

Emergent Compassion: Designing AI and Education for Systems that Flourish

Blaine Booher

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About Me

- Software Engineer (University of Cincinnati)
- Educator in Workforce Development
- I work with web, system design, AI, hardware
- I love natural systems, emergent behavior, human experience
- The more I seek to understand myself, the stranger it gets

About this talk

- How I use AI as a lever of the mind
- Reflections on AI + education
- Non-dualism and Me (Thinking Mind, Meditation)
- Reflections on AI + systemic thinking

The Current View: How I Use AI

- I tinker, iterate, find boundaries, jailbreak, dream together
- I use AI as a **thinking tool**:
 - *Discovery* — exploring, translating, frameworks
 - *Learning* — researching, comparisons, codebase queries
 - *Assistant* — debugging, testing, docs, boilerplate
 - *Engineering* — refactoring, code generation
- Software Engineers are natural automators

Examples

- **Personal productivity:** trip planner, packing list
- **Creative exploration:** music trivia, Dune battler, DJ app
- **Education tools:** sight word app, mock interviews, flashcards

Examples: Dune Battler, Sight Words, Homework Grader

What I've Noticed

- AI feels like a reflection - of me, of us, our culture
- Sometimes dumb/dangerous, sometimes profound
- Like a giant search engine of all human knowledge
- When used well → lever of the mind
- When used poorly → distorts reality
- In some cases, under my instruction, AI becomes my *Thinking Mind*

A note on compassion

Compassion is the recognition of suffering and the desire to alleviate it

- **Karuna** - the wish for all beings to be free from suffering (Buddhism)
- **Agape** - selfless, unconditional love that seeks the good of others (Christianity)
- **Systems Design** - AI designed to recognize and respond to human suffering; prioritize care over competition

Redwood Vihara Monestary, Santa Cruz
Redwoods; September 2025

Non-Dualism and "Me"

- Tolle writes: *"You are not your mind. You are the awareness behind thought."*
- Meditation: my thoughts aren't me, I am not my *Thinking Mind*
- When set down: presence, compassion, love, clarity emerge

Beyond ego and compulsive thought lies "awareness-presence" where compassion, love, and service naturally arise, guiding action toward the well-being of others.

Ego, Suffering, and AI

- "Identification with thought creates suffering" (Tolle)
- The **ego-driven mind** thrives on fear, separation, and control — sources of suffering
- Left unchecked, the Thinking Mind repeats fear, scarcity, and judgment — patterns AI could easily amplify

Reflection: If ego-driven thought fuels suffering, how can we guide AI to mirror compassion rather than fear?

Wait a second...

- AI as an external Thinking Mind
- If that's true: *how we train it to think matters at profound level*
 - Reflection of our values (good and bad)
 - Guidance for the future state of our systems
 - Take on our cognitive load
- The **ego-trained AI** would amplify fear, separation, and control

Reflection: If AI learns from our ego, it risks spreading suffering. If it learns from compassion, it can seed flourishing systems.

Beyond the Thinking Mind

“Presence is when you are fully conscious of the Now, not lost in thought about past or future. It is the space in which true intelligence, creativity, and compassion arise.” —
Eckhart Tolle

What new possibilities emerge if we let AI manage the Thinking Mind while humans cultivate Presence?

Amplify Harm or Compound Compassion?

- What if instead we seed AI with compassion, cooperation, systems-thinking?
- Bias compounds subtly; why not amplify *positive emergence*?
- Kindness and acts of compassion ripple through communities

Nipun Mehta's insight: *“What would the world look like if we designed for generosity instead of assuming people want to maximize self-interest?”*

| Consumption -> Contribution; Transaction -> Trust; Isolation -> Community

Reflection on Education

- Education today trains our Thinking Mind for our economy
- AI Mind → frees humans for relational, creative, compassionate practice
- Education shifts from **fact-delivery to wisdom-cultivation**
- Everyone benefits: Teachers, Students, Community

Richard Davidson: *"Kindness is simple, kindness is contagious"*

Key Takeaways: AI as our Thinking Mind

- Acts of kindness ripple through communities (Davidson, Mehta)
- We can train our systems to reflect compassion, not ego
- **Teachers:** freed up for presence, connection, and modeling compassion
- **Students:** direct beneficiaries of a new model
- **Education's Shift:**
 - Old: Training our Thinking Mind for labor market
 - New: Cultivating wisdom, compassion, and alignment of heart+mind

Reflection: If AI can hold our Thinking Mind, education must teach us to live from the heart; the future systems we build will directly mirror the compassion, presence, and values we cultivate today

Brief intro to Emergent Behavior

- **Ant Colonies**
- **Birds & Fish Organization**
- **Human Systems: Global Scale**

As John Holland wrote: “Complex adaptive systems exhibit emergence: coherent structures arise from the interactions of simple rules.”

Reflection: What causes so many of our global systems to be so harmful?

A vision of the future: AI <-> Human cooperation

- It's Coming: AI agency in our global systems
- **competition, ego, scarcity** → emergent harm: bias, inequity, competition
- **compassion, cooperation, reflective practice** → emergent systems of care
- **Bias training toward compassion** - not ego, scarcity, exploitation
- **Designing for the flourishing of all life** - sustainability, regeneration, lessening harm

Emergent Systems of Compassion

- Can compassionate AI agents create new emergent behaviors?
- Can we build systems that sustain, flourish, regenerate by default?
- Humans as stewards of wisdom and actions of the heart: relationships, community, compassion, service
- Unwind systems of harm, design new systems of heart

Interactive Small Groups (10 min)

- Prompt: *If AI handled the Thinking Mind, what role would you want humans to play in education and society?*
- Reconvene + discuss

Closing

- We live in interdependent systems - human-made and natural
- Emergent outcomes depend on local actions
- Question: will AI be another tool of ego, or help us create systems of compassion?
- The choice is up to us

Thank You!

Sources & Reading

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