

Generative AI and composing: an intergenerational conversation among literacy scholars

Generative AI
and composing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a transcript of a dialogue among literacy educators and researchers on the impact of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in the field. In the spring of 2023, a lively conversation emerged on the National Council of Research on Language and Literacy (NCRL)′s listserv. Stephanie initiated the conversation by sharing an op-ed she wrote for *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* about the rise of ChatGPT and similar generative AI platforms, moving beyond the general public’s concerns about student cheating and robot takeovers. NCRL then convened a webinar of eight leading scholars in writing and literacies development, inspired by that listerv conversation and an organizational interest in promoting intergenerational collaboration among literacy scholars.

Design/methodology/approach – As former doctoral students of two of the panel participants, webinar facilitators Grace and Victoria positioned themselves primarily as learners about this topic and gathered questions from colleagues, P-16 practitioners and those outside the field of education to



assess the concerns and wonderings that ChatGPT and generative AI have raised. The following webinar conversation was recorded on two different days due to scheduling conflicts. It has been merged and edited into one dialogue for coherence and convergence.

Findings – Panel participants raise a host of questions and issues that go beyond topics of ethics, morality and basic writing instruction. Furthermore, in dialogue with one another, they describe possibilities for meaningful pedagogy and critical literacy to ensure that generative AI is used for a socially just future for students. While the discussion addressed matters of pedagogy, definitions of literacy and the purpose of (literacy) education, other themes included a critique of capitalism; an interrogation of the systems of power and oppression involved in using generative AI; and the philosophical, ontological, ethical and practical life questions about being human.

Originality/value – This paper provides a glimpse into one of the first panel conversations about ChatGPT and generative AI in the field of literacy. Not only are the panel members respected scholars in the field, they are also former doctoral students and advisors of one another, thus positioning all involved as both learners and teachers of this new technology.

Keywords Writing, Literacy, Critical literacy, Artificial intelligence, Composing, ChatGPT

Paper type Conceptual paper

In the spring of 2023, a lively conversation emerged on the National Council of Research on Language and Literacy (NCRL)l's listserv. Stephanie (Jones, 2023) initiated the conversation by sharing an op-ed she wrote for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* about the rise of ChatGPT and similar generative artificial intelligence (AI) platforms, moving beyond the general public's concerns about student cheating and robot takeovers. Inspired by that listerv conversation and an organizational interest in promoting intergenerational collaboration among literacy scholars, NCRL then convened a webinar of eight leading scholars in writing development, digital literacies and critical literacies. As former doctoral students of two of the panel participants, webinar facilitators Grace and Victoria positioned themselves primarily as learners about this topic and gathered questions from colleagues, P-16 practitioners and those outside the field of education to assess the concerns and wonderings that ChatGPT and generative AI have raised.

The following webinar conversation was recorded on two different days due to scheduling conflicts. It has been merged and edited into one dialogue for clarity, coherence and convergence. Throughout the webinar, these scholars moved through, among and between several different levels of analysis or critique of generative AI and composition. While the discussion addressed matters of pedagogy, definitions of literacy and the purpose of (literacy) education, other themes included a critique of capitalism, an interrogation of the systems of power and oppression involved in using generative AI, and the philosophical, ontological, ethical and practical life questions about being human. Interestingly, in the process of transcribing and translating two hour-long conversations into one transcript, the authors found themselves engaged in a kind of critical, collaborative, contextually and historically informed coauthor debate around the nuances of language – the kind Lucinda noted “is less likely to take place when a user gets ChatGPT to generate an article.” Altogether, the conversation offers important and critical discussion and different perspectives on using generative AI in the classroom, asking ourselves what it means to be a writer and to write, what it means to teach and be in connection with our students and their lives, what drives the discourses regarding technology in education, what drives the accelerated speed advancing AI and Large Language Models for public use and consumption and what we can imagine education can and will be in the context of this qualitative and monumental leap in technological advancement.

Victoria

What do you think is the root of the uproar and urgency around generative AI? Why is everyone so alarmed?

Lucinda

These writing tools have been around for years, but the marriage of the chatbot interface to the back end of GPT took people by surprise because suddenly they were interacting with something that was speaking to them like a human. I think that is really what has blown people's minds and entranced them, and why it's taken the world by storm.

Kevin

On one hand, the alarm is predictable from a media standpoint, with respect to long traditions of talk about how technology is replacing people or taking over society. Or in the case of schooling, how technologies do everything we're supposed to be doing in school, or that kids are supposed to learn, and suddenly, the entire society becomes ignorant. These are long-standing discourses and types of shock-and-awe narratives. There's also an interest at play from tech developers to have us be at something like a new World's Fair, where everything is new, and the wow factor is really huge.

At the same time, something significant is happening. When I was a doc student, the graphical web was just being developed. People were talking about digital literacies for the first time, really. This, for me, feels like the second big thing with technology and literacy. So, that'd be my two-sided thought about this.

Detra

There's a certain component of fear. With fear, misinformation can seep in. People run with the worst-case scenario, sometimes, particularly when they are aware of how we have already been interacting and engaging with AI. If you're using Spotify, if you're using Netflix, all those predictive algorithms are already a part of our lives. But I 100% agree with Kevin that *generative AI* feels like a game changer. It's hard for people that aren't in the field to make sense of it. For instance, for my sister and my family in West Virginia, this feels very foreign to them because this isn't part of their world. So, I just think it's easy to grasp onto narratives that "this is going to take away jobs" or "students aren't going to learn anything anymore." "Everybody's going to cheat," and "your doctor's not going to really know how to operate on you." So I appreciate you acknowledging the contradictions because I want to be excited, but I also want to be critical. Holding on to both of those pieces is what makes me fearful of the fear.

Gerald

On some level, we are conditioned to be alarmed and panic, right? Where being really alarmed becomes almost normalized. You would think panicking is an exception to life as usual, but now we're living in times where we're all anxious all the time. And it's scarily becoming normalized. Building off Kevin, some of the conditioning has come through popular culture. A close friend who's a film theorist and I were talking about *Blade Runner* and cyberpunk, where you have this melding of tyrannical capitalism and these very nefarious transnational corporations coming together with technology run amok to create dystopias and global apartheid, this world of haves and have nots. I'm kind of really alarmed because we're in that world in many ways. I wonder how AI is going to generally impact people because it is emerging and arising within a context of a global capitalism. It makes me think about a cyberpunk critical pedagogy we might need to develop in the field.

Stephanie

I'm old enough to remember when spell-check and grammar check came along and teachers were alarmed and concerned, wondering how they would know if students knew how to spell or use grammar. A lot of literacy scholars have been saying for a really long time now that the autonomous view of literacy is not helpful. I think the panic, especially among K-12 teachers and university professors, is focused on how they will know if a student wrote their own papers. I'm not really alarmed about that, necessarily. One of the first things I did in a junior level class was tell everyone to open up ChatGPT and let's see what it can do together. We put in these different levels of complex prompts to see what it spits back out, and we manipulated that further by being in dialogue with the chatbox. Being in dialogue with Large Language Model systems is a new literacy, as is the ability to critique and disrupt them, and to understand how they exploit our collective labor and data to generate wealth for a very small number of people.

We can't stay in these very old conventional ways of thinking about literacy. Maybe, finally, AI will really force the majority of us to realize those autonomous ideas or ideologies around literacy don't hold and that could be a productive change in the field of literacy. However, I *am* really alarmed for a different reason. The development and acceleration of AI is motivated through capitalism, which is a literacy that many of us, maybe most, don't have access to. We are still not teaching people to understand how capitalism operates, and what it does to humans and everything beyond humans – our Earth, our subjectivities, our spirits. AI insiders say it's already out of control; it's an arms race. So here we are looking at this invention that insiders have compared to the atomic bomb, for example, and that's terrifying.

Tracey

We're trying to learn as much as we can about it, thinking about how we're preparing our teachers, how we are engaging in our K-12 classrooms around writing, but also it makes me wonder about surveillance as well. That might be part of the fear in people feeling like everything is becoming more computerized. Even though like Lucinda said, it's been here, it feels like it's moving very quickly. And we're learning as we're going. We need to remember that this is also created by humans. I think a lot about surveillance through these technologies. That is also causing some fear and some concern about the unknown.

Lucinda

Surveillance brings us to ethics. ChatGPT came out last November. In Australia, teachers came back after the December–January summer holiday to teach in February, not having had any time to prepare and to think through implications. They were teaching full time and at the same time trying to take on board this enormous societal change that people are saying is on a par with the printing press or the arrival of the internet, maybe even an Oppenheimer moment. They are with students all day, then planning and marking, and it was just a very difficult beginning of the year for us. It's probably different for people with different academic years, but it was hard. And teachers have pressures to get students using these things because “that's the future.” We had ChatGPT banned in government schools in a large part of Australia from the start of the year, and we had private schools forging ahead. Those in government schools were asking “Whoa, it's bad enough to ban it? But at the same time, the private schools have got it in every class?” These are access and equity issues.

Kevin

Lucinda makes a point in her article ([McKnight, 2021](#)) around how maybe there's a panic in English education or literacy education that AI is good at doing a lot of things we are doing in classrooms, particularly what classrooms have become through standardized assessments. What we know about writing pedagogy has been at odds with what's been happening through politics and through assessment practices. Replication and being trained through models are exactly what AI is good at. Through political, assessment-driven and outcomes-based perspectives, literacy has now met its match in a technology that can do it. Creating mundane five-paragraph essays that say very banal things is actually really easy. It takes seconds to do, which is kind of hilarious. But in addition to the panic, there's an opportunity space.

Tracey

We need to have these conversations with our colleagues, the schools we work with and in our classrooms with our students. We're all living through this together. We can't ignore it. I think about spell-checking and Grammarly, and all these different tools out there that we use. Those are helpful, and it doesn't take away from what we're doing as writers. We need to talk about how these can be used in our writing classrooms in ethical ways that our students are accessing. And we definitely need to engage with it and learn about it, so we can be critical consumers of it and ensure we are not replicating oppressive structures or systems as we are engaging in these technologies.

Grace

Lucinda refers to natural language generators and processors as “electric sheep” and “robot writers.” It echoes what Stephanie mentioned about the autonomous model and a narrowing of what literacy and literacy education means. If generative AI can produce adequate writing, what becomes the role of the in-person literacy educator? How should we rethink, redefine, reimagine what literacy education looks like and what our jobs as literacy educators are?

Lucinda

English teachers are in unique positions to have those conversations Detra describes with students. When people say, “It's just a calculator,” I think about Italy. A whole country banned ChatGPT. I don't think many countries have banned calculators. I've changed my position on ChatGPT. Back when I first encountered these as writing tools, two and a half years ago, I was cautiously optimistic and I wrote articles (see [McKnight, 2021](#)) about how we need to engage with them. As I've learned more about them, I feel myself pulled in two directions – the necessity of use and the importance of critique. There isn't currently any ethical way to use these tools. We know they are trained on a stolen corpus of materials. Court cases are addressing this now. We know they're potentially taking people's jobs. Not the technologies, but the humans who are designing and using them to capitalist ends. We've got screenwriters and actors striking in the USA. They're striking for all of us. The Victorian Department of Education is already trialing holographic avatars as teachers. So this future is already here. Then there are the people who are harmed in the creation of these tools through watching violent content and doing data labeling. And when we get students and teachers and preservice teachers to use them, we're putting them at risk, because there are legal issues of copyright and privacy infringement. We need to return to those critical literacy questions that English and Language Arts teachers are so fantastic at asking:

- Q1. Who made these things?
- Q2. Whose voices are privileged?
- Q3. Who benefits?

Stephanie

I agree, Lucinda, teaching and engaging the fundamentals of critical literacies will continue to be a primary purpose of literacy education. I also want to emphasize that our primary job as literacy educators is never to create workers “for the workforce,” which is the neoliberal capitalist mantra we hear in the USA. This is the one place where AI is exciting for me because it can provide the rupture in literacy education that so many of us have been working toward for 20–30 plus years. A part of Grace’s question also seems to be about the broader purpose of education. *Why education? Why should we keep coming together in spaces and gathering children and youth and adults across the lifespan?* A lot of folks have tried to disrupt a normative purpose of education tends to take hold in our schools through politics and policy. That workforce-oriented purpose of education is a patriarchal, colonial, white supremacist, neoliberal, capitalist agenda. We have many models, philosophies and pedagogies regarding a different vision for gathering people in intentional material-discursive spaces. How do we make places together where people come and do meaningful things, in dialogue, to learn about themselves and others, recognize injustice, be creative and dream? Instead of engaging a future-oriented pedagogy of literacy, we can create spaces every day with people that we want to be living in. Do it today. So what does that mean for literacy educators? What’s the materiality of those spaces? What kind of affect are we trying to produce together in these spaces? What are people doing? How are they being? Donna [Haraway \(2016\)](#) would say that part of our role in this world is making kin with humans and multispecies. Literacy education can become gathering spaces where we live and fulfill the kind of ethical and just world we want.

Gerald

Thank you, Stephanie, for that. On one hand, as literacy scholars, we shouldn’t be panicked about this technology in classrooms, because we know what constitutes authorship has always been historically variable, from storytelling traditions to participatory culture. We could go on with countless examples of this and AI. It’s like a post-human iteration of coauthorship or some other form of authorship. And it may push us to imagine beyond the idea of the individual author and all the related notions of property, because that concept really arose in many ways with capitalism.

My friend and I were reflecting back to this huge text we read as undergraduates on [Gadamer’s \(2013\)](#) notion of fusion of horizons. There’s a similar dynamic that goes on when AI or chatbot is here, like the person you’re in dialogue with has this sweeping encyclopedic knowledge that it’s grabbed from all over. And then you come in with your own cultural historical horizon. It’s so much in the logic of questions and answers, how you phrase things with the chat and how you conditioned it to answer your questions. I was thinking about Victoria a lot and many of the conversations we’ve had (see [Gill, 2022](#)). When we were growing up, there were so many aspects of our own identities and histories, which were erased, if not in the textbook. But with ChatGPT, I can condition through this logic of question the answers to talk about, for example, the subaltern history of Mindanao. It kind of creates possibilities for students. We have to support them

in engaging in dialogue with ChatGPT and really pursuing their own singular inquiries and exploring the complexities and nuances of identity which are often erased in the typical history books.

Grace

How does generative AI impact the connection between writing and identity, particularly sociocultural identity? And whose sociocultural identities does ChatGPT privilege, especially because we know it's drawing from the information that's available on the internet? What sociocultural identities are privileged in the internet sources that generative AI draws from?

Kevin

On one hand, there's a lot of documented work around how AI training data sets have been racist or classist or gendered. With AI, there's corporate interest. There's a training data set with a certain kind of perspective on the world and a certain kind of prejudice, a certain way of seeing things that excludes and includes. One of the complicated things for identity is that AI *creates* with the capacity to do mass data analytics, and AI creates data categories we didn't even have before. So if we're thinking along classic sociocultural or sociological demographics, AI creates categories that aren't really even responding to those demographics. It's creating, like 250 categories of identity that corporate interests will be interested in – information about people's practices, preferences, musical tastes and interests. Its demographics are artificial categories of identity. They talk about this as a kind of mass individualization. You're using the technology to either sell or convince somebody at the individual level, but you're massifying information around that individual. That just feels so different than the ways we've been thinking about identity, and how the technology shapes that.

Victoria

Gerald, you said something about a real teacher. We can all agree that ChatGPT is not going to replace real teachers, right? It's a tool, right?

Gerald

This is what the actors' strike is about. Someone can do one movie, and they can capture all that person's mannerisms and the way they speak really accurately, but then they won't need the actual human being anymore.

Victoria

I want to ask Tracey specifically. As someone who's a director and creator for a writing program for a community where identity is central, how do you see this impacting the work you're doing with the girls and the mothers and in your community, where identity and sociocultural demographics are really important to what you write and how you represent yourself?

Tracey

It definitely does not privilege our voices, our stories or our histories. When I search for things or even images, you have to search a very certain specific way. Some of the stuff that comes up, well, that's not how, how we represent ourselves when I think of a young, Latina, adolescent girl. Generative AI privileges and centers one way of knowing and being, and

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that is exactly what I work to counter and dismantle and to bring from the margins to the center, the girls' voices and stories. How this can continue to be another way where only one type of narrative then can be told because of how these how things are generated. The work is even more critical than ever.

Lucinda

In Australia, we've got similar situations, and questions about who's represented on the internet. But we also have Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous communities needing to retain control of those knowledges. And not necessarily wanting all of their cultural information and language information to be out there on the internet to be used any way, by anyone. So, while it might be good to have it out there and being incorporated into ChatGPT's "voice," so to speak, it might also not be. There are all these complexities and contradictions. I worry about the voice ChatGPT speaks with, or seems to speak with.

I also really worry about personalized learning, as a tsunami driven by the tech industries, that is going to hit us. It's coming, as people are developing cradle-to-grave learning bots that will accompany you through your life. These AI driven bots don't recognize you as a person. They see you as a set of continuously evolving data points. Just a set of data. I've read some critical work (e.g. [Rouvroy, 2013](#)) looking at the idea that this surpasses even the idea of subjectivity and the idea of being addressed as a subject. You don't have any opportunity to speak back in this rapidly evolving, continuous summation of you as data. That has important implications for how we understand what a learner *is*, and what learning *is*. We're also seeing the resurrection of "learning styles" and neuro myths that have been debunked because it's necessary for the categorization that underpins so-called personalized learning with bots. We need to critique this language of personalized learning and ask what it will mean for students when we have other forms of AI, like emotion AI, eye tracking and other biometric data pinning them to their screens and making sure they're on task with their personalized learning.

Victoria

The idea of generative AI as a writing tool was brought up, but ChatGPT is inaccurate a lot of the time. It's confidently presenting inaccurate information. How do we prepare and guide students to approach text generation tools like ChatGPT in ways that emphasize critical thinking and analysis? Because people are turning in stuff as is and it's not accurate. So what do we do?

Detra

A lot of work has been done in machine learning for many years. Khan Academy introduced AI bots in their newest version, which respond directly to students. It's becoming more targeted to what it is that you're struggling with. So it's functioning as a tutor, and even though ChatGPT is inaccurate, there are other types of platforms that folks have been using in math. It is making me think, "What does this mean, then, for teaching and learning? And most importantly, how do we get ahead of it, and start thinking about how we are collaborating?" Obviously, you want the collaboration to be rooted in accurate information, as Victoria said. Another really important piece is demystifying what it is and what it does. Part of it is just being okay with not knowing how that's feeding the system. But I also need to know more as a user, a learner and a thinker so I can be more informed.

Stephanie, that's the experience I had with my students who are also undergrads this past spring – just working on prompt engineering. I was shocked at how many of them were nervous to say they knew what ChatGPT was. I said, "What's the energy? Why is everyone seeming like you want to say more than what you're saying?" And they were like, "We were told this is cheating." So, there's a lot of shame around integrating technology. I've seen emails from school districts to students about, "We're scholars here. We don't do this; we don't do that." It's interesting, the discourse that's being sent out to certain schools and certain students about what it means to be a learner and what it means to partner with a tool versus turning over your thinking to the tool.

Every day, I try to use it so I could figure out what it is doing well for me in my life around productivity and automation. And what it's really not doing a very good job at because of the inaccuracies. When I talk about this with students and teachers, the first thing is, in the next 30 days, figure out something you can do with any type of generative AI, so you're just informed about what its affordances are and what its capability and functionality is. Then you can start dreaming and planning and thinking about ways to engage students. I can see ways to talk with students about "What are some of the issues in your community you're seeing and documenting? Have you thought about ways you can leverage technology and media to solve?" And then, "What happens if you ask ChatGPT to tell you about that same issue in your community? What do you get back? How does that information square up with what you're seeing day to day?" Bringing some criticality to that is important, but we have to get over the hump of "This is cheating. Students shouldn't have it. You're a bad human if you do this." While still being critical, shift our dispositions toward the "new," seeing it as a collaborative tool for learning instead of doing the thinking or replacing our ability to engage in meaningful work.

I'm also concerned about our relationships with students. That's what I've seen unravel this spring. All of the policies are punitive. One student teacher told me that her eighth-grade cooperating teacher gave a few students zeros on an assignment because she suspected they use ChatGPT. Her rationale was, "If they didn't use it, they would come argue with her about the grade. And if they did use it, they were just going to be quiet." To me, that's when you get into which students feel privileged or confident or even capable of pushing back on grades they get from their teacher. It just raises a lot of other issues around ethics, along with being critical thinkers, that we have to be honest, transparent and talk about.

Gerald

Detra's concrete examples get back to fundamental problems in the school system, which are so carceral and punitive. There's a way that something like ChatGPT is just going to exacerbate the dispositions toward surveillance in education.

Stephanie

Yes, and exacerbate other inequalities. Like many technological advances, very privileged people will exploit it for their benefit and people who are marginalized and minoritized are not able, or permitted, to exploit it for theirs. I'll go back to my Marxist position that this will accelerate the massive income and wealth inequalities in our society and across the globe. These are important literacies to teach and learn, for example how resources like money are distributed in our society. I asked ChatGPT to write an essay on universal basic income (UBI), and it included a false claim that UBI could disincentivize people to work, but there's nothing in the UBI research that warrants such a claim. These biases toward capitalism, income inequality and the overall idea that some people just deserve less in our society, are

literacies that people acquire in their everyday lives and AI systems may simply reinforce them.

Gerald

Even if, in the discourse of ChatGPT, there aren't biases, capitalism is a totalizing system. Getting back to what Kevin said about this proliferation of identities that can be marketed to, it can absorb even dissent and make it part of the system at the same time. The whole infrastructure of it is premised on profound inequality. Although at the discursive level, it could absorb and market all sorts of identities, even resistant ones.

Kevin

Detra started talking about ethics. There is a distinction between ethical thought and critical thinking, but there's a lot of overlap as well. Ethical conversations are like what are the rights around AI. That's going to be an exploding area of work. One of my former doc students, Sarah Burriss ([Leander and Burriss, 2020](#)), is doing work on ethics in AI and developing a middle school curriculum for ethics and AI. She was talking about using the White House Bill of Rights that's in a draft form with middle school kids talking through that and critiquing it.

With respect to this more general question around accuracy, we're going to lose this game if we go after things we've done in the past. There are questions now around what it means to have a critical view around accuracy as we're more like coconspirators with technologies and working with technologies? It's a ripe question. We need to give our students some idea of how these technologies are operating. For instance, we have all this conversation in the field around multimodality. But image recognition by AI is nothing like image recognition without AI. It doesn't see something like you've seen, and it's a different kind of operation altogether. Image recognition with AI doesn't use background information. It just goes according to characteristics of a specific image and is trying to develop a decontextualized literacy that can be applied anywhere. So, that image is always that image all the time. Using this example, what is the logic being operated here? We see the technology as writing. We see it as composing. We see it as involved in a conversation. We see it as seeing things or having intelligence. All that discourse is the best we've got maybe, but it's a trap for mistaking the work that's happening for particular human qualities. We need some distinction in terms of what is particularly human, and what the machine is doing and its manner of operation. That'll help us with the critical thinking piece.

Lucinda

Students are interested to understand more about what these things are and how they work. We also need to think in transdisciplinary ways and bring history into the conversation as well and look back with students at the history of chatbots as interlocutors and communicators. Go right back to ELIZA, the first chatbot. Look at the ELIZA effect ([Weizenbaum, 1966](#)) and how humans are so readily taken in by these bots and want to believe in them and their capacity to think. We want to believe in man's – I'm using *man* deliberately here given the gendered nature of the tech industries – man's ability to create, to be God and to create entities. That's a fascinating history. Others have talked about the importance of understanding code, and, to the extent that we can, understanding algorithmic thinking. This includes the lacks and the absences and what humans can bring to the whole equation.

Tracey

We cannot lose sight of the human factor in thinking about our writing classrooms, and how we work to develop our writers. We have to think about their critical literacies and how they engage with sources. They need to operate these technologies so they have the power to ensure they don't mishandle them and that they are not just continuing to falsify information. It goes really deep into close reading, where we get our sources, and how we're engaging in these technologies, continuing to deepen the things we've already been doing. Lucinda brought up that this was all happening while teachers are starting their classrooms. We need to work alongside teachers to support them and learn alongside them.

Lucinda

English teachers are experts at analyzing language. We can bring those fantastic skills into thinking critically about the rhetoric around these things. Tracey, you're emphasizing the human there, too. In terms of critiquing language, this whole idea of human in the loop, the idea that in the future, everything will be alright, because we'll still have humans in the loop. We need to stand up and say, "Hang on a moment, 'human in the loop' with writing is a massive demotion of where humans sit in that process." That shouldn't be reassuring that humans might just be reduced to fact checkers or anything like that in relation to writing.

Tracey

We also can't get away from our feelings and our experiences in the writing process, and the messages we want to create to change the world and to speak our truths. I absolutely agree with that – the historical passing on of storytelling that our communities are engaged with in really important ways (see [Flores, 2021](#)).

Grace

Humans are central to writing, not just part of this loop. I imagine them being absolutely at the center of all of this.

Victoria

How are we going to teach the value of writing as a skill if we can effectively just assign that task to a third party? To what extent are we going to have to fight for the right to write and the right to teach writing?

Lucinda

We are going to have to make this case that the teaching of writing is still really important. We need to look at what's happening in industries, especially the creative industries and how journalists and playwrights and copywriters, and screenwriters and authors and editors, and all of these people are using generative AI and the limitations they're finding with it as well. That will help us know what's important to inculcate in our students. We're already hearing that it's the softer skills that map well on to English, things like compassion and the ability to empathize with audiences. Maybe this can make writing more meaningful than some of the kinds of writing we've done in school in recent years, certainly in Australia anyway, driven by high stakes testing.

Tracey

I really appreciate what you said about the importance of composing and meaningful opportunities for authentic writing. We process our thinking through writing, and we learn

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through writing, and we process life through writing. I also think about restorative ways of writing, and how writing can be therapeutic. We need to really think about why students have to write. What can writing be for you? Thinking about how communities have used writing to heal, to thrive and to uplift voices that have been at the margins, I really appreciate the feelings that come out when you write from your own voice, your own experiences, your own heart, the stories of your community, your traditions and your cultures. That is very contextual and historical. That's what I believe about writing and that is why I'm like, "Get out your notebooks. We are writing Put your phones away. We're writing. Let's write it down." I think there's something – pen to paper – that we need to maybe push even more so we continue to have that process. And not in a punitive way. In a way our writers can think about different ways they're writing and for different purposes and have that be one of the ways we're composing in our classrooms so we don't lose the writer in all of this.

Victoria

I love, Tracey, what you said, "How can we make sure we don't lose the writer?" I love that so much, because it's the writer and not just the product, and the process, but the person.

Grace

A lot of my own work is about the embodiment of literacies and what it means for the human being that's involved (see [Johnson et al., 2021](#)). What else does the writer bring to it? Obviously, that's one of the reasons why the creative industries are protesting this. But also, how can generative AI be used to continue the powerful work of writing as a means for social change and social justice?

Lucinda

I don't want to be deterministic and assume these technologies are bad. There are also ways they can support writers. Back in my "Electric Sheep" ([McKnight, 2021](#)) days, I was saying, "students can use these things for brainstorming," but it's increasingly appearing that using generative AI in the early stages of writing actually shuts down thought and criticality. Anecdotal evidence is showing that using these writing tools advantages higher-performing students and doesn't do much for other students. Potentially, it's expanding an achievement gap in the classroom that we already know is based on particular kinds of cultural capital and financial capital. So it's a vexed question about what good they can do. How can they be used fairly?

Tracey

Who has access to this, the professional development teachers are getting, the time that teachers are getting to learn about these technologies to explore them? And then the access students have. What that means for college admissions? We've seen our communities use technologies in powerful ways to advocate to raise consciousness for movements. I just wonder about that access element, and how that makes the stories that are told continue to be in certain communities.

Lucinda

And to what extent does talk about all the exciting things these tools can potentially do just distract from the talk about access? I think you're on the most important thing, Tracey. None of it can happen without access. And without funding. Access depends on money, actual

money coming to communities that need it. I agree with teachers needing time. Time is missing from so many conversations about these themes in the media and from policymakers. It's almost as if the enormity of it is such that all teachers just need to be made half-time teaching, and half-time coming up to speed with all that's happening and working collegially to find a position where they can teach with and about these tools.

Victoria

What implications do you see for diverse writers and learners? What other questions do we need to be asking?

Tracey

The people who are creating these technologies – we need to have a diverse representation. Sometimes when I tell Siri to call someone, she doesn't know who I'm talking about. Like a Spanish name, she doesn't understand it. So I have to Anglicize it so she can call who I want her to call. That's what I think about if we're going to think about our multilingual learners, our global community, having access to these technologies. I really think about the people creating these and their experiences that they bring to it too.

Lucinda

It's an incredibly narrow group of people who are not only making these things, but who are profiting from them. We've got to keep in mind the whole Emperor's New Clothes nature of it. I went to a seminar where we had an AI-driven bot in a virtual reality environment, presented to us completely unproblematically, as an inclusive teaching practice. If you go back and think about all the access issues – all the hardware, all the software, all the subscriptions and the licenses you need to drive that VR experience – it's not inclusive at all. Yet, you have this rhetoric of "People in remote areas will be able to experience things in these immersive worlds." Well, those are often the people that don't have the digital access anyway. They're least likely to have a set of VR headsets hanging about in a storeroom down the hall when they don't have enough keyboards for kids. There's just so much tech boosterism and vast rhetoric about the benefits of these things that we need to challenge every time we can, every opportunity we can and resist being sucked into them and sucked into the way they always promise better productivity and better efficiency. They co-opt the language of inclusion for their own ends.

Tracey

I'm going to say we cannot forget the writer. We cannot lose our writers.

Grace

All of this discussion about criticality, about the humanizing aspects of literacies and teaching – it's reminding me of what Stephanie taught me as a doctoral student, and it's giving me hope for what we can possibly do with this game changer that's been thrust upon us. How can we use our knowledge of how AI has been used and currently exists in our world and how we interact with it to better predict and plan for what we might do with it, rather than speculate and fear how it might change us? How can we use it to understand more about what it means to be human, how to be in relationships with one another and how to work to make the world more equitable and socially just for diverse learners and writers?

Detra

How can we be more intentionally subversive with children or youth around technologies that are going to shape their lives? (see [Price-Dennis and Sealey-Ruiz, 2021](#)) I don't know how many of you have AI integrated into your Google or been asked if you want to be a part of that. But it's showing up now and it won't shock me if it'll be a part of college applications, because students are going to be using it anyway. We have to think about equity, making sure everyone has access to understand how this tool operates, and how it works. What could be possible as we know it today can change, and it will change. It's being used beyond education and finance, in health care, in government, in defense. It's everywhere. It's all encompassing. Everything is going to be tied to these systems, whether we want to talk about it in education or not. So, who are the students who are going to miss out on the conversation, knowing how they're being trapped and surveilled with these types of technologies, because we don't give them access to understand how they work? Let's be clear and intentional and subversive with students, so they have the information now to stay on top of what they want to do to. As Stephanie said, live in the world they envision now, instead of waiting till they're 18 or 25. What are we doing now to make sure they have the information they need to engage the system in ways that make sense for them?

Gerald

Detra, I'm glad you're taking it outside the realm of education also, because I think about [Dixon-Roman \(2019\)](#) work on predictive policing and AI – like racialized, racist algorithms – and we have to prepare our students to encounter these worlds. For me, it's breaking down a lot of disciplinary boundaries. Coding is the underlying grammar for a lot of this, and I don't know anything about coding as a literacy scholar. I'm hoping future generations will be able to break down these barriers and be more subversive, like cyberpunks, to challenge the system. The Master's tools will take down the Master's House, but it'll take down the rest of us also. We really need to figure out how to get a handle on AI, so it can be used in the service of human emancipation.

Stephanie

I'm thinking about all the ways it's already being used for high interest loans for certain people and low interest loans for others, housing applications, rent applications. That use of AI for benefiting capitalists is incredibly dangerous. I'll take a leap here, thinking about Gerald's comment that capitalism is a totalizing force or the idea that AI might also be and say that maybe it's not. [Gibson-Graham \(2013\)](#), feminist geographer, has written a lot about what life is like and can be on the margins or outside of capitalism including a fabulous book. It might sound kind of impossible, but there are lots of people who live outside of these technological worlds. Donna Haraway, again, would say that this obsession with technology only *really* affects a small number of people in the world. The majority of humans never take off on these technological advances, but they have to live in the ruins of them. We've seen the ruins of the digital acceleration over the decades. We know there are digital dumping grounds in the poorest and most vulnerable areas in the world. We know who pays the consequences for these very quickly accelerating life cycles of technology, and they are the most powerless in a neoliberal capitalist world. There are lots of people who are living outside of these technologies. There really are people who still deal in cash, not crypto and not Venmo. A lot of that might come back fairly strong in places. ([Moran, 2023](#)) newspaper recently reported that ChatGPT was creating fake *Guardian* articles that even they couldn't recognize as being fake. There will not be a way for even the smartest, savviest people to

know what's authentic or not. How will I trust that the website for my bank is actually my bank? I think there will be a lot more value placed in person-to-person, face-to-face. We will want to hear people say things themselves, we won't want to see an avatar on a screen. We may not want to read things online, or work with someone over email when we can't discern if the thing interacting with us is human. And maybe that's another important question we can have for education in this moment too:

Q4. What does it mean to be human? And what is the role of educators and in being human?

Kevin

I like where you're going with that, Stephanie. Part of what I'm feeling is, how can we also plan for what we might do without generative AI? There's always a complicated thing with technology, right? Which stance do we take? We tend to think of these things along binary terms, like either you're inside the technical enterprise or outside of it. So, part of the development we might need is the creation of pedagogies that put strong purchase on the human and what embodied face-to-face communication and creation looks like. It might allow us to return, with a kind of critical and ethical stance, to the assemblage and find our way. It might be a kind of honing device to help us remember what actual affect looks like, or love looks like, or connection looks like, rather than being steeped in the midst of the complexity of all of it.

Gerald

So much of my own work has been about trying to create alternative social formations within and against even something like the university (see [Ghiso et al., 2022](#)), which has become a corporate structure, much less broader capitalism. I'll go back to ancestral ways of being and knowledge and even my grandfather. On the other hand, like climate change, AI is going to find us, and to combat it, it's going to take a certain level of coordination across borders, social boundaries, political borders to prevent the end times. In many ways, the *End Times* has already arrived at so many communities. So, that's a tension I live with: both my ancestral or anarchic desire to foster these alternative communities and social formations, and that responsibility to be somehow engaged through collective work and collective social movements toward some broader, more just vision. And it's a tension probably many of us live with. I don't want to speak for everyone, but at least I do.

Lucinda

When I ask a room full of teachers and academics, "Who has read [OpenAI \(2023\) Considerations for Educators in relation to the use of ChatGPT?](#)," only a few in a room of hundreds of people put up their hand. Those considerations say it must not be used for assessment [Note: these "Considerations" have subsequently been replaced and this statement watered down to merely requiring a human in the assessment loop]. It's not intended for that. Students write for humans. We have to respect fundamental human dignity and the rhetorical purposes of our students. We have to not harm them with our practices. Just because generative AI can do something, that doesn't necessarily mean it should do something. We already know about the extensive harms from people using AI detection software, and misunderstanding that that detection software is in its infancy. To accuse a student of cheating in a piece of writing based on an AI detection score is

potentially harmful and damaging to relationships with students. We need good policy structures in place to support us, because we can't do all this on our own. Teachers can't do it on their own. They need really wise support. So don't rush into anything. And remember that principle of "Do no harm."

Tracey

As we're coming together [for a new school year], we're thinking again about what is composing, what is writing, what are our goals as teachers of young writers and engaging in those conversations continuously. Thinking about the types of writing communities we strive to create in our classrooms, our goals for our writers includes us understanding all halving learning about all the technologies and the advancements out there. Thinking about writing as not the static process, but as constantly evolving. People are writing in different ways and for different purposes and engaging in those conversations. Thinking about what our values are as educators, as teachers of young writers, and teachers of writers, as writers ourselves and also learning about these things together. So, making sure we slow down for sure, that we do no harm and that we are constantly coming back to who we are as educators and ensuring we are learning alongside our students – trying things out but in a way that is not going to cause harm. We're going back to who we are as educators, our goals and what our beliefs are about language and literacy learning, and continuing to be in community around these conversations and these ideas.

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