GREAT DECISIONS
1918 • FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION
HIGH SCHOOL
APRIL 2025

TEACHERS: CHECK OUT THE BACK PAGE

AI + EDUCATION

A NEW WAY TO LEARN

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

WHAT'S REALLY REAL?

CATCHING UP WITH THE FUTURE

BY ALLISON GUSTAVSON

CREATIVE LEARNING

Theodor Horydczak/Library of Congress

Before the internet, students had to rely on libraries to look up any information they needed for classes and make handwritten notes.

Since it was released to the public a little over two years ago, ChatGPT—and the other Large Language Models (LLMs) that followed close on its heels—has become a virtual sandbox for people of all ages and backgrounds. Entrepreneurs, artists, and even scientists are using it as a creative space where they can try out new ideas. For many, the rise of this new technology is a reminder that inspiration can naturally emerge when we're just messing around with the tools at hand.

At the same time, artificial intelligence—especially **generative AI**—has sparked a global debate over both its promise and potential perils. The tension is particularly high in the world of education, where AI is actively transforming how students acquire knowledge, find facts, think critically, solve problems, and communicate.

Most students already know what districts like Seattle Public Schools learned the hard way when they banned ChatGPT in 2023. The district's reversal of that ban by the fall of that same year—opting instead to

"formulate a comprehensive plan for integrating AI into our district's educational framework"—was an admission of an inescapable truth: AI is here to stay.

Today's students are the first generation to navigate this world-changing technology. The task—for students and teachers alike— is to learn how to safely and productively live, work, and, yes, even play with it.

AI AT SCHOOL

Many conversations about AI's role in classrooms center on the prospect of cheating. When students use tools like ChatGPT to write a five-page essay on *The Great Gatsby* or turn to the AI assistant Claude to solve a math problem, the learning process is clearly disrupted. But even though some students misuse AI to get out of doing work, it might be happening less than many people think.

The results of a recent study indicated that cheating remained "relatively stable" after the introduction of AI. In other words, the technology isn't so much *changing* student habits and tendencies as *amplifying* existing ones. People who were already likely to cheat may use AI in a negative way. Others may find more productive uses. As Playlab cofounder Yusuf Ahmad put it, "Murrow [An AI-powered writing coach] in the hands of a student who is motivated to improve their writing is a really powerful tool. It's going to change teaching and it's going to change learning. Murrow in the hand of a kid who's not motivated and is not in a context that's supporting them or motivating them is likely not going to be as transformative."

Monkey Business Images/Dreamstime.com

Many teachers are starting to use AI in classroom activities so they can help guide students in the right ways to use it, such as asking it for help as a writing coach.

Many educators are coming to the conclusion that learning how to adapt to the rise of AI technology is preferable to resisting its use. Trying to stop students from using it is becoming increasingly difficult. AI detection tools are notoriously unreliable, and students can, in fact, even train AIs to replicate their writing style.

THE DEBATE

IS AI HARMING OUR ABILITY TO THINK CRITICALLY?

YES

- ✓ AI's quick, convenient responses make us less likely to think through difficult problems on our own.
- ✓ Summaries tempt us to skip **primary-source** reading, sacrificing insight into many angles of an issue.
- ✓ Critical thinking requires sustained attention, and AI could lead to shorter attention spans.

NO

- ✗ AI takes care of simple jobs, freeing us up for higher-level work.
- ✗ AI drives people to become better at evaluating information and deciding for themselves what is correct.
- ✗ AI helps us reason through our arguments and fine-tune our perspectives.

Lefttime/Dreamstime.com

MidJourney/Wikimedia

After an image of Pope Francis wearing a designer puffy coat took the internet by storm in 2023, people were disappointed to learn that it was an AI-generated deep fake. However, it was realistic enough to fool many of the people who shared it and helped it go viral.

Instead, students will ideally learn to engage with AI as a real-time extension of teacher feedback. An ongoing revision process can replace waiting days, or even weeks, for teacher comments on a rough draft. **Walled garden** chatbots, in particular, can be very helpful. Unlike more general sources like ChatGPT, these AI programs do not have access to the entire internet. Instead, they draw from limited content specifically curated by their designers. This helps reduce the misinformation and "**hallucinations**" that plague large-scale AI models trained on the open internet. Some walled garden bots can provide detailed comments that encourage students to think more deeply about their topic without being spoon-fed answers.

THE BATTLE FOR TRUTH

Part of the debate over AI's usefulness has to do with what counts as "reliable" information. In a time of intense **polarization**, people's ideas can vary dramatically based on political, religious, and cultural beliefs. Depending on how an AI program is built and trained, it could display a **bias** against certain viewpoints.

A recent United Nations Human Rights headline perfectly sums up the problem: "Bias from the past leads to bias in the future." Most of the time, we don't know what information is used to feed AI programs, and we also don't know what's being left out. This is a thorny problem for a number of reasons, including the fact that many such biases are "unknown" to to the people training AI systems until they manifest in real-world problems. For example, several years ago, Amazon was building an AI program to help hire new employees. It had to be scrapped after it taught itself to favor male job candidates due to poorly chosen training data. The bias in the training data led to a bias in the AI program. This type of situation raises deep questions about fairness in the use of AI programs.

As if all of this wasn't enough for today's students to contend with, the problem of AI-created **deep fakes** continues to grow faster than educators can keep up with it. Studies show that the problem is more widespread and underreported than most realize, and that schools tend to respond only when a situation arises,

rather than proactively developing policies to limit the spread of deep fakes.

Deep fake photos and videos of classmates can circulate quickly and widely, wreaking havoc on the victims' lives and also leaving a painful record that can extend far into the future. As one mother put it, "You know how many colleges could find out about her [deep fake] picture floating around, without her even knowing, and reject her? You know how many job offers will not be offered because of that picture? And many girls, unfortunately, are in that boat."

As educators scramble to catch up to the enormity of the issue, schools must work harder to reduce the temptation, create safe reporting systems, and teach students that sharing deep fakes of their classmates without consent can be a crime in certain cases, with far-reaching consequences.

SHIFTING DYNAMICS

AI is undoubtedly changing the way students and teachers relate to each other—and to education in general. For some, this is a welcome disruption: a move towards more collaborative, open-ended learning between students and teachers can lead to deeper levels of curiosity and engagement. Teachers can plan more innovative types of lessons—say, using AI to enable historical figures to tell their own stories. AI technology might also help them address learning differences between their students in the classroom. It could even help students spend less time on tasks such as filling out progress logs and managing due dates. This could give them more time to focus on the more stimulating parts of their work.

Adrian Antao, a high school English teacher, sees the benefits of embracing walled-garden AI:

THE DEBATE

SHOULD EDUCATORS BE EXPECTED TO KEEP UP WITH AI DEVELOPMENTS AND USE AI TOOLS IN THEIR WORK?

YES

- ✓ AI is here to stay, and students will need these skills in the workforce.
- ✓ Using AI for administrative tasks will give teachers more time to interact with students.
- ✓ AI can help teachers create more stimulating lesson plans.

NO

- ✗ Teachers are already working overtime and cannot add to their burden.
- ✗ It's impossible to keep up with the rapidly changing AI landscape.
- ✗ Differences between well-resourced and underfunded schools will only get worse.

Mtlapcevic/ Dreamstime.com

Koshiro K/Shutterstock

With so many AI apps available, and new ones being created all the time, it can be hard to figure out which ones are most useful for you.

Daniel De La Hoz/ Dreamstime.com

In-class, written tests are one way for teachers to judge whether students are truly learning.

"You can convince Toni [the chatbot] that it was wrong, but what that takes is for you to take a stand in your own writing, which is such a huge move in the writer's psychology, to have the confidence in your own sentences, where often students are coming from a space of doubt and fear."

It's helpful for students to bear in mind that many teachers remain anxious about the new technology, and for valid reasons. Navigating the ever-changing landscape adds to their workload—often far more than the technology itself actually offsets. There can also be a steep learning curve, and busy teachers do not always have time to spend teaching themselves new technology. This is especially true for teachers in schools that do not offer AI support or training.

A "sandbox" approach to AI—playful exploration within certain guidelines—raises key questions about its usage and governance. Will we remain tethered to AI shaped by corporate interests, with their incentives and biases? Or will we co-create the AI era, both within traditional education and

THE DEBATE

SHOULD STUDENTS BE PENALIZED FOR USING AI?

YES

- ✓ Using AI is not the same thing as thinking for yourself.
- ✓ Access to better AI tools will create an unfair advantage for some students.
- ✓ Once students get too used to using AI, they won't be able to work without it.

NO

- ✗ Workplace success requires learning to work with AI tools.
- ✗ Detecting AI use and punishing students takes time away from teachers' other priorities.
- ✗ Learning should be redesigned to maximize collaboration with AI.

Ricochet69/Dreamstime.com

beyond, with a more pro-human model? The choice is ours.

WHAT *YOU* CAN DO

- **Stay informed** about the latest developments in AI—including which types of technology are on the rise, how they're being used, and what people are saying about them.
- **Enroll** in deep fake awareness training. This will help you learn to avoid falling for AI-generated false information spread online.
- **Use** the MIT App Inventor to create an AI app that addresses an issue you're passionate about.
- **Write or call** elected officials to let them know what you think about how AI should be governed.
- **Vote** when you are old enough. In most cases, you can't vote until you're 18, but in many states you can register at 16 or 17, and you'll be all set when 18 rolls around.

TEEN TRAILBLAZERS

Courtesy of Neha Shukla

Neha Shukla

At 19, Neha Shukla already has a record of accomplishments that could span an entire career: an author, entrepreneur, inventor, and AI ethicist, she founded the "world's largest youth-led AI ethics literacy movement" to grapple with the ethical complexities of AI. As Chair of the World Economic Forum's Generation AI Youth Council, she advises governments and companies on developing ethical AI policies to protect children; her initiatives have connected with more than 70,000 students across 35 countries, inspiring them to use both their voices and STEM skills to reimagine a "more equitable and just digital world."

Adrian Martinez

Adrian Martinez struggled with the "one size fits all" approach to education and figured he wasn't alone. The 16-year-old has developed an app to bring a personalized, gamified educational experience to every student, so they can access resources to study independently from home. Martinez claims that InfiniLearn, which will soon have a virtual reality option, is the most "advanced educational platform in the nation."

Courtesy of Shraman Kar

Shraman Kar

Shraman Kar is the founder and CEO of Community AI, a nonprofit that helps young people design AI projects for social good. The organization has already reached more than 1,200 people in 58 countries working to address real-world problems. It runs summer camps and workshops, hosts talks with industry and academic leaders, provides advisory and mentorship opportunities for its members, and even raised $50,000 to fund promising projects and scholarships for low-income students.

THE BACK PAGE

SHOW YOUR WORK

1. What do you think this cartoon is trying to say about AI? Why do or don't you agree?
2. Is the boy in the cartoon creating a useful prompt for the AI? Why or why not?
3. What ways could the boy in the cartoon use AI to help him improve his own writing instead of asking the AI to write the essay for him?

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO MAKE GREAT DECISIONS

1. What role do you think AI should play in classrooms?
2. What kinds of laws should be passed to control the use of AI, if any?
3. **YOUR STORY:** How has AI changed the way you do schoolwork?

KEY WORDS & TERMS	
deep fakes	polarization
generative AI	walled garden
hallucinations	

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A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

GREAT DECISIONS
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