Empowering educators in the age of AI



Part 2

My curiosity got the best of me and I registered for ChatGPT. I was quickly amazed by the efficiency and timesaving it presented me.

This prompted my dive into a rabbit hole of learning – engaging in a variety of reading and conversations in education and other sectors, as well as trying different aspects of artificial intelligence (AI) in education within my own context. The path has been complex, filled with challenges, wonders and more possibilities.

After several months, I find myself grappling with more questions than answers. The intricate landscape of AI in education presents a myriad of possibilities for implementation in my classroom and in our schools — tools like Diffit, Gradescope, Babbel, Duolingo, Powerschool, Brightbytes, Photomath, Grammarly and more.

The sheer breadth of choices can be overwhelming, often leaving me with the sensation of not making significant progress for extended periods of time.

Consequently, I've chosen to centre my exploration around a pivotal concept: how can AI enhance and augment my current teaching reality and foster an inclusive and equitable practice in public education?

From what I have observed, read and experienced, reaction to change in education varies greatly worldwide – some have struggled, while others have thrived.

What works seamlessly for one teacher may cause chaos for another. Numerous factors come into play, determining whether an innovation succeeds or fails with first and foremost the fact that this is a human endeavour with all its complexities.

Yet, when faced with challenges, when the status quo shifts in our classrooms and schools, the typical response tends to be the outright rejection or banning of whatever innovation is at hand which stops possible positive changes immediately.

Navigating the era of AI, the debate on whether to ban or permit cell phones reflects past discussions on inevitable technological advancements.

In staff discussions, the disruptive impact of cell phones is palpable, posing challenges related to mental health, disengagement and cyberbullying.

The question arises: is the issue the cell phone itself or the embedded algorithms in games and social media as well as constant notifications?

No doubt the cell phone can help to enhance the learning and teaching experience in many ways. Despite some schools banning cell phones in the face of these challenges, a nuanced approach is crucial, recognising the complexity of education, age appropriate with scaffolding and contextual. Addressing this requires a proactive share strategy across all grade levels, emphasising comprehensive digital literacy aligned with frameworks like ISTE and Edutopia, supported by experts like Dr. Michael Rich for teaching executive functioning skills, digital citizenship and preemptive digital wellness initiatives.

A forward-looking approach involves instilling responsible technology use throughout a student's academic journey to navigate the digital landscape and mitigate addiction risks.

With AI infiltrating our classrooms, we have a different beast to grapple with that is rapidly evolving, which prompts an initial instinct to reject it. Many have outright banned the use of AI in their districts, schools, classrooms, citing valid concerns such as the vital necessity to safeguard our students' privacy and digital footprint or the exponential rise of plagiarism in our high schools and universities.

But this is not going away, it would be better to engage, look for ways forward, and educate on responsible use of AI in our classrooms and schools.

A multifaceted revolution in students' learning journey

AI in our classrooms extends far beyond ChatGPT; it is just one element in the education revolution. For students, ChatGPT represents merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to writing assistance. Sudowrite, Caktus AI, Hemingway Editor and GrammarlyGo are equally adept at supporting and aiding students in their assignments.

The prevalent fear is that these tools facilitate plagiarism among students, and unfortunately, this concern is not unfounded — it is a reality — which is more pronounced in secondary and tertiary settings.

But, we are not merely witnessing the impact of AI confined to writing assignments. Students are now employing AI tools like Photo Math as personalised math tutors, scanning equations and receiving step-by-step solutions in seconds.

Language learning takes on various forms, whether through the more traditional approach of Babbel or the gamified experience of Duolingo.

They use Otter A.I. for note-taking assistance and meeting minutes, leverage Readwise for document summarisation and highlighting key points, seek feedback on their work through Gradescope, or create mind maps of their learning with tools like Coggle and Mural AI.

These examples illustrate the diverse ways in which students are integrating AI into their learning processes.

Highlighting the imperative for profound reflection prompts a reconsideration of both the content and methods of education, accompanied by a re-evaluation of our expectations and beliefs.

I advocate for the integral role of coaching, teaching and providing support throughout the learning journey, focusing on skills for effective information navigation and essential competencies, alongside achieving the ultimate outcome. Tackling this challenge necessitates a comprehensive strategy, prioritising the learning process, instilling productive work habits and nurturing competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and communication.

The key lies in developing age-appropriate scaffolding that bolsters these fundamental aspects of a well-rounded education for each student, while utilising AI tools to amplify their learning, engagement and overall educational experience.

My journey as a teacher

As a teacher, I've explored and tried various AI tools and tried combining them with other digital possibilities with the aim of

crafting an enhanced version of myself as both a professional educator and learner. However, I've come to realise that exploring the full potential of these possibilities demands a significant investment of time.

For teachers, this is not new. Integrating any digital tool, whether it be to enhance our professional skills and/or learning, means a substantial time investment and does affect our workload. It will require a careful balance to ensure that the endeavour contributes positively to the teacher's wellbeing, allowing for both professional growth and a manageable workload.

This is especially important considering the current challenges faced by the teaching profession of retaining existing educators and attracting new ones, which has become increasingly difficult for a variety of reasons.

The influence of AI appears to be more prominent in terms of learning outcomes, pedagogy, assessment and student engagement, rather than in our other professional responsibilities like planning, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels.

For us at these levels, achieving a balance in this pivotal moment is almost laughable in the face of the challenges. While AI tools offer opportunities for enhanced teaching, learning, and workload efficiencies, the revolutionary transformation of AI has increased our current workload because of all the challenges we are trying to adapt, implement and navigate in this ever-evolving landscape.

Striking a feasible balance requires thoughtful planning, robust support systems and professional development to help teachers effectively integrate AI tools without overwhelming their workload, yet this is not what's happening.

Transitioning from the challenges of integrating AI and addressing workload concerns, I've found solace and empowerment in embracing specific AI tools.

In refining my planning, creativity and lesson diversification, ChatGPT has proven to be transformative. Exploring alternatives like Copilot, Khanmigo, Magic School, Diffit and Curipod to elevate various aspects of my profession, including creating materials – particularly challenging in non-English languages – managing administrative tasks and professional correspondence, generating prompts and providing essay feedback etc.

If these names sound unfamiliar, don't worry – they were once unfamiliar to me as well, just a few months ago and I'm still not comfortable utilising every single one, nor should I be.

In the realm of assessment and evaluation, spanning testing, rubrics and formative feedback, I've been immersing myself in Gradescope as well as the tools above.

For tackling plagiarism in writing, I've found Grammarly and Turnitin to be invaluable. In the context of teaching a second language, my exploration has led me to trying to see how Duolingo and Babbel fit into my classroom.

While Brightbytes aids in data analysis for informed decision-making, the reality remains that the broader educational system must acknowledge and address the challenges posed by the rapid integration of AI tools to facilitate a smoother transition for educators and our learners.

Armand Doucet, a member of the Order of Canada, is a globally recognised thought leader for his innovative contributions to education. With a focus on student engagement and the integration of technology, he has become a prominent figure in shaping progressive teaching methodologies. His commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments and advocacy for positive changes in public education has established him as a leading voice in the field. The opinions expressed in this article are that of the author and does not necessarily reflect any official policies or positions of Education International, the AEU or SSTUWA. This article is the second in a series, was first published on the Education International website and has been reproduced here with permission.

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By Armand Doucet

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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