

Text of RIS Dean Dr. Eric Miller's
Speech to Inaugurate the Robot Teacher,
at Rojavanam International School
(Nagarcoil, Tamil Nadu, India)
on Saturday 13 April 2024.

Please send feedback to Eric Miller <storytelling7@gmail.com>

Dear All,

Vanakkam!

Today we at Rojavanam International School are inaugurating an Artificial Intelligence Teacher Robot.

It is an exciting day for us!

We are told that we are the first school in Tamil Nadu to have an AI Teacher Robot.

We at RIS take this great opportunity also as a great responsibility – a responsibility to help develop the AI Teacher Robot, and to share our findings with people throughout Tamil Nadu and beyond.

1) Our AI Teacher Robot's name

We are calling our AI Teacher Robot, Rose. This is an English name. I suggest we also give her a Tamil name, Kurinji. So she could be called, Rose Kurinji.

The kurinji flower grows in the mountains we can see from here, from Rojavanam School. In Tamil culture, the mountains and the kurinji flower are associated with togetherness and joy.

The kurinji flower is purple and blue. It blossoms only once every 12 years; just as it takes 12 years for our students to graduate and bloom.

2) Our AI Teacher Robot's colour

As AI Robot Teacher Rose Kurinji has come to us "out of the box", she is very light-skinned. (1)

What message might it send to the Indian teachers and students of our school, who almost all have darker skin than this Robot, that this Robot, who is associated with Intelligence and Authority, has lighter skin than 98 per cent of them and of Indian people in general?

A little make-up could resolve this matter. And going forward: Barbies now come in various colours. It would seem like it might be a good idea for AI Teacher Robots to come in various colours also.

3) Developing AI Teacher Robots

Again: We are delighted to be in the position of being able to seek to find ways that AI Robot Teachers could be used for the benefit of our students, and for all others!

We at Rojavanam School will not only be pioneers in the use of the AI Teacher Robot, we will also be pioneers in the observation, analysis, and development of the uses of the AI Teacher Robot.

We need to understand the abilities and uses, as well as the limits of Artificial Intelligence and Robots.

We need to understand what these things can do, and what they cannot do – while all the while improving them.

AI Teacher Robot Rose Kurinji will be a dynamic, growing, evolving entity, connected to the Internet, with new data and software coming into her all of the time.

It would be great if eventually our older RIS students could help to program our AI Robots, to help to make them ever more effective aspects of the education process – and to learn practical application of computer programming along the way.

Artificial Intelligence is here to stay, Robots are here to stay. Electronic Personal Assistants are widely used: many people find them useful.

It is our job, responsibility, and mission as educators and as humans to use these elements to our advantage, and to help our teachers and students, and others, use them to their advantage also.

And we will let people know our most successful practices and also what we have found to be possible pitfalls.

We will do this as a social service for the people of Tamil Nadu and beyond – for the parents, the students, the educators, the technology developers, and for society at large.

We will see what works about the AI Teacher Robot, and what does not. We will help to improve it.

As Dean of Rojavanam International School and as an Education Scholar, I will help to gather the data about what happens with AI Teacher Robot Rose Kurinji, and I will write about it.

4) The Role of AI Teacher Robots

Teaching is not just about giving information.

It is primarily about helping the students to think about the information in context, to give an overview of the topic and the field, and to help students see and put things in perspective. It would seem that these things might continue to be done by human teachers.

Also, robots cannot (and should not be expected to) provide love, empathy, compassion, or intellectual understanding of (or intuition regarding) individual students' emotional and intellectual needs and developmental processes.

The proper role of technology is that people can use technology to enable and empower themselves.

The company that has made the AI Robot Teacher writes, "The robot is designed to complement human educators, not replace them". (2)

So actually an AI Robot Teacher is simply a (human) teacher's "electronic aid".

5) AI Teacher Robots and Tamil Culture

We are here to help develop Tamil culture. We love Tamil Nadu. We will help it grow.

I love Sangam literature, and the Sangam society that produced that literature, and that the literature portrays.

I love Tamil culture's "spirit of cooperation", a term I first heard in Tamil Nadu.

In the past century, Tamil culture developed in the public sphere especially through journals, drama, and cinema.

Now we are in the age of "electronic communication technology". This communication technology, like any other, can be used for self-expression, self-development, and self-exploration, as well as for many other purposes, such as improvement of society.

We are ushering Tamil culture into the new age of age of electronic communication technology. As we do so, we will remain grounded in the beauty and in the morality, the sense of justice, of Tamil culture.

it was not only the Pandian king who apologised for his mistake, after he unjustly put Kovalan to death. There was also the Chola king, Manu-nidhi Cholan, who punished his own son after his son had been driving a chariot too fast and had killed a calf.

it was not only Kannagi who fought for justice. There was also Nalla Thangal (who caused a great flood). And Isakki (also known as Neeli), who also got justice. All of these female characters in a sense started as human women, but when they felt they or their family members had been abused, they went into a fury, and nature assisted them.

The powerful male ruler who apologises for his and his family members' mistakes and makes atonement accordingly; and the seemingly powerless female who is aided by nature in her struggle for justice and turns out to not be so powerless after all – these are archetypes, essential elements, of Tamil culture, and they will be brought into the age of electronic communication in Tamil Nadu and into any future age after that also.

6) Two Kinds of "Electronic Communication Technology" I love

Two of my favourite electronic communication technologies have been word-processing and videoconferencing.

Regarding word-processing:

I wish high school students could be permitted to submit typed essays.

The first step in the writing process is to write down all of one's ideas relating to a topic. Then, one must organise the material, order it, and polish it.

In this re-ordering process, I experience great joy and pleasure in cutting-and-pasting on my laptop what I have written. I have been doing this for 40 years now, and I can't imagine editing my work in any other way.

In the course of earning a BA, MA, and PhD, I learned how to state a research question, present a hypothetical answer to that question, and then give evidence to support that hypothetical answer. And to write and organise the material so that every single word in the essay takes the process along.

This is the academic writing process. I treasure having learned to do it, and to be able to teach others to do it.

We used to be concerned with students doing plagiarism – copying someone else's work. Now we also have to be concerned with students having AI do their writing. I do not want to see Artificial Intelligence writing in a student's essay. Placing every single word in an essay is the writer's job, and only if the writer does this job will the essay be organically sensible, and "all of a piece". It is fine if a student wants to use Artificial Intelligence as a consultant, but the student should then re-write the AI material in the student's own words, to fit the context of the section of the essay. In this way, the student takes responsibility for what the student is writing, and makes it the student's own.

So I encourage students to compose essays on computers, and then if a hand-written version of the essay needs to be submitted, they can write out by hand what they composed on the computer.

Regarding videoconferencing:

I was an early adapter to videoconferencing. I love it! I am like a fish in water with it.

My personal website has been storytellingandvideoconferencing.com for the past 25 years.

From the mid-1990s onward, most of my teachers and colleagues in the fields I have been in, Professional Storytelling and Academic Folklore, could not understand my fondness for videoconferencing. They felt videoconferencing would diminish what they love so much – interpersonal interaction, and local knowledge.

When the "Zoom Pandemic" came (as I call Covid-19), I was absolutely ready for the new emphasis on videoconferencing. And I think that many of the people who had for years dismissed videoconferencing as inhuman have come to see that a lot of humanity can occur through videoconferencing.

7) AI Teacher Robots and Teaching Communication

At Rojavanam International School, I teach Communication, oral and written (reading and writing, speaking and listening).

I teach, especially to the older students, (English Language) Conversation, Storytelling, Acting, Public Speaking, and Debating. And Essay Writing and Creative Writing. I also help train the teachers to give instruction in these areas.

We will seek to help teachers develop ways AI Teacher Robots can be used to assist them (the human teachers) to teach in these areas.

I am sure that professional chess players have found ways to improve their abilities by working with AI Robots. We at RIS – especially us teachers of Communication, the Arts, and the Humanities – will do so also.

Why do IITs and corporations need to hire people like me to give their employees training in Communication Skills? It is because, at least in the past, education systems have tended to teach the subject matter. They have tended to train young people to listen and to repeat what they have heard. But the graduates often can't talk aloud very well in the classroom, or in project or business meetings. Many of them can not converse, explain, persuade, or convince very effectively.

It is not a language problem. It is a thinking and behaviour issue. They are not in the habit of thinking step-by-step and expressing themselves in ways that listeners can connect with. They often can't think on their feet and improvise a relevant response at a moment's notice.

We at Rojavanam School are training young people to be effective thinkers and persuaders. We want our students to be increasingly articulate, to be able to talk about the details of things, and to be able to "tie everything together".

We are dedicated to assisting our students to develop their emotional intelligence, as well as their social intelligence (interpersonal intelligence). RIS graduates will be able to hold their own when talking (in English) with anyone in the world. We are teaching the young people ways to think, ways to approach topics, and ways to formulate questions about topics. Ways to think for themselves, and also to think and work as a team. Ways to think independently, respectfully, and creatively. To be self-reliant. To be resourceful, and to make connections between ideas. To collect, gather, and organise their thoughts. To state opinions, and then to support those opinions with evidence, facts, expert opinions, statistics, and so forth. This is "rhetoric": the art and craft of persuading and convincing people to see things the way one sees them.

A bottom line regarding education is: Do the young people improve their abilities to read – and to comprehend what they have read, for example, by being able to identify and discuss the meanings of a story? Do the young people improve their abilities to write and speak in meaningful ways?

We will find ways for AI Teacher Robots to help with all of these processes.

We will help to develop AI Teacher Robots that can help us to discover and develop these abilities in our students, that can help our students to discover and develop these abilities in themselves.

References

1) A photo of the AI Teacher Robot at Rojavanam International School is at https://storytellinginstitute.org/RIS_AI_Teacher_Robot_photo.jpg

2) "The robot is designed to complement human educators, not replace them".

As stated on page 6 of

https://storytellinginstitute.org/BSRAI_AI_Teacher_Robot_info.pdf

and on pages 1 and 2 of

https://storytellinginstitute.org/BSRAI_AI_Teacher_Robot_FAQs.pdf

Note: Our AI Teacher Robot is made by Makerlabs (<https://makerlab.in>).
Bonifon School of Robots and Artificial Intelligence (BSRAI) (<https://bsrai.in>)
is an authorised distributor in Tamil Nadu.