Editorial

Some Further Thoughts on Modern Media, AI, Robots and Their Relation to Education

There is a great fuss in the scholarly literature at the moment concerning artificial intelligence (AI) that relates to educational matters from kindergarten to the end of university studies. The fuss is partly due to the possibility of students using AI to write their answers, essays or engage in creative activities that were thought to be exclusively in the purview of language using animals like ourselves. The main interest is in the possibility of cheating in school and after.

In fact many school teachers and university instructors have no objection to students using AI to augment their work provided they explicitly point out that they have been using a program like ChatGPT to help with or augment their work. This does not mean that the student and the instructor can stop there.

Much of the problems are around what is involved when a human being writes a good, clear and original essay. Or what is it to produce a satisfactory piece of art? Of course, when it is writing involved it is useful to have help that ferrets out a wide variety of references and writes sentences that are grammatically correct and without spelling errors. But the material that is found by the AI writing programs do not distinguish between useful and useless literature. Nor do they discriminate between good and bad ideas. So there is much work for the student still to do and equally much for the instructor to do in reading what comes forward as original if augmented work.

A recent research study at the Werklund School of Education (in which our present Acting Dean, Amy Burns is the principal investigator) is working on the relationship among Artificial Intelligence, Academic Integrity and Assessment innovation which is referred to as A-3. This is a pretty typical kind of triad in the present times since on the one hand the recent innovations are remarkable and certainly potentially useful for scholarly work and on the other hand questions of academic integrity, including deliberate cheating, are made possible by these innovations. And of course, that sort of possibility requires new approaches to assessment.

In future issues of Interchange I hope that a variety of authors will take up these topics and others that relate to the further development of AI. One issue that I will myself continue to pursue is the possibility of intelligent robots that possess, or appear to possess, mobility, consciousness and human like judgment. This issue was initially raised in the movie 2001, where Hal the AI controller of a spaceship, took over the ship and locked the human occupants outside, having gained consciousness and complete control of the ship. The further questions therefore, that we may have to face, is to go beyond the picture we have of AI systems and robots as being utterly dependent on humans to one in which they are our co-equals or even our superiors. So the question is when is an Artificially Intelligent being a person? And how must our laws (and perhaps theirs) reflect this development, if it does occur.

So to all you potential authors out there, please consider Interchange as a possible venue for your publications on such topics.

Ian Winchester, Editor