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## Collective Intelligence through Multimodal Pedagogy: Lessons from Human-GenAI Co-Creation in Open and Distance Education

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**Collective Intelligence through Multimodal Pedagogy:  
Lessons from Human–GenAI Co-Creation in Open and Distance Education**

**Συλλογική Νοημοσύνη μέσω Πολυτροπικής Παιδαγωγικής:  
Μαθήματα από τη Συν-δημιουργία Ανθρώπου–Γενετικής Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης  
στην Ανοικτή και εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση**

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**Abstract**

The arrival of Generative AI (GenAI) has sparked intense debates in Higher Education, particularly within open and distance learning (ODL), where digital mediation shapes how students and educators engage with knowledge. Much of this debate remains focused on regulation or instrumental use, leaving less space for creative, multimodal, and collaborative approaches that position GenAI as a learning partner. This paper draws on *People, Places and Pasta or Uncreative Explorations as Collective Intelligence* (Nerantzi et al., 2025), a project developed during and after the EDEN 2025 conference. The project wove together scholars' notes and reflections into four creative outputs: a pedagogical recipe, a Socratic dialogue, a collective poem, and a mosaic of visual metaphors. Each functions as a pedagogical instrument that opens new pathways for integrating GenAI into ODL in inventive ways. These creative, critical, and multimodal processes are especially relevant in distributed, asynchronous environments that demand autonomy, collaboration, and multimodal fluency. We argue that these approaches can foster critical GenAI literacy, creative and critical

expression, and student agency. They invite educators to embrace human–GenAI co-creation not as a substitution, but as a catalyst for thoughtful, critical, and collective intelligence for their own professional development and their students.

### **Keywords**

generative artificial intelligence, open and distance learning, pedagogical tools, collective intelligence, multimodality, critical genai literacy

### **Περίληψη**

Η εμφάνιση της Παραγωγικής Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης (ΠΤΝ) έχει προκαλέσει έντονες συζητήσεις στην ανώτατη εκπαίδευση, ιδιαίτερα στην Ανοικτή και εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση (ΑεξΑΕ), όπου η ψηφιακή μεσολάβηση καθορίζει τον τρόπο που οι φοιτητές και οι διδάσκοντες αλληλεπιδρούν με τη γνώση. Το μεγαλύτερο μέρος των συζητήσεων όμως παραμένει επικεντρωμένο στις θεσμικές ρυθμίσεις ή την εργαλειακή αξιοποίηση, αφήνοντας περιορισμένο χώρο για δημιουργικές, πολυτροπικές και συνεργατικές προσεγγίσεις που αποδίδουν στην ΠΤΝ συνεργατικό ρόλο στη μάθηση. Η παρούσα μελέτη βασίζεται στην εργασία *People, Places and Pasta or Uncreative Explorations as Collective Intelligence* (Nerantzi, et al., 2025), που ξεκίνησε από το συνέδριο EDEN2025. Η εργασία εκείνη μετέτρεψε σημειώσεις και αναστοχασμούς ερευνητών σε τέσσερα δημιουργικά αποτελέσματα: μια παιδαγωγική «συνταγή», έναν σωκρατικό διάλογο, ένα συλλογικό ποίημα και ένα μωσαϊκό οπτικών μεταφορών. Καθένα τους λειτουργεί ως παιδαγωγικό εργαλείο που καινοτομεί στην ενσωμάτωση της ΠΤΝ στην ΑεξΑΕ, ανταποκρινόμενο στις ανάγκες μάθησης σε ψηφιακά, γνωστικά κατανεμημένα, και ασύγχρονα περιβάλλοντα που προϋποθέτουν αυτονομία, συνεργασία και πολυτροπική ευχέρεια. Υποστηρίζουμε ότι τα εργαλεία αυτά μπορούν συνδυαστικά να ενισχύσουν τον κριτικό γραμματισμό στην ΠΤΝ, τη δημιουργική έκφραση και την ενεργό συμμετοχή των φοιτητών, προσκαλώντας τους εκπαιδευτικούς να αγκαλιάσουν τη συν-δημιουργία ανθρώπου και ΠΤΝ όχι ως υποκατάσταση, αλλά ως καταλύτη για στοχαστική, κριτική και συλλογική νοημοσύνη.

## Λέξεις – κλειδιά

Παραγωγική Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη (ΠΤΝ), Ανοικτή και εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση, Παιδαγωγικά εργαλεία, Συλλογική νοημοσύνη, Πολυτροπικότητα, Κριτικός Γραμματισμός στην ΠΤΝ

## Introduction

The integration of GenAI into Higher Education has generated both enthusiasm and anxiety. On the one hand, it is heralded as a disruptive innovation capable of personalising learning, accelerating research, and expanding access (Karakitsou et al., 2025). On the other hand, it is often seen as a threat to traditional forms of authorship, integrity, and critical thinking (Costa & Murphy, 2025). In Open and Distance Learning (ODL), these tensions are particularly acute. Students are dispersed across contexts and cultures, and much of their interaction with knowledge is mediated through digital networked technologies and platforms (Simonson et al., 2019). For these students and their educators, the question is not simply how to regulate or restrict AI, but how to engage with it meaningfully in ways that strengthen learning communities, sustain, grow and diversity creativity, and foster critical reflection and deeper learning.

In open and distance education, the integration of GenAI intersects with long-standing pedagogical questions about presence, autonomy, and interaction at a distance. Following Salomon's (1993) notion of distributed cognition, learning in ODL is mediated not only by technology but also by the dynamic interplay between human and artificial agents. Consequently, ODL provides a particularly fertile ground for exploring human–GenAI co-creation as a form of collective intelligence, one that extends cognitive processes across people, platforms, and media.

The project *People, Places and Pasta or Uncreative Explorations as Collective Intelligence* (Nerantzi et al., 2025) was conceived as a response to this moment of opportunity for collective reflection through experimentation by a group of scholars who had a shared experience at an academic conference. It models the value of shared critical and creative reflection to gain new insights through active experimentation. Inspired by both formal presentations and informal conversations at the European Distance Education Network (EDEN) annual conference in June 2025, the scholars and collaborators in this project wove together notes, reflections, and impressions into what they termed a tapestry. This tapestry

served as raw material for a series of creative explorations and transformations undertaken with the support of AI tools. Rather than producing a traditional research report, the collaborators generated a pedagogical recipe, a Socratic dialogue, a collective poem, and a mosaic of visual metaphors. These outputs sought to reframe GenAI not merely as a tool, but as a co-creator and collaborator within a human–machine dialogue and illustrate some of the creative possibilities GenAI presents for learning, teaching and assessment in ODL.

Accordingly, the overarching goal of this work is to explore how human–GenAI entangled co-creation can foster collective intelligence in ODL through placing the human and human collaboration and inquiry at the heart. Specifically, we aim to investigate how creative, multimodal, and uncreative pedagogical practices may cultivate critical GenAI literacy, student agency, and critical reflective dialogue among educators and students. The current work asks how multimodal and creative practices can scaffold critical GenAI literacy in ODL.

### **Theoretical and Pedagogical Background**

GenAI has already begun to reshape Higher Education, yet its adoption is patchy and contested. Students increasingly embrace it as a ‘study buddy’, while many educators remain hesitant, fearing erosion of academic integrity or even professional redundancy. These divergent attitudes reflect broader debates about whether GenAI should be understood as a surrogate intelligence, a collaborator, or simply another tool in the digital learning ecosystem (Avgerinou et al., 2025).

Our approach also resonates with Nerantzi, et al.’s (2025) provocation of the “Uncreative University,” which extends Goldsmith’s (2011) ideas into the domain of teaching and institutional practice. Their work challenges dominant myths of originality and individual genius, reframing creativity as a process of collective remix, resourceful reuse, and collaborative meaning-making. By advancing concepts such as “uncreative teaching” (Nerantzi, 2022), and by drawing on practices of design thinking, *dérive*, and *détournement*, they foreground experimentation, adaptation, and transformation as central to educational innovation. The aforementioned provocation has been particularly inspiring for our project, which similarly embraces uncreative and multimodal inquiry as valid modes of knowledge co-construction. In this sense, our recipes, dialogues, poems, and visual mosaics extend the conversation initiated by Nerantzi et al. (2025), positioning GenAI as a catalyst for collaborative sensemaking rather than as a substitute for human creativity.

Further, our thinking was guided by Kress's (2010) multimodality theory, which emphasizes that meaning is made across different representational modes. By moving from prose notes to poetic verse, from conversational fragments to Socratic dialogue, and from personal sketches to collective mosaics, the project highlighted how multiple forms of expression can scaffold critical reflection. These multimodal experiments also align with emerging work on critical GenAI literacy (Avgerinou et al., 2025; Karakitsou et al., 2025), which positions visual metaphors and creative practices as powerful entry points into interrogating the assumptions embedded in AI systems. In this sense, multimodality is not just another pedagogy but becomes a pathway into critical GenAI literacy. Finally, in the context of this work, we draw on Roe et al.'s (2025) definition of critical GenAI literacy, who state that it is "the ability to critically analyse and engage with AI systems by understanding their technical foundations, societal implications, and embedded power structures, while recognising their limitations, potential biases, and broader social, environmental, and economic impacts." (p. 2).

### **Methodological Approach**

To translate these theoretical perspectives into practice, we adopted an exploratory, arts-based, and participatory methodological stance rooted in collaborative autoethnography (Lapadat, 2017). This methodological positioning is consonant with ODL principles of openness, student agency, and reflective practice, as it relies on distributed participation and asynchronous collaboration among geographically dispersed contributors (Simonson et al., 2019). The project unfolded as a multimodal inquiry during and after the EDEN 2025 conference, blending observation, visual expression, reflective and creative writing, as well as AI-assisted co-creation. Through this design, the collaborators acted both as researchers and as participants, generating and analysing creative artifacts in real time. Rather than seeking measurable outcomes, the process aimed to illuminate how human–GenAI interaction can generate *collective intelligence* through creative meaning-making and critical and creative reflection.

### **The Project: People, Places, and Pasta**

Building on these intersecting theoretical perspectives, uncreative pedagogy (Nerantzi et al., 2025), multimodality (Kress, 2010), and critical GenAI literacy (Avgerinou et al., 2025), our project sought to *embody* these ideas through practice. Rather than merely analysing GenAI

conceptually, we aimed to experience it *as co-creators* in meaning-making processes. The principles of uncreative pedagogy shaped our collaborative and remix-based approach; multimodality informed our diverse expressive forms (poetry, visuals, dialogue); and critical GenAI literacy framed our engagement with AI tools as both partners and objects of inquiry. This translation from theory to praxis materialized in the People, Places, and Pasta project, which functioned as a living laboratory of collective intelligence: a space where GenAI tools, human dialogue, and multimodal expression interacted to reimagine what learning and creativity can look like in open and distance education. In this sense, People, Places, and Pasta operated as a microcosm of ODL practice (distributed, dialogic, and multimodal) where participants engaged across physical and virtual spaces to co-construct knowledge through creative experimentation with GenAI.

The project originated during the EDEN 2025 conference, where the collaborators collected fragments of speech, text, and reflection from formal sessions and social conversations. These fragments were woven into a tapestry: a deliberately messy, interwoven record of collective thought. One excerpt captures the project's questioning tone: "Artificial intelligence or collective intelligence? Or maybe mathematic intelligence if it is 'just' about numbers? We say collective intelligence" (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 7). Similarly, Vallis et al. (2023, 1) engaged in a collaborative creative inquiry using poetry, based on a text that was created using GenAI, which, through an iterative process, led to the creation of "an ode to collaborative sensemaking".

From this tapestry, the team generated four creative outputs using various GenAI tools. The pedagogical recipe, *From Pantry to Pedagogy*, reframed the integration of AI in education as a culinary process. The Socratic dialogue, staged between *Sophia* and *Demos*, dramatised debates about empathy, governance, and lifelong learning. The poem *We Write Our Futures* distilled the tapestry into lyrical stanzas that challenged readers to rethink authorship, fairness, and connection. Finally, the mosaic of visual metaphors, titled *Our Garden of EDEN*, offered symbolic images such as suns and moons, mandalas, and apples, each evoking GenAI's dualities as both promise and provocation.

Together, these outputs functioned not only as creative experiments but also as provocations or stimuli for ongoing reflection and pedagogical adaptation.

## **Pedagogical Recipes**

Among the outputs, the pedagogical recipe offers a particularly useful model for educational design. Recipes are inherently structured yet adaptable, balancing precision with improvisation. As the collaborators wrote, the process begins by “preheating your mindset to openness, curiosity, and critical awareness” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 13). The listed ingredients included not only data, algorithms, and neural networks but also “one handful empathy—simulated or real, stirred in with care and human virtues,” “200g student voice—fresh, unfiltered, and co-creative,” and “50g governance—robust frameworks to guide ethical, equitable, and sustainable AI use” (p. 13).

These observations remind us that effective GenAI integration must combine technical skills with human capacities such as empathy, curiosity, and transparency, while also attending to broader societal responsibilities such as governance and sustainability. The preparation steps reinforce this ethic: “Fold in empathy and human virtues gently... simulated empathy adds flavour but must be balanced with authentic human connection” (p. 14).

By adopting the recipe metaphor, the project translated abstract debates about AI into tangible pedagogical guidance. For ODL contexts, such recipes can be adapted into online activities where students collectively design their own recipes for AI use, remix prompts into creative artifacts, or co-author reflective dialogues with AI partners.

## **The Socratic Dialogue**

Another major output of the project was the Socratic dialogue *GenAI, Learning, and the Fate of Europe*. Set in a university courtyard, the dialogue features two characters —Sophia, representing wisdom, and Demos, representing the people— who engage in a searching conversation about the role of GenAI in education and society. Through their dialogue, the collaborators dramatise tensions between human and machine agency, the promise of empathy, and the responsibilities of governance.

The dialogue is both playful and serious. At one point, Demos asks, “Can a machine really empathise, or are we fooling ourselves with simulated sentiment?” to which Sophia replies, “Empathy is not only in the machine, but in the way we respond to it. It is a mirror for our virtues as much as for our biases” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 17). This exchange underscores that GenAI is not merely an autonomous actor but a catalyst for human reflection, requiring careful interpretation and framing.

For pedagogy, the dialogue offers a heuristic for critical debate. It demonstrates how AI-related themes can be explored dialogically, staging tensions and surfacing dilemmas that invite students to adopt multiple perspectives. In ODL environments, students could be asked to script their own dialogues with or about AI, role-playing different positions such as educator, policymaker, student, or algorithm. Such activities support argumentation, ethical reasoning, and empathy, while also making space for humour, creativity, and dissent. The Socratic form also suits asynchronous environments, as students can contribute lines to a collective dialogue over time, gradually weaving together a shared text that reflects diverse voices.

### **The Poem**

The poem *We Write Our Futures* distilled the Bologna tapestry into a lyrical text that is at once hopeful and cautionary. It spoke of fairness, agency, and sustainability, while reminding readers of the relational nature of learning. One striking stanza reads: “Learning is a relationship. Trust is infrastructure. Transparency is non-negotiable” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 22). In a few lines, the poem communicates what lengthy policy documents often fail to capture: the affective, ethical, and infrastructural conditions upon which education depends. As a pedagogical framework, poetry functions differently from recipes or dialogues. Whereas the recipe emphasises structure and process, and the dialogue foregrounds debate and multiplicity, poetry distills complexity into affective and memorable expressions. For students in ODL, engaging with or producing poetry can encourage personal reflection and emotional engagement with abstract issues such as governance, fairness, or sustainability. Poetry can also serve as a form of assessment that values voice and perspective alongside analysis. Educators might, for example, invite students to transform a week’s worth of discussion forum posts into a collective poem, using AI as a co-editor or remixing assistant. The poem could then serve as both artifact and reflection, capturing the ethos of the cohort at a particular moment in their learning journey. In this way, poetry in ODL becomes not only an artistic exercise but a method of sensemaking and community-building.

### **Visual Metaphors**

The final major output, *Our Garden of EDEN*, was a mosaic of visual metaphors (Figure 1). Created with collage tools and AI image generators, the mosaic featured recurring images such

as suns and moons, mandalas, horizons, and apples. Each image symbolised a different aspect of GenAI's dualities. The sun and moon suggested cycles of light and shadow, knowledge and opacity. The mandala evoked interconnectedness and complexity. The apple, presented as the 5<sup>th</sup> apple (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 28), while referencing both the biblical Eden and the tech corporation, symbolised temptation, innovation, and risk.

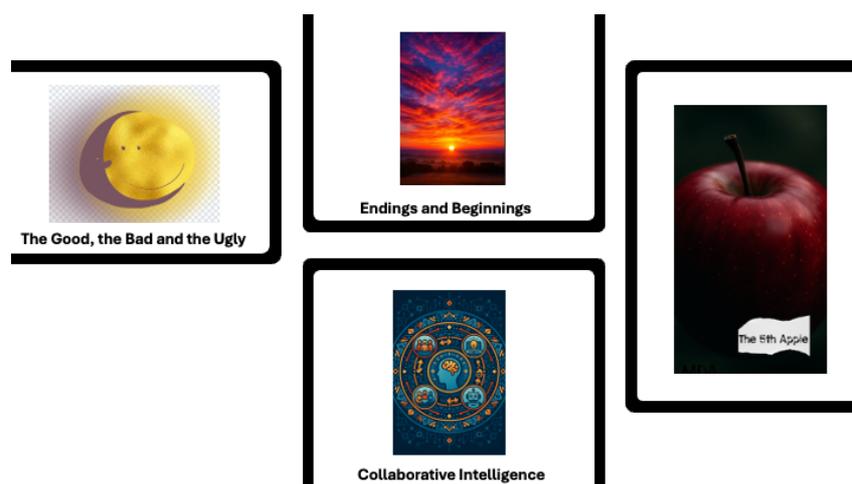


Figure 1. Mosaic of Visual Metaphors

Visual metaphors function as powerful pedagogical prompts. They condense complex ideas into symbolic form, inviting multiple interpretations and critical engagement. As Avgerinou et al. (2025) argue, visual literacy provides a pathway to critical GenAI literacy by helping students decode the images and metaphors that shape our perceptions of technology. The *Garden of EDEN* mosaic thus exemplifies how visuals can spark dialogue about trust, ethics, and cultural narratives surrounding AI. At the same time, metaphors carry the risk of misinterpretation or cultural bias, as symbols may resonate differently across students' contexts.

For ODL environments, visual metaphors are particularly valuable because they can transcend linguistic barriers and invite contributions from students with diverse backgrounds. In an online course, students might be asked to contribute images that represent their evolving understanding of GenAI, which can then be collated into a collective mosaic. AI tools can assist in remixing these images, but the interpretive work remains human, requiring students to make a judgment and decide what the images mean and why. This process supports critical literacy, collaboration, and inclusivity.

## **Application to Open and Distance Learning**

The outputs of *People, Places and Pasta* (recipes, Socratic dialogue, poem, and visual metaphors) demonstrate that creative and multimodal approaches to GenAI can be meaningfully adapted to distance learning and teaching contexts. It also presents a way to engage academics in professional development through critical and creative reflection and co-creation. Each artifact suggests a different mode of engagement that can be translated into online pedagogy.

Recipes function as structured heuristics for designing learning activities and are especially well-suited in ODL, where students are geographically dispersed and must often collaborate asynchronously. In an online course, for instance, students could collectively draft recipes for 'ethical GenAI' or 'collaborative intelligence', contributing ingredients drawn from their own contexts and experiences. These can then be remixed by GenAI tools and returned to students for critique and reflection. Such tasks not only encourage creativity but also scaffold critical literacy by requiring students to articulate the essential elements (i.e., empathy, governance, student voice) for responsible GenAI use.

The Socratic dialogue offers a valuable opportunity for in-depth exploration of complex issues. Unlike generic dialogues, which may simply present contrasting views, the Socratic method relies on systematic questioning to reveal assumptions, contradictions, and deeper insights. In ODL contexts, this can be enacted in discussion forums or collaborative writing spaces where students adopt roles (e.g., Sophia, Demos, policymaker, student, GenAI system) and sustain question-driven exchanges over time. For example, one group might be tasked with defending the proposition that GenAI can empathize, while another group, through probing questions, exposes the limits of this claim. Such activities develop students' capacity for critical questioning, ethical reasoning, and philosophical inquiry. Importantly, the asynchronous nature of ODL allows students more time to reflect on each question and craft responses, thereby enriching the depth of the dialogue.

Poetry offers a means of distilling complex discussions into memorable and affective expressions. In ODL courses, students might remix weekly discussion posts or collaborative reflections into poetic form, with GenAI tools supporting the editing or recombination. The resulting poems can function as both creative artifacts and reflective assessments, capturing the emotional and ethical tone of a cohort at a given moment.

Finally, visual metaphors allow students to articulate their understanding of GenAI in symbolic terms. Online cohorts could create collective mosaics of images representing GenAI, sourced from their own contexts and generated with the support of GenAI tools. These mosaics can then be interpreted collectively, encouraging students to interrogate the metaphors and narratives that frame public and institutional discourses on GenAI. The process not only strengthens critical visual literacy but also fosters inclusivity, allowing participation from students across linguistic, professional, and cultural boundaries.

Together, these four pedagogical approaches offer distance educators a repertoire of methods for integrating GenAI in ways that are collaborative, critical, and creative. They illustrate that even within dispersed and asynchronous learning environments, it is possible to cultivate a sense of collective intelligence and critical and creative reflective practice that can lead to new insights.

However, challenges remain. As the collaborators noted, “universities don’t seem to be GenAI ready... many educators aren’t, according to students” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 9). Designing, facilitating, and assessing creative multimodal outputs requires time, confidence, and supportive institutional structures. Assessment is particularly complex: how can educators fairly evaluate not only a recipe, but also a Socratic dialogue, a poem, or a visual metaphor? These artifacts demand alternative rubrics that value evidence of process collaboration, transparency of the creative process, depth of critical engagement with GenAI, contributions, and critical reflection, rather than simply product or originality. Inclusivity must also be considered. Not all students have equal access to GenAI tools, nor do all feel equally comfortable producing texts in unfamiliar genres or experimenting with visual expression.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities are significant. Recipes encourage students to become co-authors of knowledge, reframing learning as collective creation. Socratic dialogues cultivate critical inquiry and ethical reasoning by inviting students to inhabit multiple perspectives. Poems nurture affective engagement and provide a medium for articulating values and emotions often absent from traditional academic work. Visual metaphors offer symbolic gateways into complex issues, supporting cross-cultural participation and visual literacy (Karakitsou et al., 2025). Together, these tools embed ethical and critical reflection within creative practice, prompting students to interrogate bias, authorship, and sustainability. They also extend naturally to lifelong and intergenerational learning, as the dialogue reminded us: “We speak of skilling the youth, but what of the older generations?”

Lifelong learning must be more than a slogan” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 17). Such provocations are especially relevant for ODL, which often serves diverse and globally distributed cohorts spanning multiple ages and professional contexts.

Collectively, these approaches demonstrate that GenAI can become a mediator of learning presence in ODL environments. By blending human and machine agency, they support the three presences of the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison & Akyol, 2013), namely, the cognitive, social, and teaching presence, while expanding them through multimodal participation. In this way, ODL emerges as both a context and a catalyst for developing the literacies and dispositions required for learning with and through GenAI.

### **Lessons Learned Through the Human and GenAI Co-Creative Synergy**

Reflecting on our methodological stance, this exploratory and arts-based inquiry demonstrated that multimodal creation can itself function as a research method: one that surfaces ethical, aesthetic, and pedagogical questions at the intersection of human and artificial intelligence. The lessons learned from the human and GenAI entangled co-creation synergy underscore that the integration of Generative AI into education is not only a technical or regulatory challenge, but also a profoundly pedagogical and cultural one. By experimenting with recipes, Socratic dialogues, poems, and visual metaphors, the *People, Places and Pasta* project demonstrated that GenAI can serve as a catalyst for creative inquiry, ethical reflection, and collective sensemaking. Each pedagogical tool highlighted a different dimension of human-machine collaboration, offering distinct affordances for teaching and learning at a distance.

The pedagogical recipe foregrounded structure and process, illustrating how complex debates about data, empathy, and governance can be translated into concrete heuristics for educational and curriculum design. The Socratic dialogue enacted tension and debate, showing how systematic questioning can surface assumptions, contradictions, and ethical dilemmas. The poem distilled collective reflection into memorable and affective stanzas, communicating the relational and ethical underpinnings of education more powerfully than policy prose often does. The visual metaphors rendered abstract issues into symbolic images, enabling cross-cultural participation and supporting visual literacy as a pathway to critical GenAI literacy.

Taken together, these instruments remind us that integrating AI into ODL should not be reduced to instrumental or deficit framings, such as concerns about plagiarism or efficiency alone. Instead, they invite educators to embrace creative and multimodal practices that cultivate agency, empathy, and critical literacy among students.

For assessment, this implies rethinking criteria so that collective, multimodal, and process-based artifacts are valued alongside traditional academic outputs. As the poem reminds us “learning is a relationship. Trust is infrastructure. Transparency is non-negotiable” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 22). If this is true, then assessment must shift from policing to partnership, valuing process as much as product. Recipes and multimodal artifacts invite us to evaluate not only outcomes but also the depth of engagement, the quality of collaboration, and the ethical reflection demonstrated.

For educators, it calls for courage to experiment with genres and modalities outside the conventional repertoire, supported by professional development and institutional recognition. For policymakers, it highlights the importance of governance structures that allow space for experimentation while safeguarding equity, transparency, and sustainability. Yet these opportunities also expose tensions. Not all students or educators are equally equipped or confident to engage in poetry, dialogue, or multimodal creation. Institutional readiness remains uneven, with many universities struggling to provide adequate scaffolding, infrastructure, and ethical guidance. The challenge, then, is not only to celebrate creativity but also to build the conditions and the processes that make it accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.

For the ODL field, these insights affirm that creative, collaborative, and reflective engagements with GenAI can bridge transactional distance, enhancing connection and meaning-making among geographically dispersed students. They also signal a shift from content-delivery models to co-creative learning ecosystems that privilege participation, dialogue, and shared authorship.

In short, the co-creation process illustrates that human–GenAI collaboration can enrich distance education when it is framed not as substitution, but as augmentation and entanglement. The value lies less in the outputs themselves than in the reflective, relational, and critical processes they provoke and the opportunities for deep and diverse conversations and experimentation these present.

While this exploratory, conceptual, and arts-based inquiry offers valuable insights into human–GenAI co-creation, it also carries inherent limitations. The reflections and artifacts presented here emerged from a specific collaborative context and cannot be generalized across all ODL settings. Future work could extend this approach by engaging larger and more diverse student cohorts, experimenting with additional GenAI tools, or systematically studying how multimodal co-creation influences student engagement, agency, and critical GenAI literacy in open and distance environments.

## **Conclusion**

This work has argued that the creative outputs of *People, Places and Pasta* (a pedagogical recipe, a Socratic dialogue, a poem, and a set of visual metaphors) offer valuable strategies for ODL educators to consider in their teaching practice. Each tool provides a distinctive way of engaging with GenAI: recipes combine structured guidance with openness to improvisation, Socratic dialogues foster questioning and critical debate, poems distill reflection into affective and memorable expression, and visual metaphors translate abstraction into symbolic and cross-cultural forms of meaning-making. Collectively, they demonstrate how GenAI can be positioned as a collaborator in collective intelligence, rather than merely a tool to be regulated or feared. These practices align closely with the ethos of open and distance education, which seeks to democratize learning through accessibility, collaboration, and reflective autonomy in digitally mediated spaces.

Through this work, ODL practitioners are challenged to embrace uncreative and multimodal inquiry as legitimate forms of educational practice. It is suggested that through the above tools, students and educators can engage with GenAI not only cognitively but also affectively, ethically, and culturally. For instance, in the Socratic dialogue, Sophia asks Demos: “Can a machine really empathise, or are we fooling ourselves with simulated sentiment?” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 17). The exchange models how systematic questioning can uncover assumptions, challenge easy answers, and provoke deeper reflection. In the visual mosaic *Our Garden of EDEN*, the recurring image of the 5<sup>th</sup> apple stands as a symbol of both temptation and innovation, reminding us of the dualities inherent in our engagement with GenAI. When brought into ODL contexts, such textual and visual artifacts can serve as prompts for discussion, reflection, and collaborative creation.

We invite educators to consider our experimentations and adapt these instruments with their own students in ODL courses, exploring how students respond to creative multimodal learning, and how such practices contribute to the development of critical GenAI literacy, creative expression, and deeper learning. As the poem reminds us, “Let’s choose the future we want to write. Because we do write it. Together.” (Nerantzi et al., 2025, p. 24). Pedagogical tools such as recipes, Socratic dialogues, poems, and visual metaphors offer us not only ways of thinking about possible futures but also concrete practices for shaping them thoughtfully, critically, and collectively.

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