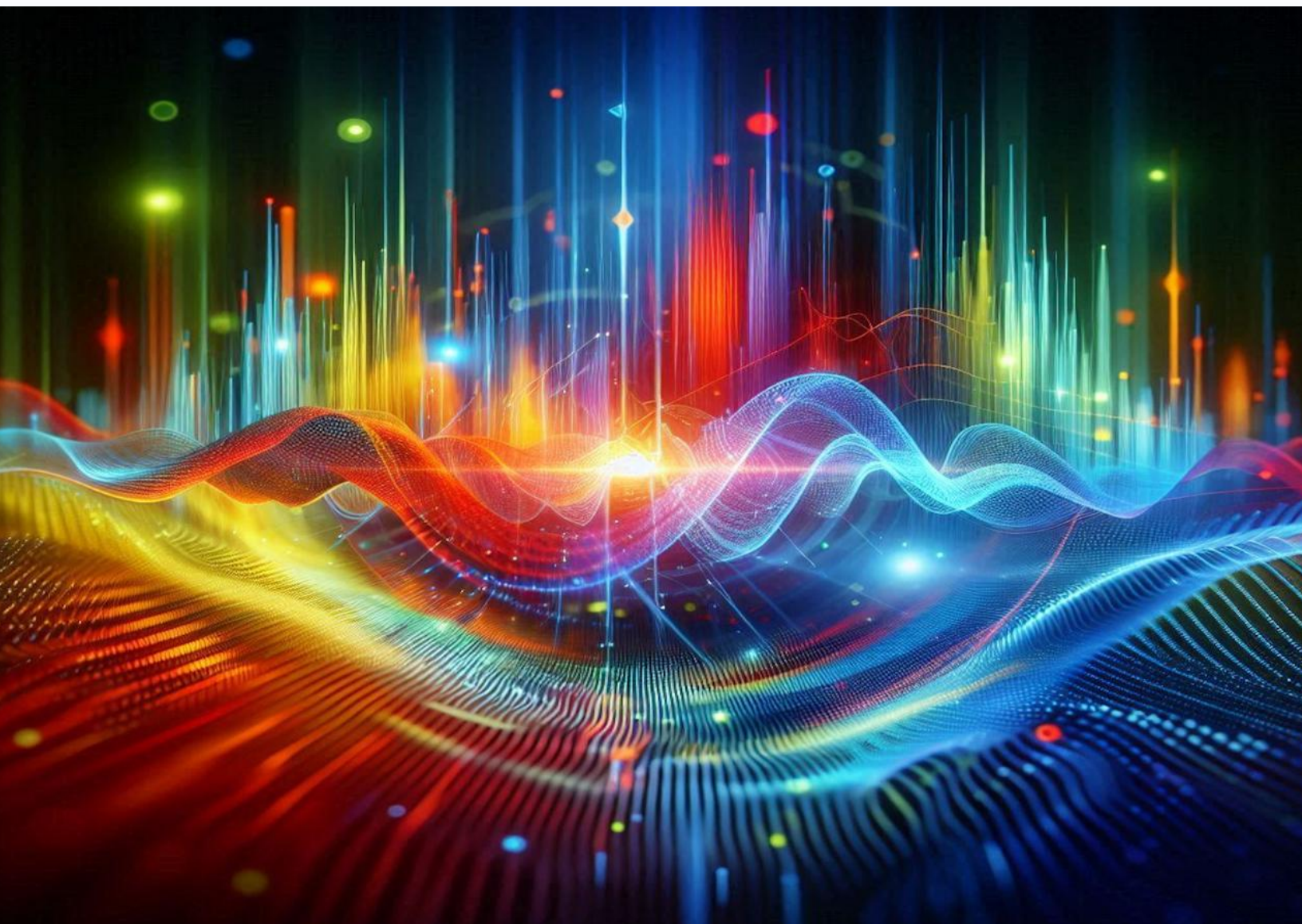


New Pedagogies for Deep Learning: A Global Partnership

Cancel the Noise or Filter the Focus?



New Pedagogies for
Deep Learning[™]
A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP

Max Drummy

Joanne Quinn

Michael Fullan

<https://deep-learning.global>

February 2025

Cancel the Noise or Filter the Focus?

A [recent article](#)ⁱ drawing on Michael Fullan's [Right Drivers work](#) caught my attention. In it, the author, Ryan Fahey, sets up the notion of noise cancelling headphones as a symptom of the bloodless paradigm - becoming obsessed with self, reliant on machine learning more than human-to-human learning, living with austerity (*ruthless*) and becoming more and more fragmented or separated — meaning what divides us becomes stronger than what unites us. This, he hypothesises, leads inexorably toward solitude over connection, proliferation of extreme viewpoints, and the maxxing out of our mental bandwidth. He concludes optimistically "there are ways we can take action to protect ourselves and our well-being without losing ourselves in the noise entirely"ⁱⁱ and suggests ways we can slowly combat the loneliness epidemic in our own communities.



What if instead of donning our noise cancelling headphones, we got better at discerning the signal from the noise, as Nate Silver put itⁱⁱ. If we come back to Fahey's article, how might we build our acuity to filter out the dross and reinforce the Human, as opposed to Bloodless paradigm?

Let's cast this into the work we have been engaged in for the last 12 years - [Deep Learning](#) - the intentional development of our Six Global Competencies (Character, Citizenship, Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking) in learners across 20 countries and thousands of schools. Building learners and leaders who are Good at Learning AND Good at Life.

If, as the OECD reportⁱⁱⁱ, *Emotions are the Gatekeeper to learning, and Learning results from the dynamic interplay of emotion, motivation and cognition*, then the isolation of noise cancelling is not a viable way to create our preferred and connected futures. Instead, thinking critically and creatively, as Civic Minded Changemakers in Society, for Society, embraces united possibilities, combats extreme views and provides time for reflection and space and means for Maslow's notion of self-actualization.

As teachers, filtering the signal has become increasingly challenging with the yaw and pitch of Pandemic-influenced education models. If we go back to the OECD line of thought "Attention to motivations by all those involved is about making learning more effective - better still if it also makes learning more enjoyable." then engagement in learning is a critical focus factor. (How) Do we take time to understand and get to know our students, their interests and needs? How do we use this knowledge to create learning opportunities that engage and excite them, personally and academically?

I listened to a Year 7 teacher describe such a "signal-from-noise" moment just the other day. The young men in her English class were obsessed with playing chess....at every moment possible, often to the detriment of the planned learning. As Helen reflected, she could have gone the "noise cancellation route" and shut down chess, the "punitive approach" option, as she called it. BUT instead, she began to look for the signal though the noise, asking "How might I use chess as a key engager, rather than distraction. She describes *"leaning into the learning and really allowed student voice and choice to become a big part of how we shaped the learning"*. What followed was the creation of a unit of work linking poetry to chess. Helen asked, " How might chess emphasize poetic function and form...how might it sustain student engagement...and how might it form the foundation for learning the skills of collaboration?"



What evolved was wonderful learning. She [relates the story](#) of a boy, previously a very vocal class dissident, becoming super engaged and productive and whole-class outputs beyond what she had previously experienced.

Helen took time to filter the signal from the noise. To understand what excited and engaged her learners, and to grasp that as an opportunity to amplify rather than diminish. Helen connected learners, developed and leveraged their collective efficacy, ignited critical thinking and

succeeded in developing both academic and personal outcomes in her boys.^{iv}

So, rather than clad ourselves in a cocoon of noise-cancellation and checking out, lets perhaps consider checking in, even more acutely, and seeking to define and divine the signals and opportunities from the noise.

Consider:

1. Where is your work the "noisiest"?
2. What might you begin to filter out; what signals might you focus more on?
3. What are three prompts that might help you do this.

ⁱ <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/3-things-a-45-billion-dollar-noise-canceling-industry-tells-us-kpkn/>

ⁱⁱ Silver N. *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail But Some Don't*. New York Penguin Press, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ OECD. (2012). *The nature of learning: Using research to inspire practice*. Practitioner Guide OECD Publications.

^{iv} Barrie H. (2023) *Teach Meet Year 7 English* <https://vimeo.com/1012650268/4835796dec>, Waverley College, The Association of Independent Schools of NSW, Sydney, Australia.