



Speaker 1:

You're listening to Reach. Teach. Talk with Nat Damon.

Nat Damon:

Welcome Back to another episode of Reach. Teach. Talk. Back in 2015, the Financial Times had a cover story titled, "Could androids shape children's minds?" And back in 2015, we were thinking about, in the crux of the article, was about the offloading of what truly was a teacher's job to technology, to IT. Whether it's grading, whether it's creating assignments, the internet, researching, trying to find what's true, what's not true, but really using technology in a way that shapes, not just one's intelligence, but also shaping one's being. And this idea of technology in the classroom was something that... There was always a running joke in schools that I worked at, which is, "Yeah, technology's great and it's going to save time and we can use this and it's great."

"Well, do you use it?"

"Not yet. I need a few more workshops. I need a little more time for me to master that. Right now, teaching is enough. I just don't have the time to really, really research how I can apply technology to the classroom."

And now we are opening another chapter in the relationship between technology and the classroom with the advent of AI, and specifically and what we're going to focus on today, the use of ChatGPT in the classroom. This is interesting, more interesting actually than the FT article from eight years ago. And the reason why it interests me and the reason why I feel this is a really important topic for us to discuss on Reach. Teach. Talk, which is a podcast focused on relational pedagogy, a podcast that focuses on relationships in the classroom and the classroom of life.

The reason why this is interesting to me is because when we talk about... It's one thing to talk about Scantron and grading, using technology to save time grading. It's one thing to talk about finding truth in all the myriad websites out there where we're accessing information, but we need to learn how to synthesize and assimilate it. ChatGPT does that for us. ChatGPT assimilates information, we use it together, and in the course of five seconds, it can write essays, it can produce song lyrics, it can produce art. With the advent of AI, we've got, for the first time, a very important conversation that's an ongoing one and that needs to happen, because it really relates to the intersection of being human and the utilization of a very human-like technology.

And when we're talking about schools and we're talking about K-12 schools or colleges and universities, we are talking about the forming of not just the minds but the development of the person, the human being. With the development and very recent advent of ChatGPT and other AI platforms, we are able to offload a lot of that human making to technology. Yet as an instinct that makes us all wince a little. It

makes us all step back and just think, "Wait, are we really going to leave it up to the androids to shape students' minds?"

So I am so excited today to bring on board a guest, Spencer Burrows, who is currently doing a million different things. Currently, he is 11th grade dean at Pacific Ridge School. He's an economics teacher, he's a civics teacher. He was a lawyer, he is a education policy wonk as well, and he's also a darn good sailor. So he and I have had that in common amid a lot of other different commonalities outside of teaching. Spencer's going to talk with us today about ChatGPT, and the reason why I invited him to come in to Reach. Teach. Talk is because he brings the teacher's context to AI. He's going to be able to give us some strategies about how to make AI and ChatGPT really work in the classroom. And he's also somebody who's written about ChatGPT in the classroom for Education Week and for Chalkbeat. And for the reason I just gave, the fact that Spencer is an educator at heart, and he gets schools, he gets relational pedagogy, he understands the essence of the essentialness of the humanity that we bring and we honor in the classroom.

So without much further ado, Spencer, welcome to Reach. Teach. Talk. I'm thrilled that you're here with us today and I'm really looking forward to really deep dive discussion into the layering and the integration of ChatGPT, specifically into the classroom. What have you found as a teacher? What have you found as an educator who has been talking to teachers all over the country about this topic? And what would you recommend for teachers to focus on as they hopefully drop a bit of their fear and lean into this yet another pivot, another advance in technology integration in the classroom?

Spencer Burrows:

Thank you, Nat. I appreciate it. To kind of dive into some of those issues, what drew me initially to teaching, I taught for a year before heading off to law school, and I loved my year teaching in law school. I knew that I was probably going to return to schools at some point in some form. And so after getting my law degree, I also got my teaching credential and then started working with schools in the LA area. Not only working at the school site and serving as a classroom teacher, but helped launch a school and help build up some other school systems. And I really enjoyed that work.

Along the way I got the opportunity to start teaching some college level classes as well for National University and some other institutions. So I've gotten to see it from a couple different angles, and I think we have to see what's happening right now with ChatGPT and some of these other technologies in the context of the pandemic that you kind of touched on. So pandemic happens March of 2020, and we all go on lockdown and then remote learning, and then skid our way through remote learning the rest of that year into somewhat hybrid learning the next year depending on where your school is located. So we've all had an over-exposure to technology maybe in the last couple of years. And as we're finally, this year, coming to quote, unquote "normal," if you can even say that, ChatGPT appears out of nowhere around January. So it is truly one thing after another.

So to bring that into the classroom context and maybe speak directly to what a lot of the teachers are seeing right now. I think one of the more unfortunate aspects of remote and hybrid, at least as far as schools go during the pandemic is, it was very difficult to police plagiarism because everything was done on computers, and I think the prevailing attitude was just, "We need to get through this understandably." And so we get through, we're coming back into this era, and then this technology comes out around January.

And I think it was a genius marketing ploy to make it available on the internet to everybody because not only were commentators and people in the tech world talking about it, everyone was using it themselves. And so I think that brought it home much faster in making it free and available to everybody at the same time. Everyone got to play with it at the same time and see, A, is it a novelty? B, can there

be an actual productive use for it? But to bring it back to the school side, I think the first thing that hit teachers was, "Students are going to use it to cheat." That was kind of the immediate gut reaction.

And I think there's some credence to that. But the more that I've experimented with it, the more that I've talked with teachers also trying to use it, you'll see a couple of things at once. First, when ChatGPT produces a piece of writing, it's often in somewhat vague terms. So if you taught English, if you're an English teacher and you assign an essay on X, Y, Z, and let's just say a student used ChatGPT to unfortunately doctor an essay, it's going to spit out an essay that sounds somewhat plausible but is not great writing. So maybe we should back up a second and talk... What does ChatGPT actually do and what are some of this AI really going around?

Nat Damon:

Yeah, let's take a step back and actually define AI and define ChatGPT and then move into what's going to be very interesting to hear about, the usage of it in the class and the suspicion around how it could be used nefariously.

Spencer Burrows:

Absolutely. So there's a difference between generalized artificial intelligence and these large language models. So generalized AI is maybe the holy grail of AI that everyone's hoping we somehow move towards where it can do everything and maybe also the dark side, like Terminator. If that's what we're trying to avoid or that scenario, what ChatGPT and some of these other similar models that are out right now, it's a language predictor model. So basically this large language predictor model will take a large corpus of text AKA the internet, and if you ask it a question or give it a direction, it basically collates available information from the internet and spits it back out in a digestible form.

So I think something to take directly from that, and this is largely the conversations we've been having with the teachers. Everything ChatGPT can do is already available on the internet. And I'm saying that in the context of for the doomsday side of the teaching profession that wants to ban it immediately, you have to realize that all these things can be done already. So maybe ChatGPT does it faster or more efficiently, but... Plagiarizing papers, they're out there on the internet and they've always been there.

Nat Damon:

That's the bread and butter of turnitin.com, 25 years ago, right?

Spencer Burrows:

Exactly.

Nat Damon:

Yes, we here are aware of that.

Spencer Burrows:

And the burgeoning industry of companies trying to make technology to now detect ChatGPT, which is a whole different story. But if that's what it does, keeping that in mind I think... And again, to try to put this in the teaching context, oftentimes when a technology is released that relates to education or could be, it immediately divides the education world into two camps. Either this is going to be the savior of education, or this is the worst thing ever and we need to ban it. And I don't think it's any of those two

ends. It's somewhere in the middle. And then I think with any kind of technology, you need to view it as a tool and use it when it's useful and don't use it when it's not. That sounds very simple.

I think Nearpod is a great example. Nearpod is essentially an add-on to Google Slides that makes it more interactive. I had no idea what Nearpod was before the pandemic. A lot of us jumped on it during the pandemic, and it was an amazing tool during the pandemic because if you had students working remotely at home and you're using Google Slides, maybe you're in a hybrid classroom, it could actually draw them in and make it more interactive. Now for all of us that made these incredible, well-thought-out Nearpod presentations during the pandemic, when the pandemic ends and the year later we're back in the classroom and I tried using a lot of the same Nearpods in my new class, they all hated it to high heaven because we're back in person, they want to converse with their classmates in real life. Which I get, but it just shows you Nearpod was a great tool during the pandemic, afterward, not so much.

So I think you have to view ChatGPT and whatever progeny comes later through that lens. I think there are some interesting and productive uses, and there's other times when it's just not useful. And it's neither the savior or the apocalypse when it comes to education. So that's kind of where we're at.

Nat Damon:

That was just fantastic. Thank you, Spencer. I think that fear of it being the coming of the apocalypse is not overstated because teachers do... I mean, you can read about this in so many different forms, like teachers saying, "There is such a high risk of plagiarism. There's such a high risk of cheating. This is really the end of it." But to your point, it's not AI in the sense that ChatGPT is thinking for the student, it's just aggregating. It's aggregating information that's already out there as you said, and putting into a really pretty boring and stripped down, perhaps very well organized, essay or, let's say, long answer to a prompt question that generally any good teacher would be able to say, "Hey, this is not written by my 8th grader."

So it's an aggregator. It's not doing original thinking, but it is being used. And perhaps part of the fear is not where it is now, but where it could end up being. Like who's to say that a year from now we're not going to have answers that don't sound like they're generated by robots. It could be something that's, "Okay, they've been able to perfect the musicality of a human voice and I really individuate it to the person." So maybe there's something about that. But where we are now, what I'm hearing you say, Spencer, is this is not the time to let fear run school decisions, classroom decisions and outlooks on the future. Because as of now we can still control the output, and that's what it's going to be interesting to hear, some strategies, not just on how to control the output of ChatGPT, but to utilize it in a way that actually builds relationship through learning in the classroom and at work outside of the classroom.

So we'll get to that, but I'm just fascinated by the example you gave with Nearpod because we all pivoted to using whatever new technology we could possibly use to engage our students when they were at home alone, bored and staring at a screen, burning out their retinas five hours a day at least. And Nearpod is a great example of how you could engage those students, but also how once you came back into the classroom, we couldn't engage that way anymore. What you stated, which cannot be overstated is, the students wanted to be in relation with each other over staring at the screen again. They probably also didn't want to be reminded of what that extended period of time was like for them. It was not a great time for learning, as admirable and remarkable and miraculous as it was that we were able to pivot the way that we did on the whole.

So getting back to this new technology-based initiative since January and looking at it as yet another command insertion of technology into what is a human endeavor, which is teaching, what are some of the ways you have seen ChatGPT used to enhance the teaching and the learning, whether it's instructional delivery, whether it's in-class, assignments since January?

Spencer Burrows:

That's a great question. So I think there's two ends. There's the student you send and there's the teacher you send. So to look at the students first, "How could this be applied in the classroom and/or how can we engage the students with the technology?" On their end, I think it's kind of a rule of thumb that anytime we can use technology to better engage students in the material, that's generally a good thing. And when you think about the different math programs, for example, that have been rolled out for lower elementary students where it looks like they're just playing on an iPad but they're really solving math problems and learning things along the way. Some people just write that off as video games, but in my opinion, if they are learning math because they're engaged in the technology, I support that. I think it's a good thing.

So looking at my students and what we do at my school, at Pacific Ridge... We're a Harkness discussion based school, so a lot of communication, a lot of those discussions. When I first saw ChatGPT released, the first direction my mind went to was, "How can I take it and use it in my classroom tomorrow if I was going to?"

Nat Damon:

And in your Harkness based classroom, which, can you share with the audience what the Harkness model is about?

Spencer Burrows:

Sure. So Harkness is really the idea that you're taking a text or an idea or some material and students are leading a discussion around that material to derive some meaning. And so if you imagine a college seminar around a table for example, similar to that, our classrooms literally have a large oval table in the middle and that's where those discussions take place. Phillips Exeter, back east were kind of the pioneers of this model. And you can check out their website for some interesting uses, as of ours.

But in terms of this discussion based, you don't usually think of a robot leading a discussion. So the more that I played around with it... And a piece of advice I have for teachers, before you start using a technology or completely write it off or assume it's a savior, take it and actually mess around with it a little bit and imagine it's in your classroom, and walk through a lesson what that would look like. And you'll start to see things that maybe it would be great at that you hadn't thought of before, or the way you thought it could be used, it just doesn't work. And that's fair.

So one of the ways that I used it was I would project ChatGPT up on the board and I would have students take the questions that we had prepared for the Harkness discussion, and I'd turn ChatGPT into the moderator of that discussion. And so we would feed questions into ChatGPT, and it would start producing an answer. And then I would have the students bounce ideas of that answer and we kind of go back and forth. And to draw this back to my point of things are engaging, it was kind of a fun tool that made for an interesting discussion, but it was no replacement for the original discussion. And I think that's where it comes back to the idea of a tool that you use when it's great and not when. We had a good time kind of bouncing some ideas and seeing the material ChatGPT was producing, and that was great for that class.

Now on the students side if there is the engagement end, there's also what I'm just going to call the brainstorming end. And so the analogy I try to make is to Wikipedia. And so Wikipedia's been around for some time. Every educator knows you can't cite to Wikipedia because it's open edit, so you don't know who said what, if it's totally true. However, I think the use of Wikipedia that's sometimes overlooked is it can be a great brainstorming tool. For example, I coach speech and debate. If we're trying to come up with some ideas on a certain debate topic or certain points to make, you look up a topic on Wikipedia

and it gives you this whole one page, two page, three page rundown. You can read that. And if you look at, Wikipedia often provides reference points to the facts that they make. Well, go check those references. And even though you can't cite to Wikipedia itself, if you check of those references and those checkout, then you probably could use it, or at least take that idea in and find your own references to it.

So as we mentioned before, because ChatGPT will produce some kind of answer or a piece of knowledge that sounds kind of general in... Point being, you don't know if it's true or not or accurate or not. Well, you can take that and then research that. So maybe it could be a good brainstorming tool. If you have a student, as I'm sure you saw with your English classes, who gets writer's block or just has whatever impediment to getting started and it's creating frustration and it's halfway ruining their life, maybe ChatGPT is a good start to begin your paper.

Nat Damon:

And you you're suggesting like... Okay, so look. You got brain freeze. You don't know where to start in terms of developing a thesis. So what you're suggesting is just have the student type in just random questions that are kind of circling the airport, knowing that at some point there'll be something in a ChatGPT response that will spark and be like, "Oh, that's cool. Okay, now I've got some headlights longer down the foggy road." Right?

Spencer Burrows:

Exactly. So again, it's a tool. Now if a student took that a mile too far and used that ChatGPT essay to turn in, A, it's not going to look like a good essay. And B, it's probably not going to sound like them. So I want to give a short reference to something that I heard of recently. I think all the college admissions offices are seeing not far into the future when this next round of college applications coming in this fall, how many students are going to use ChatGPT to write essays, especially the common app essay. Essentially the personal statement.

An Ivy League admissions officer fed a couple common app props into ChatGPT just to see what it would produce, took those essays, ran it by some other Ivy League officers, they all said the same thing. One, it sounds like it was actually written by a student, so credit to ChatGPT. Two, they were trash essays. They were just super vague. It's not going to get you into many schools. The point being it's not good writing.

Nat Damon:

I think it's out there that ChatGPT scores an average of a 2 on the English Literature AP.

Spencer Burrows:

That's probably correct.

Nat Damon:

Yes, yes, yes.

Spencer Burrows:

That sounds about right. To bring this back to the point of the teachers that think it's the savior or want to ban it all together, it has some interesting uses, you got to play around with it. And any good classroom teacher knows whatever sources you might be drawing some sources of inspiration for, you

always have to check them out. So I was talking about the student end, but to look more at the teacher end, like what could be some interesting uses for the teaching profession in general?

Some ideas I've heard thrown about that I think sound valid are... One of the first ones was lesson planning. You could put a prompt in ChatGPT, "Write me my first four lessons of my English 9 class that I want to start with my 9th graders." And it's going to spit out whatever it's going to spit out and some of it might sound decent.

Now like you know, there are a ton of lesson plans already on the internet, so it's not like ChatGPT's replacing that. Even if as a teacher you pull a well-written lesson plan from the internet, you always have to run through it yourself and see, "Is this going to work for me? Is it work for my students? Is this direction I want it to go?" So I think it would be malpractice to take any piece of writing or work that's not yours and just run with it. So for the teachers saying, "This is going to be the savior, it's going to lesson plan for you," I hope you don't just take the ChatGPT lesson, and that turns into first semester.

So positives on both sides, but again it's a nifty tool.

Nat Damon:

This is great. And I'm thinking just everything you were just saying, transcending it all, to me, sounds like you're communicating that ChatGPT is an amazing resource for idea generation, brainstorming... even formulation. What the technology produces is organized. And what I've found is there's a lot of lists and there's a lot of short paragraphs usually with a funnily defensive caveat like, "These are just what we found through our aggregating process." Or, "Everything is drawn from information pre 2021," or something. So it's very aware, this technology is very aware and makes it very clear that it is not devising on its own the perfect answer that would get you a 5 on the literature AP. But rather again, it's fueling. It's kind of giving you the tools really or the content to then be able to add your element as the student, as the writer, as a researcher, as a teacher, to lesson plan or the student to the essay or the project. And that's where the fun takes place.

But I think it's worth repeating that ChatGPT as it is now in its current form is a tool for engagement. Because what it does, and what I'm hearing you say is it broadens the scope of what's possible in designing an assignment or taking that first step into an assignment. But it's not going to replace the assignment and it's not going to replace the paper research, the ultimate product of the student.

So all that to say, am I right, Spencer, to look at ChatGPT as almost more like an editing tool than a creation tool? Does that make sense at all, this idea that... Because I remember in my English class when I was teaching English lit and teaching writing, it was like, "Okay, your first draft is always the clay on the potter's wheel. Great. You got all that stuff out there, it's all there. And now you know the next step is going to be really to start whittling it away and start etching from the marble, the statue inside." Does that resonate with you at all as an analogy or is there a better analogy for what ChatGPT brings?

Spencer Burrows:

Yeah, I think you're on the right track. If ChatGPT is going to produce you kind of a vague beginning to something that could be a great piece, that is the beginning and not the end. So one of the interesting activities that we used at foreign class was... I also teach a US history class. We were talking about reconstruction, and this is where kind of the novelty comes in and you can see it that... You put a question in the ChatGPT and it starts producing a piece of work line by line, which I think gives the illusion that it's thinking.

But it's kind of interesting to watch because it looks like it's generating it in real time and things are happening. So I put in a prompt something along the lines of, "What was the reconstruction?" And then

our class watched ChatGPT produce this one paragraph, two paragraph response. And so we had the response, I then had the students go back and fact check it. So they were able to make some good observations... And this is really building in critical analysis skills, which we should be training anyways and I think is one of the most important things you can get out of that high school education heading into college. And they found sometimes where ChatGPT either got a date wrong or the context was just mischaracterized, so on and so forth.

So I think that is a good use of the tool. And as far as teaching digital citizenship and training our students to understand how to use the internet productively, they need to understand that you can't trust what you see on the internet at face value. You do have to go back and check and do some independent research. And if ChatGPT can help them practice that skill, I think that's a great thing. I'll say that in that same US history class, I teach that with a partner teacher, and we were lesson planning how do we want to end out the Cold War real soon in our courses. And we did a quick search on the ChatGPT like, "How would you outline Cold War instruction?" It listed five or six points and we realized one or two of those could be interesting to throw in. I think that's a good use because it was a good brainstorming tool. We're not letting ChatGPT write the course for us, which I don't think you should do in the first place, but that was a productive use.

So to your question about creativity versus editing, I think ChatGPT can give you a somewhat creative, somewhat bland beginning point and then it's your job to jump in and fill in the blanks at least.

Nat Damon:

And I love what you're saying about during the process of filling in those blanks, it's collaboration, it's critical thinking. It's communication because you're looking at clarity, you're looking at the clarity of the writing and you're also looking at personalizing the writing so that it becomes yours. So it's taking ownership over... It's pretty dry to begin with. And all in the process of it, you're learning and you're drawing your own connections because...

Here's a question I have for you as an English teacher, as a literature teacher and somebody who really valued the process of writing a paper. I always looked at writing and the teaching of writing as actually teaching life skills of reflection, of introspection, of, "Okay, here's the material, here's the book that I just finished and here's finished reading and here's the thesis that I'm looking to develop from as I reflect on this book. And I'm going to chisel away at this thesis and I'm going to not write the actual essay until the thesis is written. Or maybe I will write the essay and then through writing it, I actually crystallize what that thesis is." A very internal, almost as you're writing, you are sensing the neurons connecting, you're sensing the spark going on because you are truly creating this as an individual, as a human being. Traditionally that's how essay writing shapes learning. It's that reflective introspective connection between a person, the human and the literature.

So with that as context, Spencer, is that kind of baby out with the bath water now, or would you suggest that with ChatGPT as this new pond, well, spring of content, that the actual writing process could still be the same or the same benefits?

Spencer Burrows:

That's a great question, and I'm going to start narrow and then go broad. So to begin on the narrow end, the overall big picture that I'm going to come back to is, I think maybe in a good way this is going to force teachers to be much more intentional with how they're giving assessments and being very particular in what they want to see along their way.

So I taught 10th grade modern world last year now with 11 and 12 econ in the US right now. When it comes to writing, we try to be very specific how we want to see certain things. So to do that writing



process over a number of classes, we'll start by outlining how you want to make that essay and then we'll work on your thesis. And I try to be specific about in a thesis I want to see three separate points made that tie back to...

You can see I'm being specific right now, that's what I want to see. And part of the challenge for students going through any class all the way up, I'm sure it's the same for you in school and it was for me, you're dealing with different teachers every year and everyone wants to see something a little bit different when it comes to writing. And maybe that's a good thing because you're learning a different way of... The writing's not fundamentally different, but different people require different styles, which honestly, you get into the working world, different people want to see things differently. So it is a skill to understand how to mold expectations to what you're going to produce.

So to your question, would ChatGPT just do away with that entire writing process? Not if you have a teacher who's being very specific about what they want and when. And as we're talking about the writing process... And again, we're kind of on the narrow end right now, but when it comes to that writing process, I think it is a good idea to force it into chunks in class and have the students actually do some of the work in class where teachers can then conference with those students individually and check that progress rather than assign an essay topic on Monday and just say, "Give me an essay by a week from now.

In that case, yeah, a student could just plug it into ChatGPT and produce whatever's going to come up. So that's kind of the narrow end, that writing process. The big push I'm making on both teachers K through 12 and professors right now is, we've really got to rethink how we're doing assessments. And on a very knee-jerk level, if you're concerned that your assessment can be tailored with ChatGPT, maybe you shouldn't be giving that assessment. And I've heard on the college end, a number of professors who you can imagine are equally, if not more freaked out than K through 12 teachers right now, who maybe their MO the last 20, 30 years is assigning a 10 to 20 page term paper at the end of the term. Maybe it's time to do away with that.

I mean, it really makes us think, what are you actually assessing the 10 to 20 page paper for? Stamina? Just writing more and more and more? If it was the ability to work in APA format, doesn't need to be 20 pages. If it's an argument you're trying to make based on sources, again, doesn't need to be that long. So do more writing in class, assign shorter chunks that are more focused. I mean, there's a number of ways to go about that rather than just being afraid that it's going to be tailored. So being specific about that writing process, being specific about your expectations. And the more specific you are, if what you're really concerned about is plagiarism, I think it's harder and harder to actually plagiarize with that. So to bring that all back together, teachers and professors need to be more intentional with how they're giving assessments.

Nat Damon:

Absolutely. I mean, yeah, what are the prompts? How can teachers put a stronger spotlight on the essay prompts and also be more specific on the front end in terms of what they're looking for in the essay assignment? And your connection with college professors, and the one paper in the semester that's going to decide your grade in the class is going to be this 10 to 20 page term paper, to rethink that.

And I'm also thinking in the back of my head as you were sharing about that was, "What's the point of a time essay?" Because I can see teachers saying, "Okay, well, then I'm just going to have them write everything in house. I'm afraid of ChatGPT and what it can do in terms of plagiarism and how it can lead to that and cheating with at home essay. So I'm just going to have them hand write or type but in the classroom so I can see and watch them. So I'm going to give them 45 minutes to write an essay." But is that even the point of writing essays? I mean, if these essays have already been, in a sense, constructed,

if you can basically pick any topic and have ChatGPT come up with an essay as rudimentary in rudimentary form but very comprehensive nonetheless, then what are you solving for by having students write under pressure when it really should be about... It sounds to me anyways, about looking at the individual lens that students are taking to the thesis, to the question, to the prompt.

And that's what makes for a more interesting... I mean as an English teacher by trade, more interesting grading experience because you have a whole bunch of very broad scope of individual personalized writings that come to you. And I just think that everything you were sharing then kind of does beg the question of assessments, I'm thinking particularly writing assessments. It'd be fascinating for English departments, history departments, civics departments, science departments to talk about how they use writing as a form of learning today and with the incorporation of ChatGPT.

I'd like to talk about assessments a little bit because... In what ways does ChatGPT help teachers with assessments? Just on a rudimentary level, and then perhaps you've seen some things that are unique.

Spencer Burrows:

Sure. So back to this idea of brainstorming. I've heard and I've seen that ChatGPT can be a great beginning point of forming an assessment. Let's say you're teaching a new course for the first time. I'm just going to use US history, and you want to make a quiz in the 1920s. You could input to ChatGPT, "Make me a 10 question high school quiz on the main points." I mean, you see where I'm going. The more specific the query you put into ChatGPT, the more specific answer it'll produce you.

So let's say then you have this 10 question quiz. Well, again, now you as a teacher need to go back and read each of those questions and see is there's something I want to use. Maybe it prompts your attention somewhere else for a new question, that's fine. But again, it's a brainstorming tool. Let's be honest. There's a thousand different quizzes available on the internet right now that kind of did the brainstorming for you. So again, I think ChatGPT could be used as a great beginning point for assessments and maybe prompt some other ideas. But we're focusing on writing a lot obviously because that seems to be the key function of ChatGPT. But without going too far in a rabbit hole in a different direction, it begs the question of what other kinds of assessments are there out there, right? Project-based learning, I know we both worked at schools that deal with that.

I told you I come from a very heavy discussion-based school. I think there's a lot of value to having students explain themselves. You think about the original intention behind a dissertation back at Oxford, whatever year that began, getting up in front of a board and explaining yourself. So there's more than one way to do assessments. And if this forces teachers to be a little bit more creative in how they deliver their assessments, then maybe that's a good thing too. I mean, what I tell my graduate students at National University who are studying to be teachers in their teacher prep program, "The ultimate goal of assessments is demonstrating understanding."

Now how do you allow students to demonstrate understanding? I think the schools that do this best and maybe most intentionally are you try to give students multiple ways to demonstrate that understanding. And we've all seen an education that everyone's stronger in one area or another. And just because you can't write the best essay or you can't explain yourself the best out loud in front of a pamphlet, it doesn't mean you don't know things. And so how do we get to that deeper learning? That's not an easy question, but maybe that's kind of the goal in the end.

Nat Damon:

Deeper learning as the goal in the end, I love that. And the ability with ChatGPT to do that. And I'm thinking how this conversation has had the overlay of what I would say is a very traditional classroom

design, which is the Harkness table approach where you can't hide at a Harkness table. Everybody's facing everybody. It's a circle.

Spencer Burrows:

Literally, there's nowhere to hide.

Nat Damon:

There is nowhere to hide, literally. So the idea of defending your thesis, defending your research, and not in an oppositional way at all, it's actually in a trust-based classroom, a relational classroom, you're able to do that without fear of rejection.

And ChatGPT is able to give us, to me, and this discussion is really crystallizing that it's giving us the blueprint and kind of the skeleton of what we then flesh out. And that's the human element that is not being replaced by robots, by Androids. That is actually, and you can speak to this better than I can, perhaps AI and particularly chat GPT is actually going to and is helping us to open up the human flourishing that can happen in a thriving classroom. Does that resonate with you?

Spencer Burrows:

It does. And I'm going to tie it back to the point that any way that we can get students engaged in the material, I think is a positive thing. And if you look at ChatGPT as a tool and maybe a partner in education in some ways, I see some students that would really latch onto that and find it interesting and engaging and others who won't. And that's fine.

And I just had a discussion with my students about the best way to learn and study, and to the point that everyone studies differently and everyone learns differently and developing strategies that you know will work for you, that's kind of the goal. So if flash cards work for you, use them. If they don't, then don't, because then it's a waste of your time. So I can see ChatGPT being very useful for some students in studying and brainstorming and getting stuff together. And some students who write better and learn better just coming in with a blank slate and they can run with it. Well, if that's your method, then great.

If one of the goals of K through 12 is to prepare students for the real world... We haven't shifted in this direction, but I think AI's going to be here to stay in the working world in these different professions that are using it differently. Well, if that's the case, then maybe it's a good thing that they're getting somewhat accustomed to what ChatGPT can do and what it can't. Right now, rather than getting thrown into their first entry level job where part of the expectation is that their boss who has no idea how to use ChatGPT puts it on the junior staffer to use it. Well, it's a good thing if you know how to use it and what it can do and what it can't, and they'll probably end up teaching their boss what some of those uses could be.

So this idea about digital literacy, AI is going to be part of these digital tools, just like I think social media was the last 10 years. You see job postings now where the job title is social media coordinator, or something around social media. That job didn't exist pre Zuckerberg bursting onto the scene. So it's one more thing that the working world needs to know how to use, and if we're teaching students how to use it right now, that's great.

Nat Damon:

Absolutely agree, 100%. And that brings back, Sir Ken Robinson, education guru, who just would always speak to the fact that true education is teaching our students in a way that prepares them for their future, not for our past. And everything you're just saying right then made me think about Sir Ken

Robinson in that philosophy and the world that they're going into, the world that we're currently living in. This is absolutely a world where the integration of AI is more and more going to take over.

Oh, there's a great book by the way that I just read called Running with Robots, and it is about a principal of a school in Massachusetts. It's fictional, but it's based on a... It's a prophecy. Who falls asleep for 20 years, it's a Rip Van Winkle kind of story, and he wakes up in 2040 and to his high school and looks at how AI has transformed the system, the organization of learning that is his school. And it's fascinating because it's thoughtful and it's definitely... This book came out I think a year ago, so it was before ChatGPT came on landscape back in January. But it absolutely tackles this conversation and the elements of it and the incorporation of AI. And yet what it also makes very, very clear is that even in 2040, even as we look ahead, it's still... It's those students who rejected Nearpod when you were back in person because they preferred in-person work, small group facing each other, coming up with ideas, teaming up, competing with each other, debating, all of that that comes so much more effortlessly in an in-person IRL environment.

So this conversation has been just fantastic, Spencer, for me to think about and for all of us to think about. Removing the layer of understandable resistance because it was only three very short years ago that we all pivoted onto Zoom, learned about a chat room, learned how to do breakout groups, learned about how to get the lighting just right so you don't look sick and pale when you're teaching your students. "Okay, turn the video on."

"Do we have a video on policy at school?" All of that, all of that. And it feels like now that we've ramped up, we're almost hit just by another force that's technology driven, that is absolutely calling us to action in the classroom. And with such thoughtful suggestions and strategies that you presented here, I believe that this conversation is going to be extremely helpful to help teachers lift that veil of fear. Or let's not call it fear. That's perhaps belittling, but just natural, understandable resistance after what we've all been through the past three years.

So on that note, Spencer, I'd love to just give you the final talking points, anything that we haven't covered strategically or just anecdotally that you'd like to share about to this audience, which is mostly teachers and parents that you'd like to have the last word on.

Spencer Burrows:

Sure. Well, I think we need to keep in mind that students and kids are always going to be better at using technology than we are.

Nat Damon:

So humbling.

Spencer Burrows:

And I've heard this from both the parent and then the teacher, and the advice I'm giving to my grad students right now is, you're entering your profession, it's very demanding. And the unfortunate, sobering statistic is an incredibly large number of teachers leave the profession within the first five years often citing burnout, work demands. I mean, you have so much on your shoulders.

I think teachers need to realize that students are going to find a way to use this ChatGPT. So if your mission is the absolute ban in ChatGPT, I don't think you're going to succeed at that and you're going to burn yourself out in the process. And I just don't think that's where your efforts are best placed. There's a thousand other things to be concerned about. You've been mentioning the relational learning and how much students want to be back in person, incredibly important, all the other things you have going on in

the classroom. So we've talked a lot about the technical details of ChatGPT and how to work with it or not work with it. I think you just need to realize that an absolute ban is just unworkable and it's probably futile to go down that road.

Parents have asked me, "Well, how can I work with it or make sure they don't use it, period?" And I was telling the parents, "I want you to sit down with the student and mess around with a ChatGPT with your kid, and you can see how it works. And hopefully, it gives you both a better idea of what it does and what it doesn't," and might provide a parent a good teaching point with their student that to be able to point out those parts where it's just wrong or it is not going to work. Students understanding that their parent is on the same page they are I think is important because a lot of times they're not on the same page.

So final bits of advice for teachers. Be realistic about your demands in the classroom. Everyone comes in with a plan. The plan never goes to plan. You teach the same class two years in a row or even the same class multiple periods in the same day, the class does not look the same, and you have to adjust on the fly. And that's part of your job, that's part about doing your job well is tailoring what you're trying to get across to that particular group. Things work differently for different groups of being flexible.

I think we're entering a very interesting time where AI goes from here. We were talking earlier about the writer's strike that's happening right now in Hollywood. They're obviously concerned about how AI is affecting their jobs. I've seen other areas where it's been very useful. Some of my friends who are real estate agents have had very useful application of ChatGPT in generating property listings, for example. A short two paragraphs, "Two bedroom, one bathroom, on a sunny street, da da da da." ChatGPT seems really good at that. Fair enough.

For all the doom and gloom about this is going to replace a whole ton of jobs, I don't know if that's totally true. It seems like for any job that might have been seemingly cut out, I think new ones are going to be created. Like I just mentioned, the fact that a social media coordinator exists as a job, I think there's going to be a similar type role for AI, who can learn how to use it and apply it to whatever company or business. It can be interesting.

The music industry might be ready for a shakeup. You probably heard recently, somebody created a song in the style of Drake and released it. Drake had nothing to do with it, but it sounded like Drake and people bought into it, and then it turns out it was a fake. So I think maybe it's going to come down to an industry by industry reckoning how to use it. But we're entering a new era, and running away from the technology I don't think is the answer. I think educating yourself on how it works and being proactive and hopefully optimistic on positive uses and not so much on the doom and gloom.

Nat Damon:

Well, Spencer, thank you for sharing with us so many of these positive uses of ChatGPT. And also though, thanks for being so candid also, an empathetic about the hesitation that many teachers feel and many people in general feel about AI in society, but also as it pertains to ChatGPT in schools. Because as you said, don't ban it, because what you implied there is that it becomes a cat and mouse game that nobody wants to play. So work with it.

And I found comfort in this conversation as an educator, and I believe that all the teachers and educators listening find a similar comfort in the sense that this is yet another possible gift depending on how we utilize it. Because what it could truly do is open more student creativity, more individual voice, deeper learning, which as you stated outright, that's the focus of the optimal classroom. It's deeper learning. So here's yet another tool, and let's harmonize with it.

Spencer Burrows:

Absolutely.

Nat Damon:

So thank you. Thanks again, Spencer. I'll get back to you with a ChatGPT produced limerick about this podcast and I'll send it your way and maybe I'll post it up in the notes. Because that'd be fun to take the content from this, which will be transcribed into our transcript, and then see what ChatGPT comes up with in a creative way. I think that could be super fun, and I'll post that up on the podcast episode notes.

Spencer Burrows:

I hope nobody plagiarizes that.

Nat Damon:

Yeah, right. I hope not to. But there are ways to find out, right?

Spencer Burrows:

Maybe.

Nat Damon:

So, hey, have a great, great rest of your day, and thanks again for joining us on Reach. Teach. Talk.

Spencer Burrows:

Nat, thank you.

Nat Damon:

Wonderful. Appreciate it.

You've been listening to Reach. Teach. Talk with Nat Damon. If you'd like to recommend a guest for a future episode, you can send your suggestion or questions to [nat@reachacademics.com](mailto:nat@reachacademics.com).