National Association of *Independent* Schools

Navigating the New Normal: Teaching in the Age of AI

JESSICA FLAXMAN

KATIE O'SHAUGHNESSEY

February 06, 2023

In our roles at Rye Country Day School (NY), we work to support faculty, staff, and students in a number of ways including their access to and use of technology for the purposes of teaching and learning. Already aware of artificial intelligence (AI) and curious about the potential impacts on our classrooms, we were intrigued when an English teacher shared language that ChatGPT produced in response to a question about the novel she was teaching, *Interior Chinatown* by Charles Yu.

As conversations about ChatGPT increased in December 2022, we met with upper school English teachers, curious to find out if they could discern which paragraphs about *Interior Chinatown* the bot had produced and which a student had written. Few were able to, and ultimately, more questions than answers emerged.

That's when we decided to invite teachers and staff members to a professional development session to talk about AI and its potential benefits as well as our concerns.

Chat with a Chatbot

Interested in professional development that meets the moment, we started to plan a discussion with teachers from across the school in order to learn what they thought about this novel technology already in the hands of our students. To plan for the January meeting, we engaged the bot in a dialogue to help us name our session.

Us: What would you call a professional development session for teachers about how ChatGPT will influence the future of education?

ChatGPT: A professional development session for teachers about how ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) will influence the future of education could be called "Exploring the Future of Education with ChatGPT." This title conveys the focus of the session, which is to explore the potential impact that ChatGPT technology may have on education in the future. It also conveys the interactive nature of the session, as it will likely involve teachers engaging with ChatGPT technology in some way.

Some alternative options for the title could include: "ChatGPT and the Future of Learning," "Innovations in Education: The Role of ChatGPT," "Preparing for the Future of Education with ChatGPT," or "ChatGPT: Transforming Education in the 21st Century."

Ultimately, the choice of title will depend on the specific goals and objectives of the session as well as the audience it is intended for.

Us: If we want to prepare teachers to work in a world where AI is part of children's lives and we still want to teach children to write on their own, what would you call the professional development session wherein we talk with teachers about those goals?

ChatGPT: A professional development session could be called "Teaching Writing in the Age of AI." This title conveys the focus of the session, which is to help teachers prepare for teaching writing in a world where AI is increasingly present and to support children in developing their own writing skills.

Some alternative options for the title could include: "Preparing for the Future of Writing Education," "Navigating the Intersection of AI and Writing Instruction," "Fostering Independent Writing Skills in the Digital Age," or "Supporting Writing Development in a Tech-Forward World."

Again, the choice of title will depend on the specific goals and objectives of the session as well as the audience. It may be helpful to consider the needs and interests of the teachers who will be participating.

Us: We'd like to focus on helping teachers find what is relevant about teaching in a world where AI exists. Could you make a clever title with more of this emphasis?

ChatGPT: Certainly! Here are a few options for clever and enticing titles for a professional development session that focuses on helping teachers find what is relevant about teaching in a world where AI exists:

- "Navigating the New Normal: Teaching in the Age of AI"
- "Empowering Teachers in the AI Era"
- "Finding Relevance in a Tech-Forward World"
- "Thriving as a Teacher in the Digital Age"
- "Preparing for the Future of Education: Strategies for Success in the AI Era"
- "Navigating the Intersection of AI and Education: A Guide for Teachers"

These titles are designed to convey the focus of the session, which is to help teachers find what is relevant about teaching in a world where AI exists. They also emphasize the importance of preparing for and thriving in the digital age. These titles may be especially effective at attracting teachers who are interested in exploring new approaches to teaching and learning in the digital age and who want to find ways to stay current and relevant in a tech-forward world.

A Meeting of the Minds

Having selected a reasonable title for our session (and a headline for this article) from the many options the bot offered, we then did the very human tasks of securing a location for our meeting, placing an order for refreshments from our foodservice provider, and advertising the meeting on our school's learning management system. We drummed up interest over lunch and in hallways, shared a sign-up sheet, and sent reminders.

On the day of the discussion, 20 colleagues from nearly every discipline were in attendance, including those from the learning support team, librarians, school counselors, and teachers in the social studies, English, math, science, computer science, and modern languages departments. Administrators even took an hour after school to talk, drink coffee, and connect about this technology.

Colleagues first shared their reasons for coming. Some were curious about how we plan to manage AI as a school, and others were interested in how educators nationwide are responding. Some of our colleagues expressed feelings of sadness for

the written word as well as excitement and worry. They were concerned about how we'll set boundaries for students and enforce discipline. Meanwhile, there's a fascination about how we'll think about originality and an interest in *what* students learn and *how* they do their work. We remembered some of the many technological advancements and developments that we thought at the time would revolutionize our worlds in scary ways but didn't (think CliffNotes, the accessibility of everything online, spell check, audiobooks, and even Zoom).

Then we started to generate questions, ideas, and enthusiasm about how we might shift or change our thinking and our practices in order to embrace and manage bots for the sake of our students. We identified key skills students need to have that, at this time, AI cannot demonstrate or replicate (intrinsic motivation; discerning and prioritizing information; synthesizing information and ideas in a unique way; voice, diction, and tone oral; and performative demonstrations of knowledge).

We also agreed that activities and conversations with students about the ethical implications of AI will be important to help all of us make sense of the limits of this technology, potential biases, and the future and current impacts. We wondered if using chatbots to revise, improve, or analyze provide another construct for teaching and modeling writing in every discipline. And we talked about: What constitutes cheating in this new context, what is important about original material, and how do we measure originality and its value?

After our conversations, we felt invigorated and connected. We are not in this alone, and this is not a bad place to be. We ask students to do things that are uncomfortable and uncharted territory, and teachers need to model the same. Education and discussion among teachers have already helped us to build capacity to take on this challenge within a supportive cohort. Because of this work, lessons are already integrating this topic.

We do not want to simply warn students against using AI, as this would be disingenuous and counter to progress; instead, our teachers are engaging students in conversations about where and how they see this technology impacting their own worlds, and what it might change for their capacities in the future. We look forward to hosting our next discussion this month and furthering discussions with this organic professional learning cohort over the coming months.

About the Author

Jessica Flaxman

Jessica Flaxman is dean of faculty and employees and interim upper school English department chair at Rye Country Day School in Rye, New York.

Katie O'Shaughnessey

Katie O'Shaughnessey is director of academic technology and assistant upper school principal at Rye Country Day School in Rye, New York.

National Association of Independent Schools

2001 K Street NW, Suite 1150

Washington, DC 20006

NAIS Office: (202) 973-9700

Bookstore: (240) 646-7052