Andrew Brown

Mrs. Small

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AI Chatbots and Their Role in the Humanities Classrooms

Education lives in the past. A decade behind modern society, education digs its heels into how it has always operated, staunchly refusing to move forward with society's advances. The most recent victim of this stubbornness: generative AI. Teachers fear we will move to simpler times and students will lose creative abilities should we embrace AI; but this is simply not true. This has been proved time and time again as technologies have been feared, accepted, then revered by our education system. This era of fear, however, leads to students who are not ready to integrate these technologies into their corporate lives, where it may be expected or encouraged. This time is then followed by students who are fluent in technology, as education finally realizes its use and benefit, allowing them to thrive in a way where those before them could not. We must end this cycle at its source – the education system itself –, and we should start with generative AI. Its purposes are so much more profound than many realize as AI can easily be adapted to our humanities classrooms to teach what already is taught with the extension of the new technologies. Although some students will inevitably abuse the technology, AI chatbots should be used in English classrooms to teach students how to properly use technology, prepare them for a future with AI, and teach lessons such as media and information literacy.

Many teachers have concerns about implementing chatbots into their classrooms as they fear students may use them to cheat on assignments, it will lead to a loss of creativity, and no work will be their own anymore. While these fears may be reasonable, they are rooted in mistrust

and misinformation. Jessica Grose, and author who wrote an Op-Ed for the *New York Times*, found through interviews with teachers that "there are a few real benefits to using A.I. in schools — it can be useful in speeding up rote tasks like adding citations to essays and doing basic coding — the drawbacks are significant" (Groose). She, along with many others who fear emerging technology in our school systems, believes that "students [who] rely on generative A.I. tool like ChatGPT to outsource brainstorming and writing, [...] may be losing the ability to think critically and to overcome frustration with tasks that do not come easily to them," (Groose). These concerns are quite valid given how some students use chatbots in class today: inputting prompts with their rubrics hoping to get a half-decent essay spat out for them to paste into their Google doc. When chatbots are used in this manner, I would agree that students would lose the ability to think critically, however, this is not how I, nor many others, believe it should be used in academia. Those who wish to see it used in classrooms envision it used as a tool for both students and teachers, much like a computer or a calculator, a supplement to current educational methods. AI could be used to help teach lessons, rather than skip them. AI can nourish critical thinking, rather than take it away. Not a replacement, but instead an improvement.

Should we implement chatbots into the English classroom, it could be used as an effective tool for teaching information literacy skills, showing students to not trust all sources, especially those from AI. Lessons in information and media literacy have been taught in the English and other humanities classes for decades now. Recently, chatbots, whether for better or worse, have been used by students as a source of information. This is primarily done when they try to cheat on essays, AI often "hallucinating", or returning false answers, to students' inquiries. These false answers make it obvious to the teacher that AI was used and give the student a false understanding of the topic. This opens up a great opportunity for information literacy skills to be

developed by intentionally using the chatbot's constant misunderstanding of factual information. This form of education with AI is wonderful for teachers who may still be on the fence about incorporating these technologies into their classrooms as it uses AI in a naturally distrusting way, showing students the reasons to not use it outside of class. Should this happen, students will find themselves cheating with AI less often, knowing their answers are unreliable. PhD candidate Leon Furze who is currently studying the use of generative AI in the classroom recommends having "students analyze the output of an AI writer to look for potential 'hidden biases' and assumptions. Provide the AI with prompts designed to expose these hidden biases," (Furze). Doing this kind of assignment would allow students to see firsthand the issues with information taken from generative AI. Not only that, but it would also teach them how to refine search terms, how to tell if the information is "bad", and grow their ability to be able to independently find reputable sources. These are all lessons meant to be taught to us in the humanities classroom, and generative AI hands us the tools to do so on a silver platter. Not only would this teach these lessons to students, but it would also teach them about AI and how its proper use does not lie in generating information.

In addition to using AI chatbots' flaws as lessons and resources for education, their successes can be used similarly to help students understand widely taught English concepts. Chatbots are a generative AI. They are supposed to synthesize data to generate ideas, not facts. So why should we not use it as it was intended? Allowing us to learn these English topics as well as how to use generative AI. One teacher discussed using chatbots "In English 2, where [they] usually struggle with research papers, students used AI and their thesis to create an outline and plan their papers, which led to the essay being more organized and better overall," (Collier). As Collier shows, AI was successfully used as a tool to teach a lesson that without AI might have

been harder for students to grasp. Learning was not replaced but instead enhanced by the use of AI, taking time off the teacher's plate and showing students examples specific to their topics. Another teacher had "[students] use AI to develop research questions for a passion project, create sections within their research, and even run the completed essay through AI for editing recommendations," (Collier). This serves as another wonderful example of a lesson taught using AI where students learned the lesson that has been taught for years while also learning how to properly use the technology. These examples only represent the start of how AI can be used properly in humanities classrooms, expanding further to lessons in good prompt generation and development, editing our written work, and more. Chatbots can be used as they were made to serve and build up the education system, rather than bring it down.

AI need not be scary nor a threat to our education. It can be used to enhance our education, making students ready for the future of technology while remaining educated in the same topics taught for decades in our humanities classrooms.

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