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Citation: Holtham, C. (2023). Deploying generative AI to draft a roleplay simulation of difficult conversations about inclusivity. *Irish Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, 7(2), pp. 146-157. doi: 10.22554/ijtel.v7i2.127

This is the published version of the paper.

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Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/34348/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.22554/ijtel.v7i2.127>

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Deploying generative AI to draft a roleplay simulation of difficult conversations about inclusivity

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Abstract

Within inclusivity change initiatives, conversations around microaggressions are a key element in seeking behavioural change. This exemplar use of GenAI is focused on authoring a conversational role play simulation. Prompts draw on the extensive literature of microaggressions. The underlying scenario is a podcast where the author and chatbot co-design the role play. The study involved a novice in GenAI simultaneously learning prompt engineering which would generate realistic role played conversation. A core finding was that GenAI can produce a conversational style realistic enough to deploy in higher education inclusivity workshops, and whose subject matter content is satisfactory. The chatbot proposed four benefits of a role play simulation, which are drawn on to frame the critical reflection. An important conclusion was that the GenAI process could valuably facilitate shifting from a subject expert academic being sole author, to co-design involving both those with experience of microaggressions, as well as potential staff and student workshop participants.

1. Introduction

1.1 Relationship with Generative AI in educational and scholarly contexts

The author's relationship with GenAI has involved two phases. Firstly, since the launch of ChatGPT on 30th November 2022, the author has been, using Rogers' (2003) terminology a "laggard", and in fact a quite sceptical laggard. This continued until 4th October 2023, when an inspirational one-hour business school briefing event unexpectedly proved to be the tipping point, shifting the author from sceptical laggard to intrigued novice user. The stubborn reluctance even to log on to openai.com was overcome and the second phase began that same night.

Receiving the emailed chapter call from ILTA on 5th October certainly felt extraordinarily serendipitous, and provided an immediate incentive to develop a prototype role play conversation with GenAI, and write up the experience, in just under two weeks.

This paper is based on an autoethnographic approach, having the advantage of direct access, but of course also potential problems of reliability. A reflective learning journal was kept of the project, a daily mix of handwritten and digitally created content.

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One of the key groups impacting the speed of uptake of GenAI is the response of those who are the most resistant or least interested in using it. Though the author is perhaps not a typical laggard, this transition to becoming a novice user of GenAI may shed some light on incentivizing laggards of any type to give a base level of attention to this topic. UNESCO's quick start guide was a first-class starting point (Liu et al., 2023), with Abedi et al. (2023) providing a practical introduction from the engineering discipline, but generally applicable. For prompt engineering, Lingard (2023) was of great help. Nerantzi et al. (2023) touch on simulations as a potential creativity opportunity for AI in higher education.

1.2 Rationale for the choice of topic

Following pressures from students and alumni during Black Lives Matter in 2020, the author has been involved in business school initiatives on decolonisation of the curriculum and the schools' overall EDI (equality, diversity, inclusivity) activity. Student induction now includes a 90 minute workshop on school values and EDI. Even though well-received these are time limited and are perhaps necessarily geared up to an informational role, rather than initiating attitude change, for example in relation to microaggressions (Cousins, 2019).

Case studies based on real organisations often struggle to include the messy reality of interpersonal and interdisciplinary conflict, bad faith actors and errors of style or judgement (Starkey & Tiratsoo, 2007). There is a long history of role play simulations relating to difficult conversations (McGregor, 1993), and contemporary materials are already addressing microaggressions e.g. in health (Dada & Laughey, 2023). The University of Iowa is using avatar-based simulation (Taylor, 2022) for a very similar purpose to that outlined in this paper. The focus in this paper is on using GenAI to generate realistic text-based dialogues of diverse and conflicted viewpoints in a university context.

The author, with colleagues had over a decade developed a genre of role-play simulation which hinges on a soap-opera fiction approach- a setting with characters who then face dilemmas. An expert with some experience of fiction writing is then recruited to write a sequence of challenges within the chosen setting, a fictional town of Millcaster. For staff workshops this involves the University of Millcaster.

There have been no readily available funds to recruit an inclusivity expert cum fiction writer, so the author's very early thoughts were to develop a prototype role play generated via GenAI with prompts from the author. Research by Forrester and Boothe (2023) had not been able to find an available example of an inclusivity GenAI-authored role play simulation. If the prototype worked out, it would help support the business case for recruiting the subject expert with fiction writing skills.

1.3 Transparent and detailed description of the AI tool(s) used to create the article

The only AI tool used is ChatGPT-3.5 free version.

- All use is explicitly articulated.
- None of the abstract is AI generated.
- The entire text in "Short report" is explicitly indicated as (a) author prompt (italics) or (b) ChatGPT3.5 response, subject to non-textual editing of italics and line spacing.

- It is confirmed that responsible use is adhered to in relation to the three areas of transparency, personal data and copyright. OpenAI's recommended two sentence disclosure statement immediately precedes the AI-generated content.

The first "round" of prompts were authored very early on in part to learn the features of ChatGPT-3.5. Two more "rounds" were needed, in particular, to keep within the word counts. Because of the conversational nature of ChatGPT, the idea of using the podcast as the format proved to be more attractive than report formats rooted in text writing. The whole final podcast dialogue was produced in one single session.

There have been no changes to the text of prompts and AI-generated text; the only adjustments made related to the title and headings, line spacing and italicization of the prompts. Some of the generated text involves stage directions such as (Rolls Eyes). For clarity, these were not requested by the author and are entirely ChatGPT generated.

1.4 The prompt(s) you used to generate the article

The use of ChatGPT first involved articulating 10 separate prompts leading to very useful materials but far in excess of the 2,500-word count for the short report, and not joined up. These had to be put to one side, and a new set of prompts, intended to be integrated, were produced, based on the first list but more focused, more inter-related and narrower in scope. This still led to an excessive word count. To create the eventual final podcast text, 9 narrowed prompts were drafted and refined.

Podcast discussion between User [Clive Holtham; italic text] and Chatbot GPT-3.5 [roman text] on 22nd October 2023. Text is cut and pasted without editing apart from line spacing and use of italics for the prompts. The prompts are wholly human-created.

The author generated this text in part with GPT-3, OpenAI's large-scale language-generation model. Upon generating draft language, the author reviewed, edited, and revised the language to their own liking and takes ultimate responsibility for the content of this publication.

2. AI Generated Short Report

Roleplay for Microaggression Training

User

Thank you for joining us on the EDifying podcast tonight, Chat. Our plan is to have a live dialogue so you and I and can explore how roleplay simulations can help colleagues get to grips with problems such as microaggressions. If that is OK, just to start with a slightly personal question, I usually come across people called Chat in Switzerland. Do you have a Swiss background?

ChatGPT

Thank you for having me on the EDifying podcast, and I'm happy to engage in this live dialogue with you. As for your question, I don't have a Swiss background or nationality. I'm a virtual AI, so I don't have a physical origin or background. I'm here to provide information

and engage in conversations on a wide range of topics, including roleplay simulations and issues like microaggressions. How can I assist you further with our discussion today?

User

That's really helpful, Chat. I want to put a real problem to you tonight. I have an idea to create a role play simulation on microaggressions, aimed at both teachers and students in a university where over 60% of students are from ethnic minorities but university employees form a much smaller percentage. Can you tell me what are the 5 best reasons why my simulation proposal could have a really important role to play in improving inclusion?

ChatGPT

Certainly, creating a roleplay simulation on microaggressions for teachers and students in a university with a diverse student body can have several important benefits for improving inclusion. Here are five compelling reasons for your proposal:

1. **Increased Awareness:** Roleplay simulations provide a safe and controlled environment for participants to experience and witness microaggressions. This experience can raise awareness about the subtle, often unintentional, forms of discrimination that minority students may face. It can be a powerful tool to help individuals recognize their own biases and behaviors.
2. **Empathy Building:** Through roleplay, participants can step into the shoes of others and gain a deeper understanding of the impact of microaggressions. This can foster empathy, helping both teachers and students appreciate the experiences of their peers, which is crucial for fostering an inclusive and empathetic campus culture.
3. **Skill Development:** Roleplay simulations can equip participants with the skills to respond effectively to microaggressions. Teachers can learn how to address these issues in the classroom, and students can develop strategies for dealing with microaggressions they encounter. This skill development can lead to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.
4. **Cultural Competence:** The simulation can enhance cultural competence among teachers and students. It can help participants understand different cultural backgrounds, norms, and values, making it easier to bridge cultural gaps and create a more inclusive educational setting.
5. **Behavioral Change:** Roleplay simulations have the potential to drive real behavioral change. By practicing inclusive behaviors in a controlled setting, participants can carry these lessons into their daily interactions, thereby contributing to a more inclusive campus culture. This, in turn, can lead to better retention rates for students from minority backgrounds and a more inclusive and diverse teaching staff.

Overall, your roleplay simulation proposal has the potential to create a profound impact on inclusion by raising awareness, fostering empathy, developing necessary skills, promoting cultural competence, and driving behavioral change among teachers and students in the university. It's a valuable step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

User

You have pointed me in some very useful directions, thanks Chat. Can I follow that up by asking you for 3 specific examples of well-known organisations who are known to have used role play simulations to address the problem of microaggressions before September 2021.

There is no need to repeat my question in your reply, and since we are tight on time, can you do this briefly (200 words)?

ChatGPT

Certainly, here are three well-known organizations that were known to have used roleplay simulations to address the problem of microaggressions before September 2021:

1. **Microsoft:** Microsoft is known for its commitment to diversity and inclusion. They have utilized roleplay simulations and workshops to educate employees on microaggressions and other diversity-related issues. Microsoft's programs aim to raise awareness, promote empathy, and provide employees with tools to navigate and address these challenges in the workplace.
2. **Google:** Google has a history of implementing roleplay simulations and diversity training programs to combat microaggressions. They've used various scenarios and discussions to help employees recognize and address these issues, promoting an inclusive workplace culture. Google has been at the forefront of addressing diversity and inclusion challenges in the tech industry.
3. **Harvard University:** Within the academic sphere, Harvard University has been proactive in addressing microaggressions. They've used roleplay simulations and workshops as part of their diversity and inclusion initiatives. These simulations aim to enhance the cultural competence of faculty, staff, and students, creating a more inclusive learning and working environment.

These organizations have recognized the importance of using roleplay simulations as a means to address microaggressions and promote diversity and inclusion. Their efforts can serve as valuable examples for your own initiative.

User

Chat, let's get onto designing the role play. Universities still have problems with ethnic minority staff and students facing micro-aggressions from both staff and students due to their ethnicity. Let us suppose we have an average student Zak (ethnic minority) who has been affected by microaggressions and is unhappy with that. There is an outlying staff member Karina who does not accept there is such a thing as microaggressions, and who politically votes for a party which wishes to reduce the percentage of ethnic minorities in the UK. Please create a dialogue between Zak and Karina where Zak explains microaggressions and how they make him feel. Karina then responds to each one with the opposite viewpoint. Karina is a very aggressive person who does not believe in niceness or compromise. Please make sure she is not too pleasant.

ChatGPT

Zak: Karina, I wanted to talk to you about something that's been bothering me. I've been experiencing microaggressions on campus, and it's really affecting my experience here.

Karina: (Scoffs) Microaggressions? Really, Zak? That sounds like another one of those made-up things to me.

Zak: No, Karina, it's not made up. Microaggressions are subtle, often unintentional acts or comments that convey bias or discrimination. They make me feel like I don't belong or that I'm somehow less than others because of my ethnicity.

Karina: (Rolls eyes) Well, I don't buy it. I vote for a party that wants to reduce the number of ethnic minorities in the UK. It's about preserving our culture and heritage, not discriminating against anyone.

Zak: That's exactly the problem, Karina. When you vote for policies that target ethnic minorities, it perpetuates the kind of bias that leads to microaggressions. It makes people like me feel unwelcome and unsafe.

Karina: Toughen up, Zak. This is the real world. If you're going to get upset over every little thing, you'll never survive.

Zak: It's not about being thin-skinned, Karina. Microaggressions have a cumulative effect. They chip away at a person's self-esteem and make it harder to focus on academics.

Karina: (Shrugs) Well, if you're that sensitive, maybe you shouldn't be here. We can't always tiptoe around your feelings.

Zak: It's not about tiptoeing, Karina. It's about respecting each other and fostering a welcoming environment for everyone. If we want a diverse and inclusive campus, we need to acknowledge and address these issues.

Karina: (Dismissively) I still don't see the big deal. Maybe you're just too sensitive.

Zak: Karina, I hope one day you'll take the time to understand how microaggressions affect people like me. It's about creating a better, more inclusive community for all of us.

In this dialogue, Zak tries to explain the concept of microaggressions and their impact, while Karina dismisses them and holds her viewpoint, illustrating the challenge of addressing microaggressions when faced with someone who doesn't believe in their existence.

User

Chat, here is the next step for you. Zak and Karina have now been joined by Maria, who is an activist within the university to improve the pay and conditions of ethnic minority staff, as well as the way they are sometimes treated by a minority of white staff. Her first degree was from SOAS in colonial history. She will express much stronger views than Zak. She has listened to the dialogue and now wants to make four points which criticise Karina and which may lead to strong disagreement or confrontation.

ChatGPT

Maria: (Passionately) I couldn't help but overhear your conversation, and Karina, I have to say, I strongly disagree with your views.

Karina: (Defiantly) Well, Maria, it's a free world, and we're entitled to our opinions.

Maria: (Assertively) That's true, but when you vote for policies that actively target ethnic minorities and deny the existence of microaggressions, it contributes to systemic discrimination. You may not see it, but it's very real for people like Zak and countless others.

Karina: (Rolls eyes) Here we go again with the victim mentality.

Maria: (Emphatically) It's not about victim mentality, Karina. It's about recognizing systemic issues and working to rectify them. Microaggressions are part of a larger problem of racial inequality that needs to be addressed.

Karina: (Defensively) I just don't see how my political beliefs have anything to do with it.

Maria: (Passionately) Karina, your political beliefs directly impact the lives of our colleagues and fellow students. By supporting policies that target ethnic minorities, you're complicit in perpetuating discrimination and inequality. We need allies, not adversaries, in our fight for a more inclusive university.

Karina: (Sarcastically) So, now I'm the enemy, am I?

Maria: (Firmly) I didn't say that, Karina. I'm saying we should be working together to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all, regardless of our differences.

In this exchange, Maria passionately expresses her disagreement with Karina's stance, emphasizing the impact of political beliefs on systemic issues and the need for collaboration in promoting inclusion. Maria's strong views may lead to confrontation with Karina, highlighting the divisive nature of the topic.

User

Chat, this is very much along the lines I was hoping for. Actually a fourth person has been listening, Winston. He is an older academic, white British, and he is a bit frightened to enter the discussion, and even more frightened to say the wrong thing. Can you make Zak welcome him into the discussion, but also for Zak to explain how Walter could be more effective in promotion inclusion if he were personally to speak up as an ally and active bystander.

ChatGPT

Zak: (Turning to Winston) Winston, it's great that you're here, and I appreciate your willingness to join the conversation. It's essential for everyone to be part of this dialogue.

Winston: (Nervously) Well, I've been listening, and I'm just not sure if I can add anything meaningful.

Zak: (Encouragingly) Winston, your perspective matters. As a respected academic, your voice carries weight, and it can be a catalyst for change. If you're wondering how to promote inclusion, one crucial step is to be an active ally and bystander.

Winston: (Curious) What do you mean by that, Zak?

Zak: (Explaining) Being an ally means showing support and empathy for those facing discrimination. It's about standing up for what's right, even when it's uncomfortable. When you see microaggressions or any form of discrimination happening, speaking up and addressing them sends a powerful message.

Maria: (Nodding) Zak is absolutely right, Winston. Sometimes, just having someone step in and say, "Hey, that's not okay" can make a significant difference.

Zak: (Continuing) Being an active bystander means actively intervening when you witness unfair treatment. It could be as simple as asking someone if they're okay or if they need help, or it could involve addressing the person responsible and educating them on why their actions are hurtful.

Maria: (Encouragingly) And, Winston, it's not about being a hero or knowing all the answers. It's about showing that you care and are committed to making our university a more inclusive place.

Winston: (Reflecting) I see. I've always tried to be fair and just, but I suppose I've been worried about saying the wrong thing.

Zak: (Supportive) It's okay to make mistakes, Winston. What's important is that you're willing to learn and grow. By taking these steps, you can help create an environment where everyone feels safe and valued.

In this exchange, Zak and Maria encourage Winston to become an ally and active bystander, emphasizing the importance of his role in promoting inclusion and addressing microaggressions. They offer guidance and support to help him understand the value of speaking up and taking action.

User

Here is the final stage, Chat. Karina is very angry at the way Zak and Maria are talking to Winston. She wants to make some new arguments about why inclusivity is being given too much attention in the university.

ChatGPT

Karina: (Angrily) I've had enough of this inclusivity talk. Zak, Maria, you're both too focused on making everyone feel comfortable. Universities are places for intellectual debate and growth, not for coddling people's emotions.

Zak: (Calmly) Karina, it's not about coddling. It's about ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to engage in intellectual debate. Microaggressions and discrimination can be severe roadblocks for some students and staff.

Maria: (Firmly) Inclusivity isn't about stifling debate; it's about broadening it. It's about ensuring that voices from all backgrounds are heard and valued. This is fundamental to the academic experience.

Karina: (Dismissively) But it's gone too far. We can't even have challenging discussions anymore without worrying about offending someone.

Winston: (Thoughtfully) Karina, it's possible to have challenging discussions while still being respectful and considerate. Inclusivity doesn't mean avoiding debate; it means making sure that everyone can participate without feeling marginalized.

Karina: (Defiantly) I still think it's being overemphasized. We're becoming too politically correct, and it's stifling free speech.

Zak: (Assertively) Free speech doesn't mean free from consequences. Inclusivity and respectful dialogue should be the pillars of free speech. It's about learning how to express strong opinions without hurting or silencing others.

Maria: (Passionately) Our university should be a place where people of all backgrounds can flourish intellectually. Inclusivity is the key to unlocking the full potential of our diverse community.

Karina: (Resistant) Well, I still think it's a step too far.

In this final part of the conversation, Karina expresses her frustration with the emphasis on inclusivity and raises concerns about stifling intellectual debate and free speech. Zak, Maria, and Winston counter her arguments, emphasizing the importance of creating an environment where all voices are heard and respected. The discussion showcases the differing viewpoints and challenges in promoting inclusivity on campus.

User

Chat, I am afraid we are running out of time and sorry to the EDIfy listeners who could like to hear more. In no more than 100 words, could you summarise for us how a 4 person role play dialogue like this could help us to address difficult conversations in a university context?

ChatGPT

A four-person roleplay dialogue like this helps address difficult conversations in a university by:

Promoting Awareness: It raises awareness about critical issues like microaggressions, systemic bias, and inclusivity.

Fostering Empathy: It encourages participants to empathize with diverse perspectives, creating a more compassionate and inclusive environment.

Skill Development: It equips individuals with the skills to engage in constructive conversations, stand up against discrimination, and be allies to marginalized groups.

Creating Safe Spaces: Roleplay offers a controlled environment to practice difficult conversations, enhancing participants' confidence in addressing real-world challenges.

This type of roleplay is a valuable tool for universities seeking to improve campus culture and inclusivity.

User

Well Chat, that was 108 words but I am sure no-one will complain about that. If we ask you to come back again in the future, would you mind doing that?

ChatGPT

I'd be delighted to return in the future! Feel free to reach out anytime you'd like to continue our discussions or explore new topics. Thank you for having me on the EDifying podcast, and I look forward to our future conversations.

3. Critical Reflection

3.1 Reflection on Process

Early in 2023, the author had started to draft an online role-play simulation with a view to using the output to underpin the bid for resources. But this stalled for a specific reason, which was it proved to be very difficult at a personal and emotional level to write text for the problematic participant, now named Karina. This was not a problem for ChatGPT, who in early prompts had however constructed Karina as too sympathetic, hence the need for very specific prompting on this aspect. The way that GenAI was early on able to overcome the author's personal mental block increased confidence in the whole process.

3.1.1 What did it get wrong (references, etc.)

The GPT-3.5 has a very limited understanding of word counts and errs almost always by being too long. In relation to the examples requested, it had originally given a decent variety of organisations but became stuck on Microsoft, Google and Harvard despite repeated regeneration requests. The author did not have enough expertise or time to get around this. Each dialogue was unnecessarily summarized, which has been retained as a potential marker of the use of GenAI.

The initial question to the chatbot asked about their Swiss background. This was a deliberately authored potential microaggression, and in a real-life discussion, a facilitator would be able to tease out that potential faux pas. This perhaps serves as a design example, to include twists where a chatbot purely processing text will struggle to highlight subtle logical inconsistencies.

3.1.2 What did it get right?

From the very beginning, GPT-3.5 was able accurately to mimic a conversational style. It originally made Karina surprisingly conciliatory, so it was necessary to give it clearer instructions on Karina's intransigence, to which GPT-3.5 responded very well. Although the content generated in this field of microaggressions is not ground-breaking, it is satisfactory as a significant input to a microaggressions workshop, though more work is needed on the overall design of such a workshop.

3.1.3 How long did the process take?

Plausible results were achieved in the first 24 hours, but to refine the prompts was a continual process as the author is still only a novice. Two weeks elapsed time was available and adequate output was eventually achieved by day 13.

3.1.4 What would you do differently?

I would begin with word counts deliberately understated. I would examine different genres of conversation early on; I was forced into the podcast format due to the way I had experimented “bottom up” in learning prompt engineering. This was an exploratory study carried out by a novice GenAI author. This clearly limits the wider applicability of the work, but does provide a cameo of circumstances that will, with a surge of AI novices, be fairly commonly arising in coming months.

3.1.5 Was it difficult to write a long scholarly piece with Gen AI?

The aim was to produce a credible role play that could serve to underpin difficult conversations with staff and students. It was not a scholarly research activity, but rather applying scholarly principles to learning design. It was possible even with minimal GenAI expertise to produce a plausible roleplay, but this needs further work on learning design, and has not been tested yet on a live audience.

3.2 Reflection on Implications

With only core reading and two weeks intensive prompting of ChatGPT, the author would be reluctant to claim the type of insight into GenAI that local colleagues and international experts have accumulated over the last year. So the reflections in this section are partly based on the author’s other areas of research interest in educational technology innovation since the start of the pandemic in particular.

The chatbot proposed four benefits of a role-play simulation. Here is a very brief assessment of each:

Potential Benefits	Author Commentary
Promoting awareness	This was achieved at a basic level; more could be done through additional prompts
Fostering empathy	Because of the realistic nature of the generated conversation, and its style, this has reasonable potential.
Skill development	This hinges on the learning design surrounding the role play, but experience of role play on other topics suggest there is potential for this.
Create safe spaces	By using the reasonably authentic words of realistic but non-human entities, this avoids participants being faced with sharing what they may not want to share. So this is a positive from use of this type of simulation.

Table 1: Review against the four benefits articulated by Chatbot

3.2.1 Implications for knowledge, scholarship, teaching and learning and assessment?

A subject matter expert can with time and escalating skills develop new expertise firstly in prompt engineering and secondly in designing the pedagogy surrounding the chat content. Even the work of a GenAI novice was able to generate surprisingly nuanced content, which has great potential in addressing realistically areas of management where conflict and clashing values abound.

Another important conclusion was that the GenAI process could valuably facilitate shifting from a subject expert academic/novelist being sole author. Stylistically, GenAI can produce credible fiction. It would be possible and indeed desirable from the very start to co-design the simulation involving both those with experience of microaggressions, as well as potential staff and student workshop participants.

3.2.2 What does this mean for you as a scholar?

An initial foray on the first evening of use generated a lifelike conversation between two fictional characters which led to immediate suspension of scepticism and perhaps the excessive zeal of a recent convert. As experiences accumulated, this very slowly evolved to a more realistic and once again somewhat sceptical approach, but now with active personal intent to move beyond the current novice stage, and also to encourage sceptical teachers in particular of the necessity of shifting position,

3.2.3 What does this mean for our discipline at large?

Although I don't regret my stubborn refusal to engage with GenAI, if I was teaching any module in October 2023 (which I was not) I should have paid attention to following up on the spring and summer briefings so that I could be making confident statements to students, encouraging them to make appropriate use of GenAI, and being seen to use it myself actively as a study assistant. This would make it easier to warn of inappropriate use as well.

When it comes to research, I would be more reluctant to suggest to colleagues that they use GenAI as a research assistant and writing assistant but would instead start visibly to use it for those purposes myself, and indeed writing this paper is in part intended to share with colleagues some of the benefits of doing so.

There are a wide variety of online communities enabling sharing of experience with GenAI within and across disciplines. Taking inclusivity as an example, it would be very helpful to have a central international clearing house for sharing case studies and exemplars, possibly building on the active role taken, for example, by UNESCO.

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