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Partnership in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence

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PARTNERSHIP IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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The Beginnings

"Why do students still need us? They have ChatGPT." A colleague recently raised this concern in feigned exasperation over lunch.

While the comment was most likely a rhetorical question in response to the recent global debate around the impact on education of generative artificial intelligence (AI), it points to real concerns regarding how educators might use generative AI to enhance teaching and learning. It also might have been masking pressing worries, including concerns about plagiarism, potential bias, and discrimination. Finally, it raises ethical concerns, such as students, out from under educators' watchful eye, using generative AI to produce content for frauds and scams, or write malicious computer codes to steal data or compromise computer systems.

In Singapore, where I live and teach, we have one of the world's highest Internet penetration rates, and mobile, smart devices are ubiquitous, which means that the impact of generative AI in this context can be significant. I contend that this may not be a bad thing, as schools and universities may find deploying such tools easier given the conducive environment and that many of our students are already using advanced tools for their learning. At my institution, most of our students are already using their mobile devices for a wide range of learning activities, and I believe that this is telling of their abilities to adopt these new technologies quicker than we can imagine.

For me, the purported worries about generative AI displacing faculty members seemed to reflect the premise of a teacher-student relationship that is more teacher-centred and one that views students as passive learners. As I see myself as a facilitator of learning, one who co-creates teaching and learning with students, I do not share the worries listed above. However, I did feel a sense of disquiet in thinking about this comment because of what it might imply about my and others' work with colleagues and students as partners in our different educational contexts. In my context, a medical school in Singapore, we partner with our students extensively. This includes providing students with formal roles and representation in education committees and policy-making platforms, such as the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLG), chaired by a student leader. In SSLG, students can propose and debate educational and student-life related initiatives and projects with members of the school management who are in attendance.

Besides participating in SSLG, I am also a member of various other committees, such as the Learning and Teaching Committees (LATs) and the Medical Education Committee (MEC). On these committees, we engage students to refine their community learning projects, and they are represented on major curriculum reforms and changes. I am convinced that in my experiences, partnership is never the outcome, but it is the way that informs our approach to our teaching and learning. Through partnership, staff and faculty "engage students as co-learners, co-researchers,

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co-inquirers, co-developers, and co-designers" (Healey et al., 2016, p. 2). The ways we share responsibilities, make decisions, and involve students do reflect to a large extent the principles of partnership. In short, I feel like the students are my collaborators, colleagues, rather than only students.

Nevertheless, I am aware that my colleagues in other schools and faculties have highlighted their experiences where students are generally more reserved and passive in the Asian context. I do wonder if the specific dynamics in my context could be influenced by our intentional effort to partner with students at the onset when the school was established, where we start with a clean slate, and a conscious effort to preserve and cultivate what we have started. I could imagine the challenges to change culture, especially when it is entrenched—something that my colleague who feigned exasperation at the use of ChatGPT might be alluding to. For me, there are more reasons for optimism that generative AI might improve partnership given the positive culture and mechanism already in place at my institution. I also find myself thinking more deeply about how we can harness the power of partnership to support our students in navigating this era of generative AI.

Of partnership and generative AI

I believe that generative AI could offer many exciting prospects for partnership in grading, creating personalised learning plans, and providing real-time feedback for students. I currently work in partnership with students in these arenas in the following ways. I partner with students to identify welfare needs, such as piloting a sandwich vending machine to provide an alternative food option. I also partner with students on developing their extracurricular learning activities, such as initiating a new overseas community involvement project. In addition, I have worked with students to propose curricular improvements. Although I have yet to implement generative AI tools in these learning activities, I could imagine extending my current partnership practices in a number of ways.

For instance, I teach a course in professionalism, ethics, law, and leadership. In line with the flipped classroom pedagogy and learning management system that we have adopted, students are provided with real-time feedback on their performances. In this partnership, students can enter their suggestions any time through a "Student Voice" portal. They are also required to evaluate faculty and provide qualitative comments, data which could be used to inform the performance appraisal of faculty teaching the course. Currently, we can use the learning management to monitor real-time student performances in class. I have observed that most students welcome the real-time feedback on their learning. The insights we glimpse of their learning process help us to inform and shape our discussion. Students can also submit "burning questions," which we would normally elicit in a discussion by inviting peer responses before we add our input to clarify any misconceptions or conceptual misunderstanding.

Considering classroom interaction, I believe that there is potential to use generative AI in such a way that it could assist in creating personalised learning approaches for students, ones that consider students' scholastic abilities as well as interests and goals for the course (Prain et al., 2013). A new form of partnership can emerge if we can, for instance, use generative AI to produce personalised content, and stimulate interests and discussions by posing tailored

questions for each team or student in the class. What is so powerful about generative AI is that it can respond and adapt responses based on what and how the students respond to the conversations, instead of merely churning out a generic prompt for every student in the class. In this scenario, the faculty can then use our time more effectively by engaging students more deeply in the discussion of issues rather than clarifying simpler concepts. In addition, generative AI has the potential to generate what each student might be interested in about the topic and allow them to learn at their own pace. This is something not feasible currently given the time constraint and size of the class. Therefore, I am excited about these ideas and how possible uses of generative AI could constitute a new way for us to partner and engage our students.

At the same time, I need to carefully consider the limitations of these tools. As generative AI can be trained to produce human-like responses in essays, artwork, or programming codes, it could be easier for students to commit plagiarism and harder for me to detect such instances. The responses generated from such tools may also contain potential inherent bias information, and thus perpetuate dominant or erroneous views. Generative AI could aid wrongdoings, such as by tricking the tool to bypass its own checks and generate a phishing email with malicious intent. This kind of behaviour is less likely, however, when students have the opportunity to work in partnerships, building relationships based on trust and respect.

Overcoming the limitations and challenges of generative AI is one thing. There is an even more pressing matter at hand, which is to build and foster trust in teacher-student relationships. Of course, we should set clear guidelines and expectations related to the use of such tools. A clear policy from university and school will be helpful to set the tone and convey the seriousness with which we view this matter. But, more importantly, we need to trust our students: trust that they will do the right thing, and trust ourselves to use this opportunity to guide students on navigating these issues. Trust can shape behaviour. But once it is broken, it is hard to repair. Given that generative AI is a nascent technology, trust could be the important factor that might advance or impede its impact on partnership. Therefore, in partnership with students, I will need to further embrace and build on the partnership approaches I already use and that these new forms of technology make possible.

In partnership, teaching is not intended to function as mere knowledge transfer. My aim is not to assess a student's essay or artwork. Rather, it is how we can *jointly* (emphasis added) create the output (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). For instance, I supervise students for their scholarly research projects. For the Year-4 students, their final written report constitutes only one component of their final marks. They are also graded on other skills, such as project organisation. This highlights the importance we place on processes, rather than just the outcome (which of course is important in many ways in its own right). In this process, students have the opportunity to offer feedback on their supervisory experiences. I also normally organise my supervisees to meet, so that they could provide peer support. To be clear, plagiarism is wrong no matter how you argue it. My point is that given the nature of partnership, there is little to worry about students passing off such works as their own. Just to give another example, my Year-3 students, whom I supervise for their Student Researcher Immersion Programme (SRIP), are required to present their findings as part of the assessment criteria. With this requirement, it is much harder for them to pass off (not that they do) a generative AI's work as their own, as they would not be able to answer my queries, which are often context specific.

Furthermore, I believe that partnership provides the ideal platform for faculty to reinforce academic integrity and professional values. Continuing with my examples on partnership with students on research projects, I often share openly with my students about concerns related to generative AI and use it as an opportunity to discuss issues, such as the importance of honesty and responsibilities for scholarly endeavours. I also use this chance to hopefully inspire them in my field, which is medical education, and how it can be useful for their future profession as doctors working in the healthcare setting.

From my experiences, a partnership approach can combat misunderstandings. Generative AI is not about using social media and communication tools, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, to replace emails or face-to-face meetings. Rather, without belabouring the point, it is special because of its abilities to produce text, audio, images and other content, and its responses can be trained. To embrace its potential and not to fear it, we need regular dialogues and maybe even inspirations on its application (both successful and unsuccessful ones). For me, I do discuss these topics regularly with likeminded colleagues. I believe that there should also be regular sharing amongst students (as the use of generative AI in partnership is about them as well), and within and between universities to help advance our understanding of generative AI. In fact, although many students have heard of (or are already using) ChatGPT, such technology is not new. Earlier forms include chatbots that most people would have encountered or used. In 2014, the term generative AI was coined as new technology enabled machines to be trained to generate new texts, images, and other outputs. Partnership can provide the appropriate avenues for students and faculty to address concerns, real or perceived, to better understand, and hence demystify generative AI.

I offer a final personal example from my own practice. I am involved in a project with scientists, clinicians, and senior-year medical students to co-create curriculum improvement. The project involves conducting interviews and focus groups, and analysing existing documents. The output of this partnership project is a context-dependent, instead of a generic, response. Hence, it is hardly possible for students to commit plagiarism. We also ask students to present their work, which further allows us to engage in a meaningful discussion and enhance their learning. I am excited to imagine how the advent of generative AI might afford new opportunities, and novel ways to embrace our partnership endeavours.

Conclusion

The age of generative AI is here and its impact on partnership has yet to fully unfold. Nevertheless, the essential principles of partnership – students and colleagues engaging in meaningful ways that enact mutual respect and reciprocal relationships — can help us navigate the road ahead. In my own experience, I have learned that generative AI could offer many exciting prospects for partnership, opening up new ways for us to partner and engage our students. It is also important to set clear guidelines and expectations regarding its use for students, but more importantly, we need to build trust with our students. Looking forward, I anticipate exciting times ahead as we navigate the promises of generative AI and how it can help us to bring partnership to the next level.

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