



## How AI Can Simplify Teaching with Technology



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A new voice-activated digital assistant for the classroom helps teachers be more effective

## Promethean Webinar Series Recap

Artificial intelligence (AI) can carry negative connotations within education circles, evoking images of machines replacing human teachers in the future. The truth, while less fantastic, is that AI can be a very useful tool that is helping educators to be more effective in the classroom right now.

Promethean recently hosted a series of webinars with eSchool News on the use of AI for instruction. The speakers for these events included:

- **Levi Belnap**, Chief Strategy Officer for [Merlyn Mind](#)
- **Matt Cole**, EVP, Global Sales for [Promethean](#)

This interactive ebook summarizes the content from these webinars and includes video highlights. It explains how Merlyn Mind and Promethean have teamed up to make teaching with technology much simpler using an [AI-powered digital assistant](#).



**Levi Belnap**  
Chief Strategy Officer  
Merlyn Mind



**Matt Cole**  
EVP, Global Sales  
Promethean



## What is AI, and how can it support education?

“AI is often misinterpreted,” according to Belnap. We tend to form our perceptions from the popular media we consume, and in science fiction novels and movies, AI frequently has sinister implications—with computers becoming as sentient as human beings and even taking over the planet.

In reality, AI means computers are now able to simulate capabilities that we humans have been doing since we were toddlers, such as understanding human speech, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and even carrying on conversations. After being fed millions of bytes of sample data, computers can “learn” how to make predictions or decisions without being explicitly programmed to do so. This means computers are now able to do things that only humans could do before.

“That’s a really powerful function,” Belnap said. “It doesn’t mean the computer is now human, but it has the ability to do things with us, for us, potentially in support of us, so we don’t have to do these things for ourselves.”

Some of these capabilities raise important questions for educators—and for society at large. For example, there is a lot of concern about ChatGPT, an AI-powered chatbot that was made freely available by OpenAI in November 2022. ChatGPT can generate a wide range of content when prompted, including essays that students could pass off as their own work. The technology could force educators to rethink how they assign writing projects in the future.

But there are also several applications of AI that bring powerful benefits to educators, removing the drudgery of many manual processes so that educators can focus on the important work of teaching and connecting with students.



## Introducing Merlyn: A custom-designed digital assistant for the classroom

A prime example of how AI can help teachers do their jobs more effectively is Merlyn, which Belnap called “the first digital assistant that’s custom-built for the classroom.”

Developed by Merlyn Mind, Merlyn is a voice-activated digital assistant like Siri or Alexa. Using speech and natural language processing technology, it can understand what teachers are saying and execute voice commands in real time. However, what makes Merlyn unique is that it has been programmed to understand the workflows involved in teaching and learning.

“It understands what a teacher means when they say, ‘Go to my [Kahoot!](#)’ or ‘[Open Nearpod](#).’ It understands the tools and applications used in the classroom,” Belnap said.

When integrated with the existing apps and devices in a classroom, Merlyn can simplify many of the digital tasks that teachers do every day.

Instead of having to open an application on their desktop and navigate to the correct page or resource they want to show the class, for instance, teachers can ask Merlyn to do this from anywhere in the room. This untethers teachers from their desk and allows them to circulate the room and work with students individually or in small groups—without disrupting the flow of a lesson.

Here’s a short video that explains the technology



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## How it works

Merlyn's capabilities can be integrated into any classroom environment through a device called [Symphony Classroom](#), which can be connected to a classroom display through an HDMI input.

Symphony Classroom enables what Belnap called "multimodal control" of the content on a connected display. Teachers and students can control the content through voice commands or the click of a button on a handheld remote, or they can control an interactive display by touching it as they always have.

Merlyn's capabilities go deep into the internet browser layer. For instance, it can control internet searching and browsing within Chrome or Microsoft Edge. Users can ask Merlyn to call up a YouTube video, play and pause the video, activate full-screen mode, and even jump to a specific time stamp: "Hey Merlyn, go to 5 minutes and 30 seconds in the video." The technology can recognize "all of these really granular voice commands that are naturally human," Belnap said.

For applications commonly used in classrooms, like Nearpod or Google Slides and Classroom, Merlyn Mind has built what it calls "automations," which are shortcuts for tasks that now can be achieved by voice command. If teachers have a document or online video they'd like to post to their Google Classroom page for students to review later, they can simply say, "Hey Merlyn, add this resource to Google Classroom." Merlyn grabs the link to that resource and drops it into the teacher's Google Classroom feed automatically.

"As a teacher, without ever going back to my laptop or opening that application, I have instantly completed something that previously would have broken the flow of the class," Belnap said.

*\*Meet Merlyn discount promotion is available for a limited time through June 30th, 2023 and is subject to availability. Promethean reserves the right to change, alter or discontinue this promotion at anytime.*

While Symphony Classroom connects to any display, Promethean has partnered with Merlyn Mind on a program called "Meet Merlyn," which allows schools to purchase up to five Symphony Classroom devices at a reduced price.\* The devices can connect to any [ActivPanel](#) display from Promethean.

"We recognize that this is something schools are going to want to try out first [before making a large-scale purchase], and as such, we're making it very easy for them to do that," Cole said.

He added: "Promethean's ActivPanel displays allow teachers to bring content to the front of the classroom in a variety of different forms, so both the teacher and the student can interact with that content. Our partnership with Merlyn Mind gives teachers a much more efficient way to capture that content and bring it into the classroom, whether the teacher is at the front of the classroom or at a desk helping a student. By simply using voice commands, teachers can bring up content almost instantaneously."

"When you bring AI and voice control into a classroom that already has the leading interactive technology with the ActivPanel, you have a really magical experience where teachers and students now can interact with [this] touch technology from anywhere in the room," Belnap said.





## Key benefits

Merlyn offers many benefits for teachers and students:



### ***It simplifies teaching with technology.***

Merlyn lets teachers do with their voice what previously took many steps and led to wasted time and frustration.

“It’s unrealistic to expect one human to do all the things that are expected of teachers as they manage 20 to 30 students and [multiple] devices and applications,” Belnap said. “We have seen that Merlyn decreases the burden on teachers. Having a voice-activated digital assistant built for the classroom makes teaching easier. It’s bringing the classroom into the modern day.”

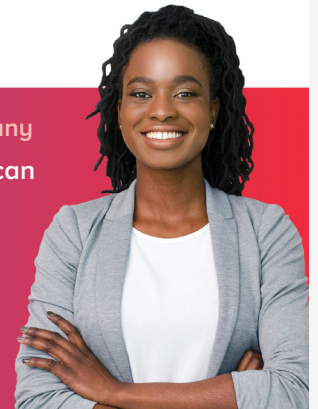
Not only does Merlyn save teachers valuable time, but it makes teaching with technology less complex. Teachers don’t have to remember which menu commands to choose or where to find certain apps or menu items; instead, they can control commonly used classroom applications with simple voice commands. Merlyn removes the intimidation factor from edtech use and allows teachers to just teach.



### ***It untethers teachers from the front of the classroom.***

Teachers can’t be in multiple places at once. With Merlyn, they are no longer stuck at the front of the classroom managing the technology. Instead, teachers are free to roam around the room. This allows them to pay more attention to their students and manage their classroom more effectively.

Teachers who have used Merlyn have told the company “I’ve stepped into the future, and there’s no way I can go back now. I used to have to juggle everything going on in the classroom, and I was running around physically from the display to the laptop to the students, back and forth the whole time. Merlyn just breaks that down.”



### ***It allows teachers to be more successful.***

When teachers can focus their time and attention on their students, instead of worrying about managing the technology, they can better achieve their core mission—ensuring that all students are learning.

When teachers have to pause in the middle of a lesson to bring up new content or otherwise execute a manual command, it can be disruptive to the learning process. By using Merlyn to make these transitions seamless, “you’re not losing the class,” Cole observed. “It solves for keeping students focused and engaged, which is so critical.”

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**Listen to one teacher who has used Merlyn describe her experience**





## Far-reaching applications

Merlyn has applications that go beyond simplifying teaching. For instance, it can be a powerful tool for ensuring equity in the classroom.

“One of our pilot customers in the U.K. was a Paralympian in a wheelchair. He was a science teacher who basically transformed what he was able to do in the classroom with Merlyn, because he now could have as much control of the technology from his wheelchair just with his voice,” Belnap said. “This is an incredible benefit of voice technology that we are just starting to realize. It unlocks learning for every person to engage as simply and effectively as possible to drive successful outcomes.”

Students can use Merlyn as well, leading to what Belnap called “a co-orchestration of learning.” He explained: “In one of our earliest-adopting classrooms, the teacher uses it as an assistant to help manage the classroom, but students can also ask questions and instantly get information.”

The Symphony Classroom hub offers different mechanisms for giving teachers control over this process. When the microphones on the Symphony Classroom are live, anyone in the room can say “Hey Merlyn...” to activate the technology. However, teachers can also mute the microphones on the Symphony Classroom hub, which requires users to employ the push-to-talk remote. Teachers can use the remote to maintain control over Merlyn, and they can pass the remote to students as a behavioral management strategy.

“Teachers love to say, ‘Who wants to manage Merlyn for the day? Who wants to help me manage the class?’” Belnap said. “We’ve also heard of the technology being used for mock trials, where students are calling on Merlyn and engaging with it as a witness to get information. We’re really at the beginning of what is possible when you bring AI into the learning equation.”

With so many new technologies added to instruction in the last few years, teachers can often feel overwhelmed. “I can’t think of anything more simplistic than a voice command to use technology and bring information into the classroom,” Cole said. “It’s cutting-edge technology, but it’s very simple to learn and easy to use and understand.”

**Concluded Belnap: “It’s category breaking. It’s transformative.”**

## Additional resources

**Webinar:** “AI in the Classroom – Supporting Innovative Teaching and Increased Productivity”

<https://www.eschoolnews.com/webinars/ai-in-the-classroom/>

**Webinar:** “The Promising Reality of AI”

<https://www.eschoolnews.com/webinars/the-promising-reality-of-ai/>

**Learn more** about Merlyn and its use with Promethean Smart Panels:

<https://www.prometheanworld.com/microsites/meet-merlyn/>

Listen to what students in the U.K. think of Merlyn as a classroom tool







MERLYN MIND

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For more information, visit, <https://www.prometheanworld.com/>



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