

# What If We Talk About ChatGPT (Again)?



Not very original, you might say, to write an editorial that talks about ChatGPT after the flood of articles, reports, and opinion pieces that have invaded our news feeds in recent weeks. However, not doing so in a journal dealing with college pedagogy would be an odd choice, to say the least. It would even imply that we have been living in a cave since the recent release of the chatbot prototype. Developed by the research firm Open AI, initially funded in part by none other than the brazen tech mogul and inveterate space traveler, Elon Musk, this language model strikes the imagination as it creates a real shockwave in the educational world.

The tool fascinates as much as it evokes myriad thoughts in the higher education community. Is ChatGPT a disruptive technology, a search engine of the future, or a tool for learning, cheating or intellectual laziness? It's probably a little bit of all of this at the same time, depending on how it is used. And much more if we believe the scientists and researchers specialized in artificial intelligence (AI), who see the chatbot's recent exploits as the very small tip of the iceberg that is the potential of AI.

The excitement of the last few months surrounding the language model is fueled by a media buzz, due to the version made publicly available on November 30, 2022. However, the AI "revolution" has been underway for decades without such a media hype. Quebec is, in fact, a hub of AI research<sup>1</sup>; Montreal, home to the "Montréal Declaration for a Responsible Development of Artificial Intelligence" (Palais des congrès, November 2017). And the higher education community has no reason to be shy about its recent initiatives in this area: let's think in particular of the Pôle montréalais d'enseignement supérieur en intelligence artificielle (PIA), the International Observatory on the Societal Impacts of AI and Digital Technology, or the JACOB Center for Applied Artificial Intelligence.

Regardless, in educational institutions and classrooms, many educators in the college network were caught off guard late last fall. Is ChatGPT behind some of the summa-

<sup>1</sup> According to a study conducted by Tortoise Media, which ranks states according to their strengths in AI, Quebec ranks 7<sup>th</sup> worldwide (*La Presse*, March 9, 2022).

tive evaluations submitted? Not impossible. Should we be concerned and rethink the assessment of learning in higher education? Certainly—and not just because of the accessibility of a language model like ChatGPT (but that would be the subject of a whole other editorial). Now, should we ban the controversial chatbot from schools or not? The age-old dilemma between banning and educating quickly comes back to bite. Opinions on the matter are divided at the moment. Arguably, more hindsight is required, but more and more teachers are speaking up about effectively integrating text generators into learning rather than banning them. Gradually, the higher education community is organizing itself. Resources for deepening one's understanding of ChatGPT or making the most of its capabilities are appearing: pedagogical guides for using the platform, communities of practice, labs, panels and podcasts are multiplying.<sup>2</sup>

Among everything that has been written and said recently with regard to ChatGPT, if there is only one thing that should attract attention, it is the importance, even the necessity, of AI literacy, which is even more specific than digital literacy. As with other types of literacies,<sup>3</sup> having a good understanding of the fundamental concepts and methods used in AI will certainly prove itself useful for life in society. Learning to "prompt" also, i.e., to enter information that allows interaction with a computer program and to use strategies that increase the probability of obtaining a correct answer. As well as developing critical thinking about the answers provided by the conversational robot, because there is no guarantee of the veracity or reliability of the information provided in ChatGPT texts. Isn't this an essential transversal competency that we would like to see college students develop: corroborating the information

they are exposed to, cross-checking it, questioning it and systematically doubting everything... that is said in certain media, that is written on social networks and, now, that is presented by ChatGPT?

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There won't be any further talk about the popular chatbot in this issue of *Pédagogie collégiale*—not that we don't want to delve into the subject, quite the contrary. In the spirit of full disclosure (or almost): we have a series of articles on this topic in the works that will complement our *It Takes a Village* thematic issue next May. After all, like it or not, ChatGPT is now part of the collegiate village, even if it has caused some havoc since its release.

On another note, we would like to take advantage of this editorial to re-launch our special call for *Network Portraits*. We are looking for short texts (200 words maximum) presenting a person from the college network that we should absolutely discover because they embody college life at its best, across all roles and professions. Read a sample portrait for inspiration and send us yours before March 31, 2023: [aqpc.qc.ca/en/call-for-contributions-2023]. —

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<sup>2</sup> The Observatoire sur la réussite en enseignement supérieur (ORES) offers a selection of resources to help you gain insight in the matter [capres.ca/enseignement-et-apprentissage/pedagogie-strategies-et-moyens-denseignement/chatgpt-une-selection-de-ressources-pour-y-voir-plus-clair].

<sup>3</sup> The Réseau québécois de recherche et de transfert en littératie offers a definition that captures the essence of literacy: the ability of an individual, an environment and a community to understand and communicate information through language in a variety of media in order to participate actively in society in different contexts.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

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