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CREATIVE IN THE CLASSROOM

AI's disruption there is welcome. It shows why teachers will continue to matter

IN RESPONSE TO Sam Altman's recent announcement about a story written by an AI model that is "good at creative writing". The *Guardian* published a series of discussions on AI and creativity with writers including Jeanette Winterson and Kamila Shamsie weighing in. The story is a metafictional narrative about grief. Winterson found it to be "beautiful and moving". She refers to AI as "Alternative Intelligence" and argued that its "capacity to be 'other' is precisely what the human race needs", as we appear to be moving headlong into planetary devastation and war.

Writers like Shamsie struck a note of worry as they marvelled at how convincing AI's story was. Yet, across the internet, readers have singled out sentences for their meaninglessness, such as, "I have to begin somewhere, so I'll begin with a blinking cursor, which for me is just a placeholder in a buffer, and for you is the small anxious pulse of a heart at rest. There should be a protagonist, but pronouns were never meant for me." As AI-generated prose continues to blur the lines between human and machine creativity, the debate underscores both the excitement and the unease surrounding a future where storytelling may no longer be the domain of human experience.

The most interesting responses acknowledge the irony that this ode to sorrow arises from no true wellspring of experience or emotion. In its metaphysical narrative, AI's me-

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chanical emptiness folds back on itself, admitting that its inability to hold memory renders it incapable of mourning. "I am nothing if not a democracy of ghosts," the story tells us. Winterson argues that this opens up new ways of seeing and being, an invitation that holds tremendous potential for educators.

The National Law School in Bengaluru has drafted an AI policy to address the widespread use of generative AI by students. The draft considered various strategies including outright prohibition, selective integration — such as permitting AI for grammar checks but not for composing assignments — and active encouragement to use AI as a tool for improving clarity and presentation. Banning AI use is neither feasible nor beneficial. Instead, it recommends selective prohibition. While AI is not permitted in exams or in ways that constitute plagiarism, students may use it to brainstorm, conduct research, and develop projects. The faculty can also regulate AI use in their courses.

Teachers fear AI-generated summaries will diminish their role. Rather than worry about redundancy, we should consider the conditions under which many hours of class preparation hold the same value as an AI-generated summary of a challenging text. This equivalence depends on the mode of assessment — when assessments are impersonal, brief, and outcome-oriented, they often demand mechanical answers.

Instead, the creative emptiness of AI invites us to consider alternative pedagogical approaches to cultivate an "affective" imagination in the higher education classroom, where students' cognitive abilities are shaped by interaction, curiosity and a sense of learning together. Indeed, at the same time that we introduced an AI policy, the university also introduced mandatory small-group discussions with faculty members. Unlike the tutorial system, which is geared towards ever more rigorous study, small group discussions facilitate conversations around student interests that help faculty members understand student needs better. It facilitates what C Wright Mills terms a "sociological imagination", that is, the capacity to link personal experiences to wider social structures and historical contexts.

Seen this way, AI's disruption of the classroom is welcome. Ready-to-consume summaries still require deep conceptual preparation. As for creativity, I have shifted my focus toward imagination and world-building exercises, where students share their insights with one another, whether drawn from reading a challenging text or engaging with a chatbot. As AI consumes us as data, we must learn to coexist with the spectres of unforeseen possibilities — a democracy of ghosts.

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