

Maybe not suffering, but still effort

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Towards the end of the calendar year, [I wrote here](#) about [a study](#) that claimed that the ease of access to "information" that LLM tools provide to learners, compared to searching for information through search tools like Google, leads to superficial learning. I noted at the time that even if the findings of that study were not surprising, they provoked reflection regarding the technological means that I have been involved in integrating into education for many years. After all, I see tools that facilitate the learning process as positive, but if the price of that facilitation is poor learning, I am not sure that it's really worthwhile.

For quite understandable reasons, the vast majority of the materials to which I refer here come from the field of education. However, digitality in all its forms affects many areas of our lives, and more than once issues that arise in the educational space also appear in the broader culture. And that's also the case with the question of "suffering". This week I came across three examples, quite different from each other, that in my opinion illuminate the subject from interesting and even important angles.

In a short time, Suno, an AI tool that produces a song with a simple prompt and the click of a button, has become both popular and controversial. I admit that my connection to popular music is quite limited, and while the copyright issues involving AI tools definitely interest me, these aren't particularly related to education. However, the ease of production does. [An article about the tool](#) in The Guardian from mid-January quotes Suno CEO Mikey Shulman, who explains, among other things, why this ease appeals to the tool's users:

I think the majority of people don't enjoy the majority of the time they spend making music.

I found myself scratching my head at this sentence. It's possible that Shulman means to say that there are stages in the process of producing a song that can be tedious, and I suppose that's true. But it seems logical to me that creating a song, or any piece of music, is done out of desire. It's doubtful that anyone forces us to compose a song. In light of this, it's a job that is done with joy, even if it is sometimes difficult. I have trouble understanding how, beyond the first time or two, a "creator" would feel ownership or pride, let alone enjoyment, towards a song that he or she simply produced by clicking a button. The enjoyment and satisfaction stem from the fact that we put in the effort and succeeded in creating something of quality.

The second example I found in [an article originally from 2019](#) but coincidentally (and fortunately) updated this week, a musical instrument teacher reviewed [a study](#) involving 75 students. The researchers taught the basics of the game of [petanque](#) – a game similar to lawn bowls. After the first phase of familiarization with the game and a short period of practice, the students were divided into two groups. Each group practiced again for 40 minutes, and then one group was asked to discuss among themselves which strategies for throwing the ball were successful, while the other group received a lesson/lecture on the correct way to throw the ball. From the description in the study of these two approaches, I think it is easy to understand that the researchers wanted to examine:

the effectiveness of two teaching strategies in PE. One allows students to explore and come up with their own ways of throwing in petanque, while the other teaches students the standard motions.

After the practice and conversation or lesson periods, the students (of course) were tested on throwing the ball. The author of the article concludes that the achievements of the students who identified their own errors in throwing the ball were better than those who received explanations. He writes:

the students who learned by making mistakes, seemed to have more confidence in their ability to improve and get better, than those who were taught using the correct movement approach!

Anyone with a background in education will surely recognize here an expression of John Dewey's educational approach that could be called [Learning by Doing](#). Experience allows us to internalize our learning so that it becomes a part of us in a more meaningful way than if it were just explained to us. But here I must admit that I am almost ashamed to have to explain it. Even if the educational system does not implement this concept, it seems to me that everyone pays lip service to it.

The first two examples here reflect different aspects of the same effort (or suffering) that I wrote about earlier. They're far from earth shattering, and it's precisely their banality that makes me bring them up. On the one hand, a tool like Suno allows us to produce a product while saving us effort – the same effort that makes the process meaningful for us. In the case of the game of petanque, the very act of confronting a difficulty, rather than simply receiving an explanation of how to act correctly, is what contributes to success.

But to me, the third example is the most interesting, and not just because of its source. It clearly identifies effort as a central component of learning. This week in The Forward, Louis Keene [reported](#) on the gathering of an ultra-Orthodox community in New York around the threat that AI tools pose to the community. As with the exposure to the Internet more than a decade ago, the community's rabbis are now opposing tools like ChatGPT. In their view, their use poses a danger to the community. They are even calling for a fast day to eradicate the threat. But the explanation for the opposition to AI tools is not the corruption of youth following exposure to a foreign and corrupt culture, but something much more informed that reflects a very accurate and appropriate perception.

Keene explains that the community's rabbis advocate a view that stems from Rashi's interpretation of the verse Leviticus 26:3:

If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them

Rashi interprets:

They were laborers in the Torah, on the pretext of keeping and fulfilling them, as it is said, "And you measured them and kept them to do them" (see [here](#)).

Hence the term “amiluth” – the need to put effort into understanding the scripture. Keene quotes one of the community rabbis as explaining:

If at the push of a button, I can get a hold of a d'var torah for my Shabbos meal from AI, to us, that's a problem. ... No, no — I want you to open the book and read it and come up with a question and come

up with an answer. That's part of what's holy about learning Torah. It's not just the end result. It's the process.

I couldn't have said it better.