

Relational Feedback as a Tool for Learning, Connection, and Well-Being

Peter Felten Center for Engaged Learning Elon University




Transformational Teaching &
Learning Conference



1. Introduce yourself to someone
2. In ~3 minutes, share a story about an experience you've had with feedback – then the other person shares a story...
 - a. When, who, where, what, why?
 - b. *Listen generously*
3. What insights about feedback emerge from your stories?





Grading \neq feedback

“Our principal task is educating all students, not ranking them.”

(Blum, 2020, p. 5)



1. Defining our terms 2. Yeah, but... 3. Relational feedback practices

Feedback literacy

(Carless & Boud, 2018)



“Feedback is a
dynamic and co-
constructive
interaction in the
context of a safe and
mutually respectful
relationship for the
purpose of challenging
a learner’s (and
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(Ajjawi and Regehr 2019, p. 653)



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Feedback literacy means students:

1. Value feedback;
2. Understand their active role in feedback processes;
3. Make judgments about quality of their own work;
4. Manage their affective responses to feedback.

(Zhou, Dawson, Tai, & Bearman, 2021)

We need to help students develop their feedback literacy.
We need to frame feedback as a relational process.
We need to be trustworthy.





Trust in the college classroom is...

“students’ willingness to take risks based on their judgment that the teacher is committed to their success.”

(Chew & Cerbin, 2021, p. 23)



Trust in the college classroom is *not*...

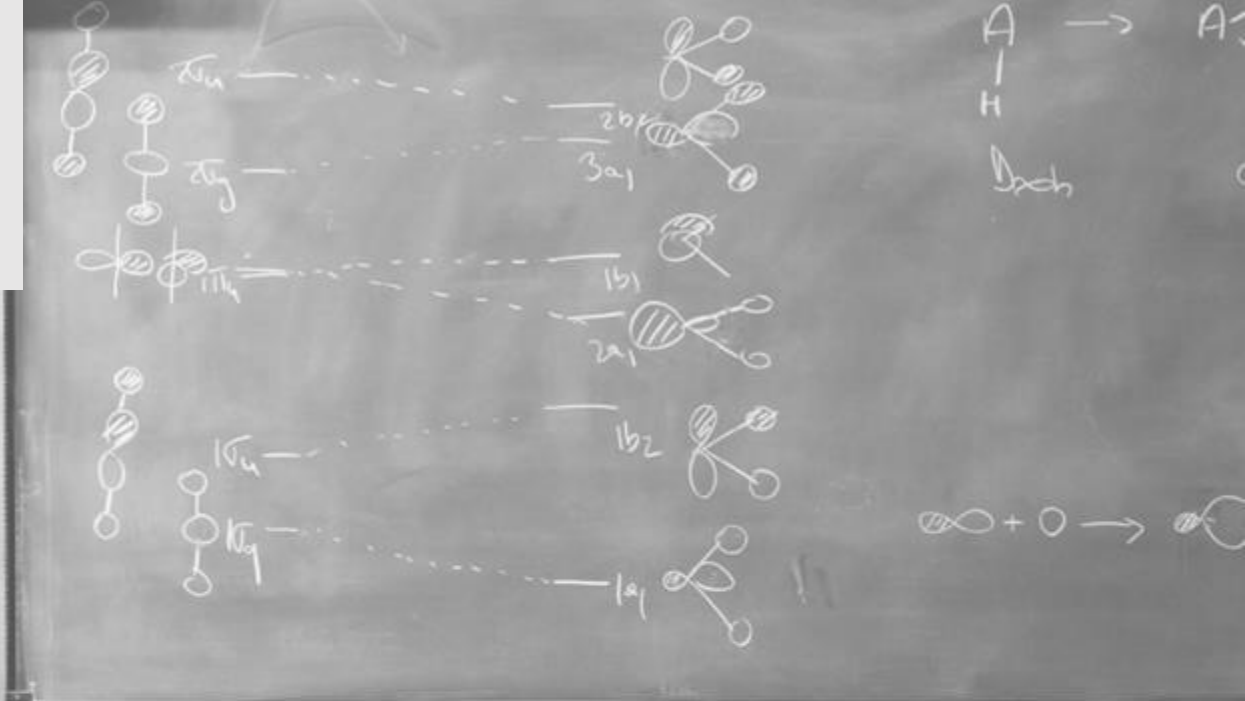
evenly distributed – *significant* variations of student trust in faculty and the institution by race, first-gen status, and family income.

(Fosnacht & Calderone, 2020)

necessarily high *among* students – which can profoundly shape academic behaviors.

(Eddy et al., 2017)

Students who trust professors and peers are more likely to take intellectual risks and to thrive in college.




In general, a molecule adopts the structure that best stabilizes HOMO

We can build trust with and among students through relational teaching, assessment, and feedback processes.

(Felten et al., 2023; Sutherland et al., 2024)



- 
1. What works to build trust with/among your students?
 2. How “feedback literate” are your students? ...*are you?*
 3. What can you do to build trust and feedback literacy?

1. Value feedback
2. Understand their active role in feedback processes
3. Make judgments about quality of their own work
4. Manage their affective responses to feedback

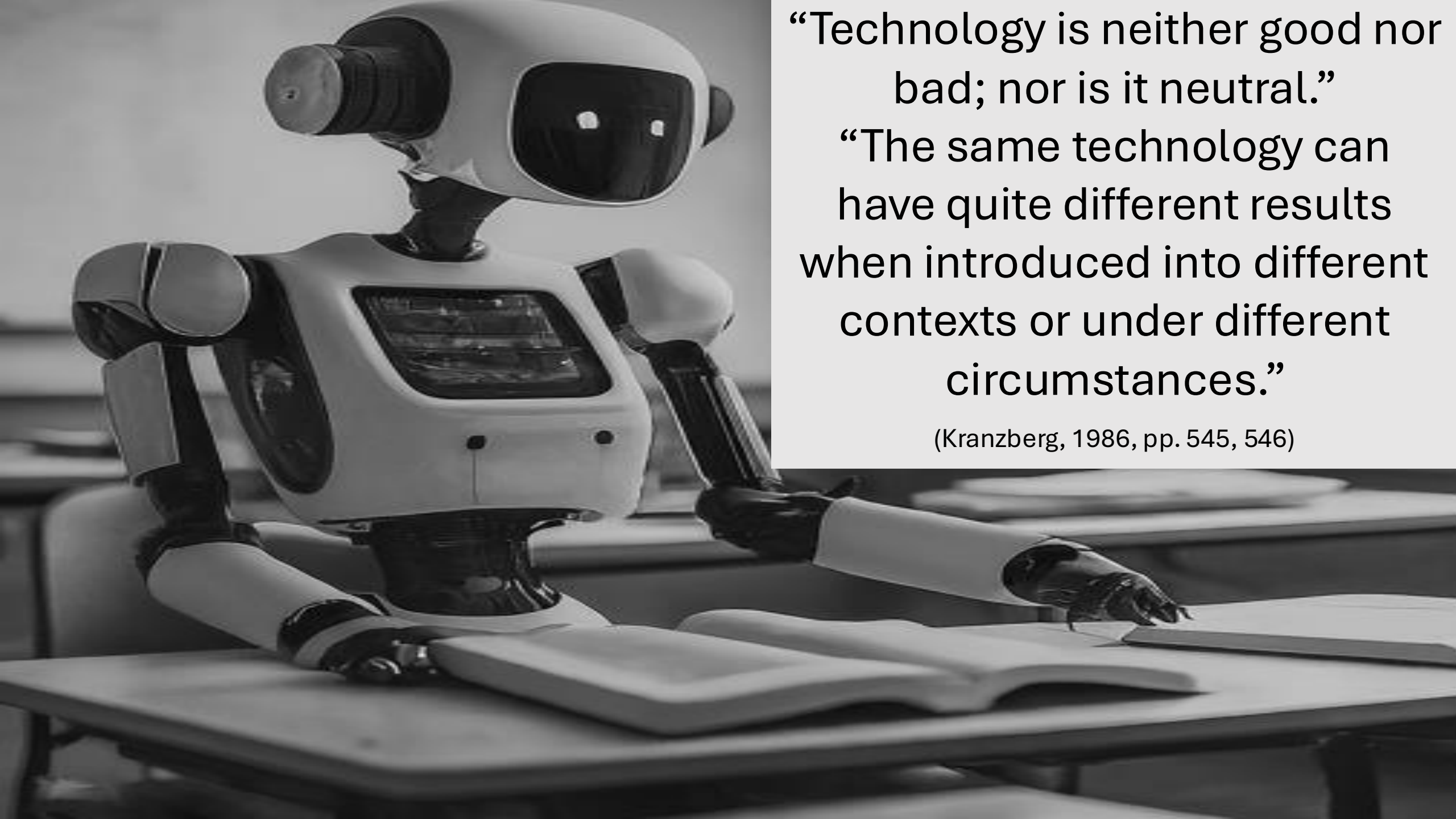


1. Defining our terms 2. **Yeah, but...** 3. Relational feedback practices





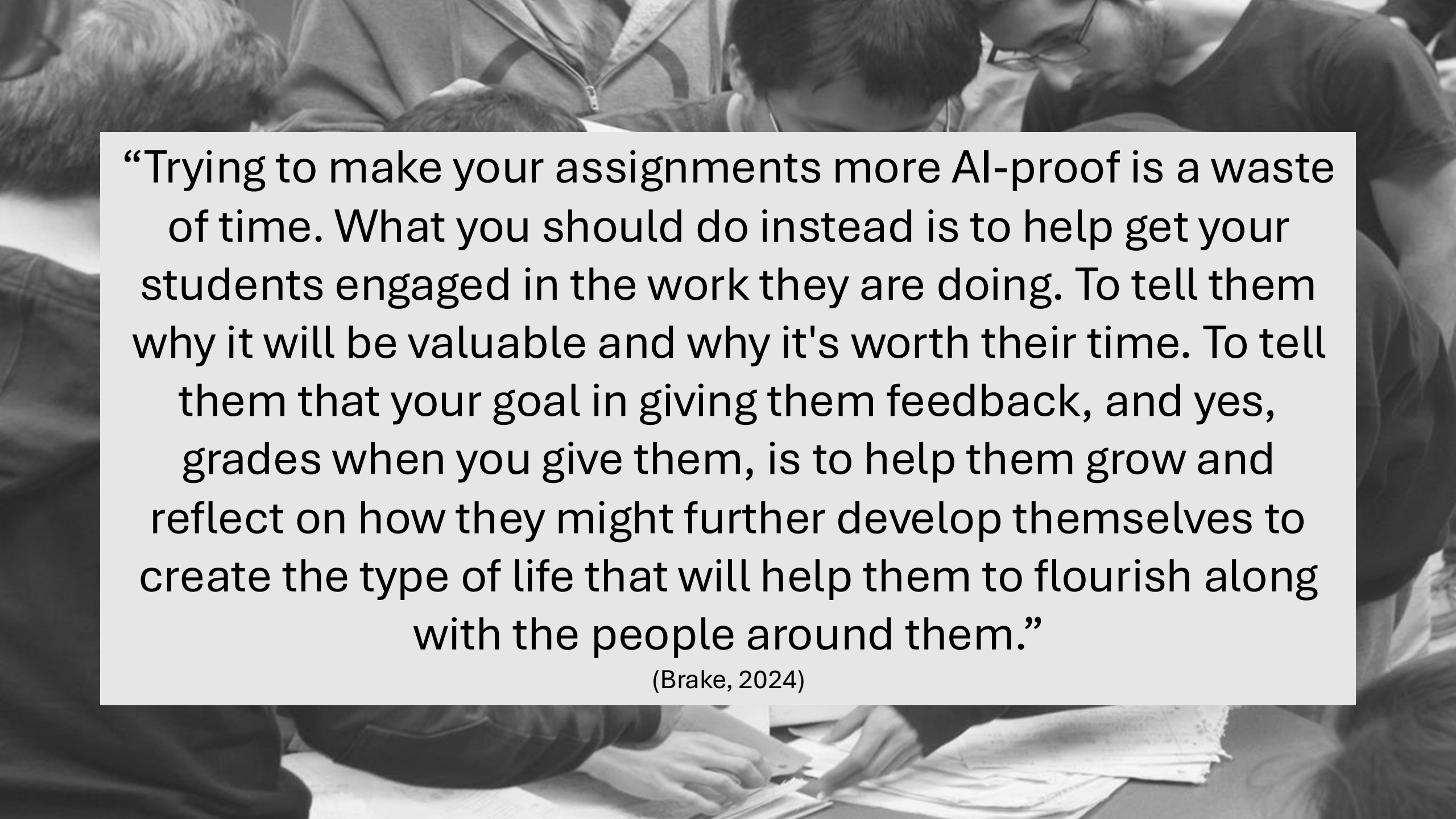




“Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.”

“The same technology can have quite different results when introduced into different contexts or under different circumstances.”

(Kranzberg, 1986, pp. 545, 546)

A black and white photograph of students in a classroom setting. In the foreground, a student's hands are visible, writing on a piece of paper. In the background, several other students are gathered around a table, looking at papers and talking. The image is slightly out of focus, emphasizing the text overlay.

“Trying to make your assignments more AI-proof is a waste of time. What you should do instead is to help get your students engaged in the work they are doing. To tell them why it will be valuable and why it's worth their time. To tell them that your goal in giving them feedback, and yes, grades when you give them, is to help them grow and reflect on how they might further develop themselves to create the type of life that will help them to flourish along with the people around them.”

(Brake, 2024)



(Sutherland et al., 2024, p. 8)





What are barriers to relational feedback in your teaching context?
What ideas (and questions) do you have about addressing those barriers?



1. Defining our terms 2. Yeah, but... 3. **Relational feedback practices**



our
feedback

peer
feedback

In our relational feedback, we should convey:

1. High academic standards and expectations;
2. Belief in the student's capacity to meet those standards, even if their work does not do so right now;
3. Specific guidance about how to improve;
4. Availability of resources to support the student's improvement.

(Cole, 2008)



Make feedback a routine and validating part of your course

“By conveying beliefs in students’ abilities to succeed in the course and in college more generally, instructors have an important way to directly and indirectly contribute to college success: directly through the intended transfer of content knowledge and/or skills and indirectly through boosting students’ sense of self-efficacy.”

(Carrell, Kurlaender, & Bhatt, 2020; see also Brown et al, 2022)



The background of the image is a grayscale photograph of a desk. It features two laptops, one in the foreground and one slightly behind it to the right. There are also some papers and a pen scattered on the desk surface. The overall tone is professional and academic.

Dear XXX, [student earning a C so far]

As we approach mid-term, I'm writing to give you some quick feedback.

For the past couple of weeks, you've consistently completed your weekly problem sets. Those are good practice for the exams, and your improvement on the second exam shows that this weekly work helps you learn. Keep it up!

I encourage you also to take advantage of the practice quizzes to be even more prepared and successful in the rest of the term.

If you have questions or would like to chat, stop by my office hours [details].

You're making progress. I am confident you will succeed in this class –

Create opportunities for relational peer feedback

“Giver’s Gain”

“giving helpful feedback is a way to practice something students must do themselves to be successful: revise their own work”

(Hart-Davidson & Meeks, 2020, p. 79)



also builds
feedback literacy!



GRADING RUBRIC FOR SHORT ESSAY (20 points)

	Poor	Under-developed	Good	Excellent
Thesis	No thesis (0)	Unclear or not relevant (1-2)	Clear and relevant (3-4)	Clear, relevant, and insightful (5)
Analysis and writing	Not coherent, many writing errors (0)	Rarely supports thesis; frequent writing errors, or unclear (1-2)	Clearly organized and written, and mostly logical (3-4)	Clear, consistent writing and analysis (5)
Evidence	Lacking, irrelevant, or wrong (0)	Some, but not correct or not linked to thesis (1-2)	Appropriate and correct, but not the most relevant (3-4)	Consistently cites the most relevant, correctly (5)
Context and significance	Not addressed (0)	Inappropriate or incorrect (1-2)	Appropriate but narrow (3-4)	Appropriate, broad, advances thesis (5)



(Bernstein & Greenhoot, 2014)

Peer example 1: Small group essay evaluation



Peer example 2: Collaborative testing

“Analyses revealed that with the exception of upper performers, students performed better overall on the collaborative tests.

Additionally, regardless of their academic abilities, students performed better on the higher order thinking questions under collaborative conditions.

This improvement was equal across different academic abilities, suggesting that collaborative testing promotes higher order thinking even when taking into account previous academic abilities.”

(Mahoney & Harris-Reeves, 2019, p. 25)


Peer example #3: Informal online study groups

Online “study lounge” paired with student-set goals for average exam scores

(Manda Williamson, University of Nebraska, in Felten & Lambert, 2020)



What's one thing you will do to make **your feedback** more relational?
What's one thing you will do to support relational **peer feedback**?

- 
1. Value feedback
 2. Understand their active role in feedback processes
 3. Make judgments about quality of their own work
 4. Manage their affective responses to feedback

“Learning and talking together, we break the notion that our experience of gaining knowledge is private, individualistic, and competitive. By choosing and fostering dialogue, we engage mutually in a learning partnership.”

(hooks, 2009, p. 43)



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