Failure to Contain or Failure of Imagination? Exploring Artificial Intelligence's Implications for Feminist Pedagogy

Anne Kerber
Minnesota State University, Mankato, anne.kerber@mnsu.edu
ChatGPT, a content-generating tool powered by artificial intelligence (AI) launched in late 2022, catalyzed conversations around its potentially disruptive and innovative implications for higher education. Despite the early buzz around this technology, I only took notice of it in late spring 2023, when colleagues began reporting issues with their students using it to craft “answers to tests or writing assignments in lieu of writing themselves” (Small, 2023, para 1). As I learned more and considered how to adapt my own pedagogical practices in response, it was difficult to resist the impulse toward imposing strict boundaries around its usage. Yet, as a communication scholar, I was also troubled by the policing metaphors permeating discourses around ChatGPT and how they positioned students (e.g., Keegin, 2023; Waxman, 2023). Amid my struggle to make sense of this tension, I was reminded of Webb et al.’s (2002) exhortation that “education either functions as an instrument facilitating students’ integration and conformity into the logic of the present system, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’” (p. 68). Feminist pedagogy offers educators resources for examining how generative AI may contribute to a practice of freedom by re-thinking our current practices. In what follows, I offer three ideas to expand understandings of ChatGPT and related technologies, particularly with regard to classroom equity: Foregrounding student perspectives, engaging ethics, and reconceptualizing assessment.

**Foregrounding Student Perspectives**

A core commitment of feminist pedagogy involves respect for diversity of personal experience (Webb et al., 2002). I argue educators should begin by engaging in perspective-taking to reframe and understand why students are using generative AI. Discourses surrounding ChatGPT emphasize how it offers cognitive shortcuts, drawing comparisons to other learning technologies such as the pocket calculator, Google, Wikipedia, and spellcheck (e.g., Barnett, 2023; Waxman, 2023). Although such conversations are valuable in helping educators navigate how generative AI will change pedagogy, students’ voices are largely missing from the dialogue (Verma, 2023).

Developing a better sense of students’ interest and desire to use this technology, and, particularly, where their understandings intersect with lived differences is essential from an equity perspective. Parsloe and Smith (2022) offer a poignant reminder to resist ableist thinking that views students’ use of technology as a means to escape the labor of learning. Rather, they implore us to remember students may be struggling to stay in classes for a variety of lived circumstances. How might generative AI tools be useful in leveling the playing field for under-resourced, underrepresented, or marginalized students? For instance, students with learning challenges may find generative AI useful for adjusting reading levels and better comprehending course content (Waxman, 2023). Students who are learning in a second language may also find the tool to be helpful for practicing translation or studying grammar and writing conventions (ChatGPT through an equity lens, 2023).

**Engaging Ethics**

As AI technologies proliferate, students will need both the access and the literacy to use them effectively or risk being left behind. An ethos of feminist pedagogy encourages us to open dialogues on the ethical dimensions of ChatGPT usage from a position of openness and ongoing
learning. For instance, ChatGPT usage challenges traditional definitions of plagiarism and author attribution (Barnett, 2023). How are students making sense of when it is appropriate (or not) to use generative AI? How do their understandings differ from ours as educators? Moreover, how can instructors and students collaborate to develop ethical codes to guide class work?

Although academic integrity is a primary concern, Vaccino-Salvadore (2023) contends that helping students develop AI literacy requires consideration of other important ethical implications, such as data privacy, mitigating bias, and authenticity. Educating students about these issues can allow them to make better informed decisions about AI usage.

**Re-conceptualizing Assessment**

ChatGPT’s continued technological advancement also necessitates a thoughtful re-evaluation of assessment practices. Although students’ inappropriate use of AI-generated content may be currently identifiable, this is unlikely to remain the case as next-generation technologies promise to mimic writing styles (Harris & Alter, 2023). A case in point: ChatGPT is currently free, but its developer, OpenAI, has already introduced GPT-4, a more advanced content generator for a monthly fee (OpenAI, n.d.). Students who cannot afford such premium services will be at a disadvantage compared to those who can. Returning to analog assessment methods (e.g., blue book essays and paper-based tests) creates other equity and accessibility challenges. In this environment, how can we evaluate student learning while keeping equity in mind?

One entry point is focusing on the essential skills or outcomes being assessed and how students are demonstrating them. ChatGPT can help students summarize a theoretical concept. Yet, it may be more impactful to see how students put concepts in conversation with their personal experiences, as Small (2023) recommends. Instructors should also consider how students document the processes of learning. Can students explain how they created an assessment artifact? Can students describe how course materials informed their thinking? Can students engage in dialogue about the artifact and defend their viewpoints?

Another approach involves demonstrating generative AI’s limitations. Small (2023) argues that critical investigations of AI-generated content empower students to consider issues of representation, knowledge creation, and bias. It would be equally instructive to have students identify where ChatGPT outputs fail to use clear and plain language, to fully explain conceptual ideas, or to weave larger ideas across an entire paper. Identifying the shortcomings of AI-created content not only provides students with a deeper understanding of the technology’s benefits and drawbacks, it enables them to discover “the power in authenticity” of their own voices (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 9).

Like generative technologies themselves, adapting to these advancements is an iterative and ever-changing process. Although these ideas represent starting points for integrating a feminist pedagogy perspective into how educators respond to ChatGPT, more productive pathways will continue to be revealed.
References


Open AI (n.d.). *GPT4 is OpenAI’s most advances system, producing safer and more useful responses*. https://openai.com/gpt-4


