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Revolutionizing History Teaching with AI: A Journey with ChatGPT

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(Automatic translated from the portuguese version:

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/revolucionando-o-ensino-de-hist%C3%B3ria-com-ia-uma-jornada-azevedo-4nuic>)

Introduction:

While the use of technological resources in the classroom is not new—I have been using tools like data show projectors, Google Maps (since its launch), online forms, websites, videos, etc., for 25 years—such usage was more limited for a time, especially due to teacher resistance who rarely received adequate training. But in the last decade, particularly after the pandemic, the integration of technology in the educational field has advanced rapidly. From simple digital resources to sophisticated artificial intelligence tools, each innovation has the potential to radically transform how we teach and learn. As a history teacher with 25 years of experience, I have always sought methods that not only inform but also inspire and engage my students in significant ways. I started a blog in 2011 sharing some of these adventures with the technology of the time (tecnaula.blogspot.com). The focus is to understand the teaching of history not as a need to memorize past situations but to provide tools for students to understand the present and knowledge blocks they can use to build their futures. Thinking of activities that could make historical knowledge not only playful but also practical and applied, I created the activity called Letters to the Past, which can now be totally improved and expanded with the support of ChatGPT.



What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence tool developed by OpenAI, functions as an advanced text generator. It uses vast training data to predict and generate plausible and contextually appropriate responses, demystifying the idea of AI as a sentient entity. "The true power of artificial intelligence in education lies not in replacing the educator but in amplifying human capabilities and freeing teachers to engage in what truly matters: personalized teaching," states John McCarthy, a pioneer in artificial intelligence. Understanding what ChatGPT is essential to make good use of it. Using it as if it were a Google search system can be intensely frustrating, for example, and often leads to incorrect responses. Similarly, if well utilized, it can also be an incredible tool for humanities teachers (we deal with texts all the time, and the function of this AI tool is precisely to generate texts).

The 'Letters to the Past' Activity:

The function of the Letters to the Past activity was to give students the opportunity for both playful and practical interaction with historical knowledge. After studying a specific period (e.g., the French Revolution), each student was invited to write a letter to a historical figure

from that era (different students received different characters), and they were to both explain a bit of their life "in the future" to the character and ask questions about their actions and thoughts.



In grading the activity, I could verify the presence of anachronisms, incorrect use of concepts, and the misunderstanding of basic aspects of the subject (e.g., the concept of revolution, bourgeoisie, nationalism, nobility, serfdom, etc.). When I started this activity in 2001, I had two classes, one with 13 students and one with 15, and it was very easy to not only correct all the letters but also to respond individually as if I were the character in question. A few years later, I was already guiding up to 600 students simultaneously in about 15 to 17 much more crowded classes, making individualized responses to everyone unfeasible. So, I would draw 2 to 3 letters per class to respond.

Integrating ChatGPT into the Activity:

With ChatGPT, I can now simulate responses from historical figures to all the letters. This not only maximizes interaction with each student but also enriches the learning experience by allowing each student to receive personalized feedback. With a few commands before

entering the letters, it is possible to "explain" to ChatGPT 4.0 the activity of "teaching" the proper way for the responses to be given. And it's incredible to realize that the quality of the responses, although not as personal as the ones I gave, is much higher than I initially expected. It is also important that the teacher continues to choose some to give their personal responses and even indicate to students which were answered by him and which with the support of AI (and when possible, those created by AI should be read before the feedback). To enhance further, ChatGPT also helps to analyze the letters collectively, identifying common themes and conceptual errors, such as anachronisms, allowing focused adjustments in areas where students demonstrate difficulties. For example, I can ask it how many of the letters used the term revolution and what percentage of them used the term correctly, or ask to identify the most common mistakes made and make a list according to the frequency of each error.

Conclusion:

The use of ChatGPT in teaching history demonstrates the transformative potential of AI to enrich the educational process. This is just the beginning, and the possibilities to expand such practices are as vast as our imagination allows. This example here chosen is just one among dozens I intend to share with you in the coming days, and my goal is that we as humanities teachers share the practical results of our activities using AI tools.

In this way, I invite fellow educators and technology enthusiasts to explore the use of AI as a support tool in their teaching practices. Share your experiences or questions in the comments, and let's together discover new possibilities for our classrooms.

Relevant Keywords List:

Artificial Intelligence in Education

Innovation in History Teaching

ChatGPT in the classroom

Technology in Education

Student Engagement

Creative Teaching Methods

Interactive Learning

Modern Educational Tools

Personalized Education

Anachronisms in History