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AI and Teacher Workload

Efficiency or Erosion?

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Opening Reflection

Teaching is a vocation of heart and hands. It demands planning, marking, mentoring and endless adaptation. In South Africa, where class sizes are large and resources are stretched, Artificial Intelligence promises relief. Automated marking, lesson planning and admin support could lighten the load. But what do we lose when machines take over the human rhythms of teaching?

What's Happening Now

- Educators in Gauteng are using AI tools to generate lesson plans and worksheets, especially in maths and science.
- Marking platforms with AI feedback are being piloted in private schools, reducing turnaround time.
- Some schools are exploring AI chatbots for parent communication and timetable queries.
- Concerns are emerging about deskilling, data privacy and the erosion of teacher judgement.

What's Changed: From Manual Labour to Machine Support

Before AI:

Teachers spent hours on admin, planning and marking, often after hours.

Now:

AI can automate routine tasks, freeing time for relational and strategic work.

Key Shift:

From reactive overload to proactive support. From burnout to balance, if used wisely.

Why It Matters

Teacher wellbeing is central to learner success. AI can help, but only if it is deployed with care. South African schools must ensure that AI supports, not supplants, the professional wisdom of educators. Teaching is not just a task; it is a relationship.

Reflective Responses

How can AI reduce workload without reducing professionalism?

By automating routine tasks while preserving teacher autonomy and judgement.

What risks must be managed?

Over-reliance, loss of pedagogical skill, and ethical concerns around data use.

What does meaningful human presence look like in an AI-supported classroom?

It means relational teaching, emotional attunement and contextual wisdom. It means educators guiding learning with empathy, not just efficiency.

What support do schools need?

- Clear guidelines on AI use in planning and marking
- Training in AI literacy for educators
- Tools that align with CAPS and local curriculum needs
- Wellbeing frameworks that include digital workload balance

Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

Insights from Gauteng pilot schools (2025):

- AI reduced marking time by up to 40 percent
- Teachers reported mixed feelings, gratitude and concern
- Calls for national policy on AI in teacher workload

“Efficiency must never come at the cost of empathy.” – <i>Sipho Dlamini, Principal in Soweto</i>
