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AI And Encounter-Based Learning In Humanities Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper examines how large language models (LLMs) can be used to design encounter-based learning experiences in humanities pedagogy, particularly in online instructional environments. Drawing on classroom-based case studies from undergraduate humanities courses at Loyola University Chicago and DeVry University, the paper argues that carefully constrained AI tools can function as pedagogical mediators that stage powerful encounters with historical ideas, figures, and environments, rather than serving as shortcuts for content delivery or cognitive labor. The paper situates these practices within established research on active learning and experiential pedagogy, emphasizing how AI-facilitated encounters can support inquiry, critical reflection, and historical thinking when embedded within instructor-guided lesson structures. Two primary instructional models are examined. The first involves AI-mediated Socratic dialogue, in which students engage in structured conversations with historically grounded perspectives to interrogate assumptions and test reasoning. The second uses AI-generated visual reconstructions of lost or speculative historical environments to prompt comparative analysis, historiographical critique, and evidence-based debate. Across both models, AI is framed not as an interpretive tool whose outputs are provisional and open to challenge. Classroom discussion, contextual grounding, and instructor facilitation remain central to the learning process. By reframing AI as a means of staging encounters with history rather than automating answers, the paper contributes a practical, ethically grounded framework for integrating AI into humanities pedagogy in ways that deepen engagement, preserve disciplinary values, and align with evidence-based instructional design.

Keywords: Active Learning; Ai; Experiential Learning; Humanities Pedagogy; Historical Thinking