

The Human Factor of AI Implementation Conference

Opening Words

November 8, 2024

Good Morning. It is an immense privilege to be here with you.

I would like to open with a reference to the words of one of our conference participants, Maria Santacaterina.

“You can’t compute human emotions. You can’t compute human intelligence, let alone human potential.”

What a powerful reminder of why we are gathered here today. While technology is evolving at an extraordinary speed, the essence of what makes us human, our capacity to feel, to connect, to imagine, and to care, cannot be replicated by an algorithm.

At the International School of Zug and Luzern (ISZL), this truth lies at the very heart of our work.

First, a little about our school: ISZL was founded in 1961 to serve the communities of Canton Zug, Luzern and other surrounding cantons. We are a not-for-profit and do not have an owner. Our enrolment is about 1,200 students, representing over 60 nationalities.

Our mission guides us each day:

We are a community of learners determined to make the world, or our corner of it, a better, kinder place. We reflect our values in everything we do so that we make the most of the opportunities and challenges in a spirit of enthusiastic inquiry.

And our vision extends the mission:

We help every student turn their learning into action, creating the opportunity to stretch themselves further and achieve more than we believe possible.

At ISZL, we see this lived every day, in classrooms filled with conversation, in students solving real-world problems, and in the shared belief that education should cultivate not only knowledge, but also kindness, empathy, and purpose.

This is the foundation upon which our engagement with AI must rest: technology serving humanity, never the other way around.

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Dr. Michael Gerlich and the SBS Swiss Business School for bringing together such an extraordinary community of thinkers and practitioners.

The conversations over the next two days invite us not only to ask what AI can do, but what it should do, and how we ensure that it strengthens the human spirit at the centre of learning, leadership, and life.

I need to confess that I am not an AI expert, but I am doing my best to learn as much as I can as quickly as I can.

My background is in human development with more than thirty years in education and leadership across several countries in different corners of the world, working with young people and teachers to nurture growth, curiosity, and well-being.

So, this morning, I speak as an educator and someone deeply concerned with how AI shapes children's development and the kind of world they will inherit.

Before we go further, I want to recognise those who remind us why this work matters most, our students.

Would the students from SBS Swiss Business School, students from visiting schools, and our own ISZL students please stand for a moment?

You are our future.

You will inherit our work, our decisions, our values.

For us adults, it is our curiosity, our creativity, and our courage that will determine what this next chapter of human-machine partnership becomes.

We are honoured you are here, and my thanks as well to ISZL teacher, Bob Sugden, for preparing and supporting your participation. Please feel free to connect with Bob and our students to learn more about the work of our school and students.

What do we see in our classrooms? At ISZL, we already see how AI is transforming learning. Students use it to brainstorm ideas, visualise complex systems, and explore new perspectives. However, we also see the tensions it brings:

1. How do we ensure curiosity is not replaced by convenience?
2. How do we protect attention and well-being in a world of endless input?
3. How do we help students stay grounded in empathy and integrity amid technological change?

These are not theoretical questions. They are lived each day in our classrooms.

Shifting to the focus of this conference, the Human Factor of Learning, I would like to reference Dr Gerlich's research that reminds us,

"Over reliance on these [AI] tools can lead to cognitive offloading, reducing engagement in deep, reflective thinking."

AI can be an extraordinary accelerator of learning, but it cannot think, feel, or imagine for us.

Our mission at ISZL reminds us that *we are a community of learners*, not just users of technology. Our responsibility is to ensure that AI extends, rather than erodes, our humanity.

The remainder of this speech quotes several thinkers and researchers in AI. Please note that everyone referenced is a speaker at this conference.

As Patricia Ferreiro writes, *“The values adopted to build today’s AI systems will be reflected in the decisions those systems make for us and about us.”*

Education, therefore, remains a profoundly human act, rooted in relationships, empathy, and ethical reflection.

Dr Gerlich also warns that when students *“ask AI before they ask themselves, they risk losing the habits of discernment and curiosity.”*

Our mission calls us to *enthusiastic inquiry*, to keep asking *why, how, and what if*. AI should be a thinking partner, not a thinking substitute.

As Trey Bannerman observes, *“The future I envision is ‘human plus machine’, where AI handles the computational heavy lifting while humans focus on insight, empathy, and innovation”.*

And, as Tom Hoy adds, *“In a world where there’s no single correct outcome, the value of human insight lies not in being right but in being thoughtful, nuanced, and aware of trade-offs.”*

That, ultimately, is the work of education: cultivating discernment, humility, critical thinking, and imagination in a world that too often rewards speed over substance.

To make the world “a better, kinder place,” we must preserve the qualities that connect us: empathy, patience, and authentic relationships.

At school, we see that when technology fosters collaboration, it strengthens community; when it isolates, it undermines belonging.

This is where ISZL’s future-focused school pillar becomes real.

Innovation is not about adopting every new tool. It is about ensuring that technology serves human purpose.

As Una Wang reminds us, *“From Generative AI to Agentic AI, the next evolution of intelligence is not just about smarter machines, but smarter, most inclusive humans.”*

This leads to the navigation of three tensions. As educators, parents, and leaders, we must hold three tensions in balance:

Promise vs Proof: AI's potential is vast, but genuine learning gains depend on pedagogy and reflection.

Efficiency vs Humanity: Automate the routine so we can reinvest in relationships, dialogue, critical thinking, and creativity.

Access vs Safety: Broaden opportunities while protecting children's and adult's privacy, rights, and well-being.

As Wikitoria Gromowa-Cieslik cautions, *"Free AI is never truly free, users pay with their data, cognitive autonomy, and cultural identity."*

Returning to the theme of this conference and reaffirming the human factor, across all our discussions today, from creative expression to global governance, one message endures:

AI's story is not merely technological, it is profoundly human. It is about belonging, balance, and the ethical use of knowledge.

As Tom Hoy reminds us, *"When AI handles the routine and the obvious, humans are freed to do the unpredictable, relational-rich work that machines cannot replicate."*

At ISZL, we believe that AI should amplify our mission, not erode it. It should help us become more reflective, more connected, and more compassionate, the very qualities that define what it means to make our corner of the world, a better, kinder place.

Closing Thanks:

I would like to extend heartfelt thank you to those who made today possible.

- Daniel Osei-Poku, for leading the event set-up with care and precision.
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- Jessie Shannon, for all of her behind the scenes work leading up to the event, her leadership in coordinating the team, and her impressive attention to details to ensure the success of this event.

Your dedication behind the scenes reflects the same collaboration and care that this conference celebrates.

Thank you for all being here. Welcome again to ISZL. It is my absolute privilege and honour to welcome you to our campus and community, and this unique opportunity to learn together with a view to ensuring our children inherit a world we are proud of.

I wish you a meaningful and inspiring two days of learning together. Thank you.