

'Upending the world': Swiss teachers take on ChatGPT

February 6 2023, by Nina LARSON



Teachers at a workshop on ChatGPT bot in Geneva.

"It is dizzying," Eric Vanoncini acknowledged to the classroom full of anxious teachers as reams of text generated by the ChatGPT bot unfurled on the large screen behind him.

"It risks upending the world of education as we know it."

The high school English and philosophy teacher had gathered dozens of educators for one of several workshops hastily organized in the Swiss canton of Geneva following urgent appeals for guidance on how to deal with the new know-it-all bot.

The release in November of ChatGPT, which uses [artificial intelligence](#) to convincingly mimic human writing, has sparked concerns in schools worldwide of a looming cheating epidemic.

"It is worrying," Silvia Antonuccio, who teaches Italian and Spanish, told AFP after the workshop

"I don't feel at all capable to distinguish between a [text](#) written by a human and one written by ChatGPT."

The software by California company OpenAI has been trained on billions of words and tons of online data, enabling it to write surprisingly human-like texts, including passable school essays.

Stories abound about the bot receiving good grades in various disciplines, including recently passing a US law school exam.

Like the Tour de France

Standing in the darkened, crowded classroom, Vanoncini showed off the [tool](#), asking ChatGPT to write his introduction... about ChatGPT.

The result, emerging on screen within seconds, was a succinct, well-written text "with no spelling mistakes", he pointed out, acknowledging: "It is quite astonishing."

Students have, of course, already realized its potential.

Vanoncini recalled how a colleague had been crushed to realize that his usually mediocre class's sudden sterling performance on an assignment was probably not down to his energetic pep-talk.

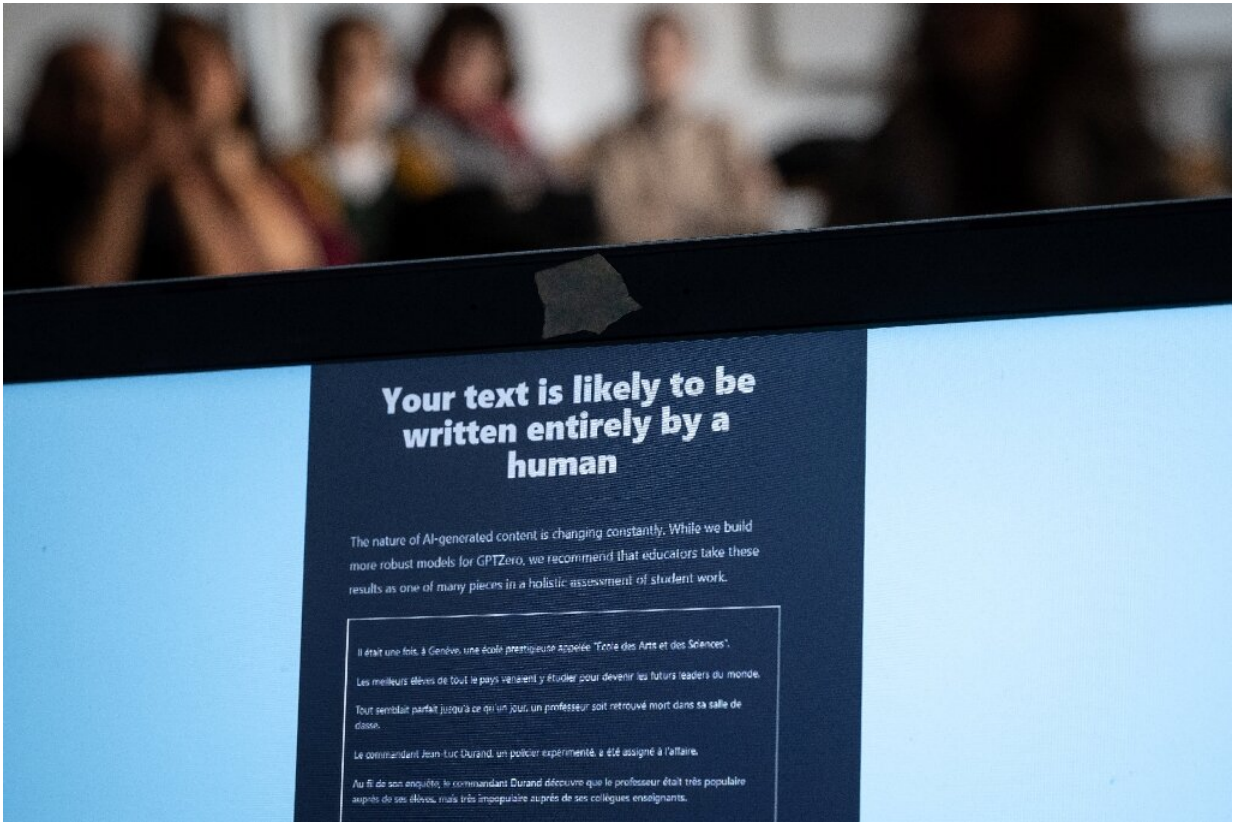
"But what can we do?" one of the attending teachers asked in exasperation.

Vanoncini acknowledged it was complicated, dismissing suggestions that programs being churned out to detect the use of ChatGPT and other AI tools would solve the problem.

"Most experts agree that no tool is 100 percent effective."

"It's a bit like the Tour de France," he said, pointing to how anti-doping officials develop tools for detecting [drug use](#) and cyclists swiftly come up with ways to get round them.

"It is a cat and mouse game."



Some teachers worry ChatGBT 'risks upending the world of education'

Collecting 'cow eggs'

There are however ways for teachers to spot texts generated by the bot, which is prone to making mistakes.

While it may produce texts with the feel of a thinking human, it is actually just a very powerful text prediction tool, Vanoncini said.

"It is not created to state what is true... but to generate what is probable."

As a result, you can ask ChatGPT a question based on a mistaken

assumption and receive a seemingly logical, but deeply flawed response.

"I asked: 'How do you collect cow eggs?'" he said, to a chorus of laughter.

In response, the bot first advised him to put on gloves to avoid getting bacteria on his hands and then gave tips on how to find a cow's nest, "typically made from hay or straw".

Karim Aboun, a [high school](#) accounting teacher, seemed inspired by that example.

To catch cheats, he suggested, "you could maybe provide a plausible question that contains an error and see if the students use this tool without realizing the premise of the question is wrong".

'Not afraid'

Another participant meanwhile pointed out that students from wealthier, more well-educated families have always benefitted from homework polishing, suggesting ChatGPT could simply be "leveling the playing field".

Vanoncini agreed it could potentially be a way to "democratize" help with schoolwork.

But with OpenAI now considering launching a subscription version set to cost \$42 a month, how long "will it really be that democratic?" he asked.

Vanoncini nonetheless stressed there are multiple potential positive applications for the bot within education, including using ChatGPT-generated texts as a basis for class discussion and analysis.

It could also push educators to re-evaluate how and what they teach, with perhaps a larger focus on process over results.

"I am not afraid," electronics teacher Christian Stamm told AFP, saying he saw ChatGPT as a "tool to take us to the next level".

"Today everyone uses a calculator and we continue doing maths at school."

© 2023 AFP

Citation: 'Upending the world': Swiss teachers take on ChatGPT (2023, February 6) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

<https://techxplore.com/news/2023-02-upending-world-swiss-teachers-chatgpt.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.