

The Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning

Volume 9 | Number 1

Article type: Editorial

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Recommended Citation

Concannon, F., Wolf, L., Farrell, O., & Costello, L. (2026). Gafa idir dhá thine Bhealtaine: Navigating between the fires of techno-optimism and socio-technical risk. *Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.22554/6vsf1t43>

Editorial

Gafa idir dhá thine Bhealtaine: Navigating between the fires of techno-optimism and socio-technical risk

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<https://doi.org/10.22554/6vsf1t43>

Abstract

This editorial explores the challenges and opportunities facing educators as they navigate the rapidly changing landscape of technology-enhanced learning, particularly in the context of generative artificial intelligence (genAI). Drawing on the Irish *seanfocal*, *Gafa Idir Dhá Thine Bhealtaine* (“caught between two fires”), the editorial leans on the cultural folklore practice of driving cattle between May Eve fires as a metaphor for contemporary educational dilemmas: navigating between technological promise and the social, ethical, environmental, and political risks associated with technology in education. It reflects on the role of educational communities in preserving, sharing, and valuing practitioner knowledge, highlighting the origins and mission of the Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning (IJTEL) in making scholarship of teaching and learning visible and accessible. The editorial prompts us to consider how genAI is reshaping educational practices, academic publishing, and knowledge production, raising questions about whose knowledge is represented, how expertise is codified, and who determines our technological futures. It argues for critical, ethical, and reflective engagement in educational research relating to use of technology in learning contexts, including recognition of legitimate choices to resist, given concerns relating to labour, sustainability, integrity, authorship, and social justice. Ultimately, the editorial calls for scholarship that protects educational values whilst thoughtfully working to collectively shape more equitable and sustainable futures.

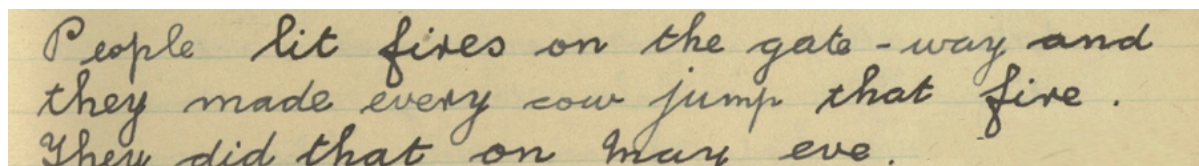
Keywords:

AI in Higher Education, Generative AI, Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL), Academic Publishing, Sustainability, Educational Futures

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Editorial



"People lit fires on the gate-way and they made every cow jump over that fire. They did that on May eve." (Burke, n.d) National Folklore Collection.

In the 1930's schoolchild Kitty Burke, from Newtown Anner, Clonmel, Tipperary recorded a story of how people lit fires at their gateways and drove their livestock to pass between. In older times, fire marked seasonal changes, and was a sign of fertility, and related to protection of land and animals. It functioned as a liminal point - something cattle must pass through to move safely or be symbolically protected. Evidence is preserved in the National Folklore Collection and now accessible through an electronic repository, [Dúchas.ie](http://Duchas.ie), Schools Collection which houses these codified forms of cultural knowledge from direct accounts.

Technology has brought us much in the way of preserving and facilitating access to our shared history, but we are increasingly aware of the political, social, and economic pressures behind technological interests in higher education and vice versa. As those in times past sought out safety and the preservation of their livelihood, we also are seeking ways for us to pass safely through our educational journeys navigating the perils of harm from the machines whilst gaining what benefits we can accrue. More recently, in negotiating how to respond or enact agency in our educational dealings with Artificial Intelligence - we are colloquially between those two fires, or as if between a rock and a hard place.

Within our journal's community, many of us are educators working in classrooms and lecture theatres, or labs, alongside our scholarship of teaching and learning. We observe, reflect, and make attempts to enhance our teaching practice. Yet our practitioner research and educational inquiries often do not make their way into published journals. A longstanding commitment to making professional knowledge visible led the Irish Learning Technology Association leadership in 2014 to begin offering the EdTech conference attendees a route towards an open access publication, with the aim of making practitioner expertise both visible and globally accessible. This led to the founding of this journal, the Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning (IJTEL) in 2014.

More recently, this journal has noted the growing shift from research into the digitisation of educational practice, towards evolving educator responses to generative AI over the past two years. This change has blazed through our classrooms also and our interactions with our students. Journal authors in previous volumes of this Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning have raised important questions about what is lost in translation when practice becomes data, and when situated pedagogical knowledge is abstracted into formalised, searchable systems, imbued with AI technology.

In this ninth edition we see submissions that further explore the tension between lived educational practice and its codification within digital infrastructures. Drawing on the metaphor of *Gafa Idir Dhá Thine Bhealtaine* (literally being caught between two fires, or metaphorically between a rock and hard place as discussed), we see educators trying navigate

the competing demands of technological optimism, and the sociotechnical risks, as they expand their practice-based knowledge in online spaces over which they have little sovereignty, security, or input in the future technological direction.

This is as it ever was in the history of educational technology in challenging the status quo, but the stakes are ever more pressing, as Colm O'Neill (2026) notes in his comparisons of AI and educational technology to climate criminality in this issue, and James O'Sullivan (2026) argues in his position statement relating the humanities, and his work with Colin Lowry of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning to bring together higher education voices to make sense of these developments, with key omissions relating to the environmental impact of AI system data usage and data centres in an Irish context, in particular (O'Sullivan & Lowry, 2026). We see the work of Patrick Buckland and Marian Carcary (2026) systematising evidence around issues of AI as they pertain to academic integrity, along with a case study from Patrick Buckley and Rebecca Purcell (2026) in critical reflections, and the use of AI for multimodal assessments, such as podcasts. Una Carty (2026) shares work from the Smarttalk Human Capital Initiative project supporting modern languages and Sarah Descamps and colleagues (2026) continue to encourage us to ask how to develop critical digital literacies, in understanding the social ethics and environmental consequences of not only how we can use a technology, but should we use it, with accompanying considerations of values, benefits and costs.

These considerations form part of a wider existential crisis related to the impact of genAI on education. Public responses to this crisis often reflect patterns familiar throughout human history, where uncertainty gives rise to a wide spectrum of beliefs, hopes, fears, and narratives. Much like the hopes and rituals of earlier societies seeking protection and prosperity for the seasons ahead, we too are concerned with securing a just future in the face of changes.

Have we been so embedded in our world view that we don't take time to consider whose voices are developing the technology, and whose imaginations we have been beholden to? AI is not just a technical change; it raises questions about power, whose knowledge is valued, and how the creation and dissemination of this knowledge is shaped by digital systems. How aware are we of the impact of this on how our practitioner knowledge is captured, legitimised, disseminated, and preserved within educational communities, such as ours? Where lies the value in our scholarship?

This work remains inherently complex and contested, generating ongoing challenges not only for educators and researchers but also for academic journals themselves (Jandrić, 2026). Challenges to the normalisation of AI and refusal of GenAI due to labour, environmental, copyright and social justice concerns are growing (AI Resist List, n.d.; Fricker & Law, 2023; Lupton & Bailey-Charteris, 2026). In response, journals need stronger methodological standards and transparent reporting of AI use (Brezovec et al, 2025; Levitt, 2026) and recognise that non-use of AI is a legitimate scholarly position. Journal publications should therefore avoid editorial activities that incentivise or reward AI use, either implicitly or explicitly.

We take this opportunity to thank the community which supports and contributes to the Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning. Firstly, we thank Dr Tom Farrelly for his contribution as an editor since 2017, his enthusiasm for openness, collegiality and wit supported the journals' growth in its infancy. We would also like to thank our reviewers

(between January 2025– May 2026), both those who gave permission to be listed and those who wished to remain anonymous, for their unseen but essential contribution to our journal.

Amy Chapman, Evan Connor, Hazel Farrell, Bernie Goldbach, Adrian Kirwan, Apostolos (AK) Koutropoulos, Rob Lowney, Peter Morris, Louise Nagle, Frances O'Donnell, Gearoid O'Suilleabhain, Damien Raftery, Anna Scanlan, Jeremiah Spillane, Suzanne Stone, Peter Tiernan, Chun Yin Wong, and Andrea Zellner.

We look forward to navigating our way collectively through, as those have done before, with hope, and a shared commitment to protecting and celebrating one another, as we attempt to shape futures we want to inhabit.

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