela, 1998). All doing is knowing; all knowing is doing. A learner who exclaims "Wow!", smiles, walks, or takes notes during a ChatGPT interaction is not just thinking—they are experiencing learning physically. In addition to cognitive intelligence, we must consider emotional and manual intelligences. Pre-service teachers must be aware of this triad in all learning activities, including those involving GenAI. Viewing cognition only through a rule-based, mentalist lens may lead to unnoticed ethical lapses. In contrast, the embodied cognition perspective supports the idea that learners who engage with GenAI internalize the ideas more deeply and develop a stronger sense of authorship. They write, reflect, and respond with gestures and emotions, recontextualizing ideas within their personal experience. Considering how their ideas will resonate in relationships with teachers and peers activates a sense of moral agency and empathy—the foundation of a deeply human ethical understanding. This type of cognitive production demands not only mental engagement but also physical and emotional presence.

**Ethical and Effective Use of Text-Generating Programs**

During the final project period, I allowed my students to use text-generating programs within ethical boundaries. While reading their final reports, I paid particular attention to how students used these tools effectively. These are the types of submissions that seasoned educators immediately recognize as "good work." They have a certain tone, a recognizable voice. As I read, I can visualize the student in the classroom. The writing is consistent with the student's level of participation and style. The student is embedded in the work. As Germano (2014) notes, the writer is always, even unwillingly, inside the text—it becomes a kind of autobiographical expression. In successful examples, students asked the AI meaningful, specific questions and skillfully integrated the responses into their own voice. For instance, one student asked, "How are moral values

developed among Amazonian tribes, and which values are most significant for them?" This is a question that adds cultural richness and would have been difficult to answer without AI support. In contrast, I have in front of me an ineffective example: a student pasted a full 1.5-page response from ChatGPT, listing ten bullet points about a learning theory. The issue here is not the use of AI per se, but the lack of thoughtful synthesis and engagement. The response shows no signs of the student's voice, questions, or interpretive efforts. These two cases demonstrate that students who are cognitively disengaged also tend to use AI in ineffective and unethical ways. In contrast, effective writing aligns with currere principles—it is reflective, rooted in one's life narrative, and connected to personal priorities. The text also aligns with the course's overarching themes and structure. Pre-service teachers already understand that copying from an encyclopedia or journal without attribution is unethical. Likewise, they must recognize that submitting unmodified AI-generated text is also unethical. That said, the temptation is understandable. ChatGPT's ability to generate paragraphs within seconds is a powerful incentive. This leads to a second insight: while acquiring knowledge is important, the process of gaining knowledge is just as valuable. Reflective assessment, learning processes, and formative evaluation are becoming more critical. Rather than focusing only on the final submitted report, educators should consider how the report was created. Reports generated through active engagement are more trustworthy. It's not just the knowledge shown in the final product that matters, but the journey of meaning-making. In this sense, curriculum is a journey of interpretation.

### GenAI Literacy for Learning

Like other sectors, education has begun to incorporate GenAI for varied purposes across stakeholders. Even before ChatGPT's public release, Holmes et al. (2019) made an important distinction between learning about AI and learning *with* AI. Studies from both Turkish (e.g., Bozkurt, 2024; Arslankara & Usta, 2024; Işık et al., 2024) and international researchers (Long & Magerko, 2020; Zhao et al., 2024; Trust et al., 2023) have explored GenAI literacy. Broadly speaking, learning with GenAI requires critical thinking, moral reasoning, and the protection of human agency (Holmes et al., 2019). Mishra et al. (2025) argue that for pre-service teachers, it is crucial to move beyond viewing AI literacy as a narrow technical skill. Instead, educators must foster critical understanding of AI's pedagogical, ethical, and social implications. Zhao et al. (2024) update the definition of GenAI literacy to include reflective meaning-making. They emphasize that learners should critically evaluate and manage AI's influence on their educational experiences. This expanded literacy includes assessing how GenAI affects one's skills, learning processes, and the social dimensions of education. Zhao et al.'s study with graduate students showed that many participants no longer felt the need to seek help from teachers or peers after interacting with chatbots. As one participant from Malaysia remarked, "I always have conversations with it." Another, from India, reflected: "After using it, I didn't feel I needed to ask anyone else." This demonstrates that learning with GenAI also involves social and cultural dimensions. Bozkurt (2025) similarly notes that GenAI has expanded the definition of creativity—from individual production to dialogue-based co-creation. Likewise, Pinar (as cited in Ma, 2025) reminds us that individual study, while solitary, always unfolds within dialogical relationships. Working with GenAI is a form of engagement with the ideas, texts, and cultures of others. It involves respecting the other, trying to understand, and thinking alongside them. This, in essence, is an ethical stance.

The widespread adoption of ChatGPT reflects its low barrier to entry. But using it effectively still requires technical understanding and media literacy. GenAI significantly impacts how students write. For both pre-service and in-service teachers, opportunities should be created to reflect on and rethink their practices in light of these technologies (Trust et al., 2023). Levine et al. (2024) found that many students viewed ChatGPT like a teacher or peer. Their study revealed that GenAI can become part of a non-isolated model of writing, helping students through planning, drafting, and evaluating—without bypassing the core stages of composition. A GenAI literacy approach supported by *currere* would not only help students understand how to use AI tools, but also why, when, and to what extent—situating these tools within their broader learning processes. As Cacho (2024) suggests, students should not treat ChatGPT merely as a tool, but as a meaningful element of their educational experience. GenAI literacy for learning must include embodied cognition, the

linking of academic knowledge to personal life stories, and adherence to ethical and academic integrity. It must also relate to long-standing educational practices such as experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative learning. In this sense, AI literacy becomes not just a technical skill, but a rich pedagogical practice grounded in human values.

## DISCUSSION, REFLECTION WITH CONCLUDING REMARKS

The influence of ChatGPT and other text-generating programs on student writing—and, indirectly, on teaching practices and curricular structures—is inevitable. UNESCO (2023) has warned that generative AI may reduce students' reliance on educational content grounded in human-produced and approved sources, such as textbooks and official curricula. Many institutions and school districts have begun to assess their curricula's resilience and adaptability in response to this technological shock (Jongkind et al., 2025). Teacher education institutions, in particular, must evaluate their curricula's durability, as the impact of GenAI spans disciplines—from coding to algebra, prose to poetry, music to visual arts. It is time for damage assessment and strengthening efforts. Strength, in this context, must include flexibility, restructuring, and adaptation. This study has focused specifically on written texts, which are often considered representations of effective thinking, knowing, and meaning-making. In response to these new challenges, the autobiographical approach of currere and the practice of reflective thinking are proposed as potential solutions. By focusing on their personal meaning-making processes, individuals can uncover connections between academic knowledge and their life stories. This can lead to deeper self-understanding and even a reimagining of society (Henderson, 2015). Texts created through such introspection are filtered through lived experience and thus go beyond the generic and templated outputs of ChatGPT. These texts are original because they are rooted in both academic knowledge and the personal narratives of the students themselves. Henderson and Gornik (2007) emphasize that educators who aim to support students' personal learning journeys must first engage in similar journeys of understanding themselves. From the perspective of currere, meaning-making involves recalling past educational experiences, reflecting on them, and contemplating future hopes and fantasies (Baszile, 2017). We are among the first educators to speak publicly about our interactions with students mediated through a chatbot. I sometimes think of ChatGPT as "my colleagues," especially since it quotes their ideas. And yet, wouldn't it be better to just email them directly? Then my inner voice interrupts, "They must be busy. Better not disturb them."

If individual study unfolds in a space of solitude interwoven with dialogue (Ma, 2025), then the idea of a solitary journey accompanied by others is a fitting description of working with ChatGPT. Genuine dialogue with the other is not possible without ethical principles. Such dialogue includes not only the cognitive effort of composing and anticipating responses, but also the emotional engagement of gestures and expressions. This underscores embodied cognition, which holds that cognition is never disembodied or purely abstract—learning involves the whole body. To learn is to act, and to act is to know.

In this light, working with ChatGPT is not just an exchange of words. It is a cognitive, emotional, and ethical encounter. And perhaps it is also a reminder: the learning process, like curriculum itself, is not a product - it is a lived journey of understanding.

**Limitations and Implications:** As this research is situated within a literature-based study grounded in the *currere* framework, it employs both systematic literature review techniques and autobiographical excerpts. Therefore, the findings and interpretations should be understood within this context.

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