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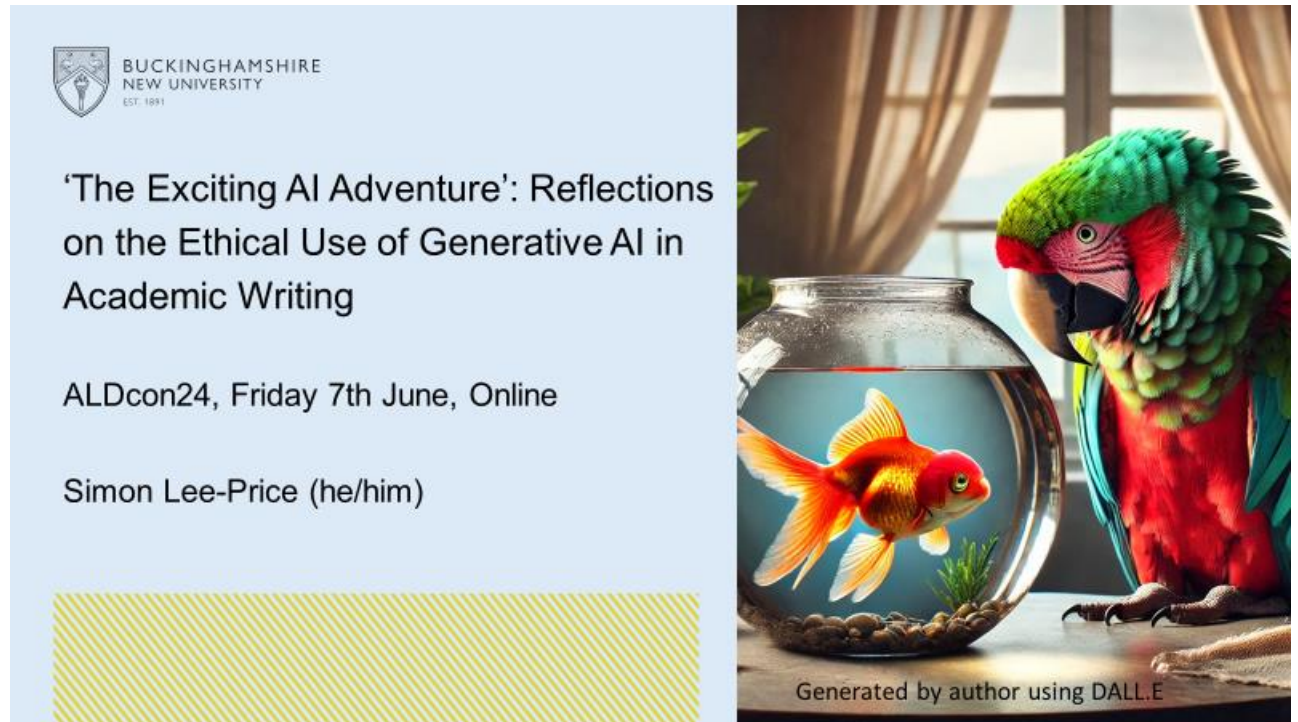
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‘The Exciting AI Adventure’: Reflections
on the Ethical Use of Generative AI in
Academic Writing

ALDcon24, Friday 7th June, Online

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If, as they say, a week is a long time in politics, then in HE, in the age of Artificial Intelligence, eight months ago, seems like a world away.

Back in October 2023, engaging with Gen-AI as part of my teaching practice placed me among a small minority of colleagues at my university. Since then much has changed. A module on using AI for study has become part of the curriculum; we have an institutional AI working group; and the University recently appointed a research professor in Inclusive AI. Almost on a daily basis I am alerted to, or invited to attend, webinars and workshops on AI. Scholarship in the field seems to be developing, like AI technology itself, at an exponential rate. Who can keep up with either?

In short, I worry that what I have to say is already dated . . . or, at the very least, has lost the currency and discovery value I felt it possessed when I submitted the proposal. Yet, as these opening remarks have begun to reveal, the problem of time is a critical factor in shaping our engagement with AI. I mean time in its multiplicity of aspects: from the spatiotemporality of speed and acceleration to the economics of productivity, efficiency, and self-optimisation. So, perhaps this belated contribution remains in its own rambling way timely after all.

So, let me go back in time. In October 2023, I was invited by a colleague to deliver two academic writing workshops to a group of Health and Social Care students. The colleague asked, somewhat vaguely, if I could also include 'something about plagiarism and the use of AI' – now closely related issues and ones which had been raised as a major concern at our recent start-of-year Staff Development conference. I accepted the invitation, while wondering what I could add to the discussion of AI. I also wondered, too cynically perhaps, if I had been asked to deliver the workshops primarily to allow my colleague a few hours relief from their busy schedule of timetabled teaching to catch up with other things.

After giving some thought to the workshops, as far as my own more flexible but not unlimited time permitted, I decided to take the plunge. I had read about other teachers using ChatGPT to design lesson plans, and so, with some reluctance and a degree of scepticism, I created an OpenAI account and wrote my first ever prompt for ChatGPT 3.5:

Can you help me plan a lesson about reading and paraphrasing for a class of university students?

The result impressed me. I experienced what one author describes as being ‘awed by the power and potential of the technology’ (Cardon *et al* 2023, p. 264). This sense of awe diminishes the more I work with AI and learn how it operates – but it has not disappeared entirely.

After several additional prompts I had the structure and a set of promising learning activities for the workshop. What I had effectively done was massively accelerate the research and planning process, which, previously, would involve searching on Google for sample session plans and activities and asking colleagues for ideas and material. This process might take hours or even stretch over days. Now, in a matter of minutes, I had a bespoke and professional-looking session plan, complete with timings and learning outcomes -- readymade for institutional templates, peer observations, and OfS inspectors.

While I was a complete novice at prompt writing (or prompt engineering), I was not without cognitive and experiential resources. In the field of prompt engineering these are called ‘non-technical skills’ and include: Communication, Subject Matter Expertise, Language Proficiency, Critical Thinking, and Creativity (Crabtree, 2024).



Non-technical skills for prompt engineering

‘While technical prowess is vital, a prompt engineer also needs a suite of non-technical skills:

- **Communication.** The ability to convey ideas, collaborate with teams, and understand user needs.
- **Subject Matter Expertise.** Depending on the application, domain-specific knowledge can be invaluable.
- **Language Proficiency.** Mastery over language, grammar, and semantics to craft effective prompts.
- **Critical Thinking.** Evaluating model outputs, identifying biases, and ensuring ethical AI practices.
- **Creativity.** Thinking outside the box, experimenting with new prompt styles, and innovating solutions.

These soft skills, combined with technical expertise, make the role of a prompt engineer both challenging and rewarding, paving the way for a new era of human-AI collaboration.’

(Crabtree, 2024, n.p.)

With varying degrees of awareness, I was applying my English language skills, pedagogical knowledge, and practitioner experience when composing my prompts. For example, I asked (politely) for the session to be tailored to a specific type of student and I evaluated the response accordingly. I judged that the initial session plan was serviceable but also somewhat dull and potentially unengaging. So I entered the prompt:

Me:

That's OK. But could you make the lesson more exciting?

ChatGPT:

Certainly! To make the lesson on reading and paraphrasing more exciting for university students, you can incorporate interactive and engaging activities. Here's an enhanced lesson plan:

The response suggested two things: First that I rename the workshop:

Exciting Reading and Paraphrasing Skills Adventure

And Second that I:

Begin with a short video clip or a funny anecdote related to paraphrasing to grab students' attention.

I adopted the name-change suggestion, somewhat archly. However, it did make me consider that I might need to adopt a more boosterish approach to learning development to engage students accustomed to the inflated language and hyperbolic claims of popular and social media. As practitioners, can we afford to be blandly neutral and objectively descriptive (like good scientists are supposed to be) in a post-truth world in which the standard is typically 'fantastic', 'amazing', 'incredible', or 'awesome'? When we student experience themselves as time-poor subjects and a crowd of things clamours for their attention in online and off-line worlds, do we need to promise them instant and effortless excitement and gratification and state this on the label? And what are the pedagogical and ethical implications of such a move?

As for the 'funny' paraphrase-related anecdote: Does anybody know a good one? I certainly didn't. So, I decided to ask ChatGPT to suggest one. Always keen to oblige, to the extent of hallucinating, ChatGPT provided a paraphrase-related anecdote in a matter of seconds (ChatGPT, 2023).



'Funny' paraphrase-related anecdote . . .

'Once upon a time in a small town, there was a librarian who took her job very seriously. She was known for being meticulous about cataloging and paraphrasing book summaries. One day, a mischievous parrot flew into the library. This parrot had a peculiar talent – it could mimic voices and sounds perfectly.

The parrot perched itself on a shelf near the librarian's desk and started listening. It overheard the librarian meticulously paraphrasing a book summary and decided to have some fun. The next day, as the librarian was explaining the book to a library visitor, the parrot squawked loudly, 'Squawk! Parrot says, "The book is about a pirate with a wooden leg who is searching for his buried treasure!"'

The librarian was shocked and said, 'No, no, that's not right at all! It's a historical novel about a 19th-century sailor seeking adventure!' The visitor burst into laughter, and the parrot continued to interject with its hilariously incorrect paraphrases.

From that day on, the library became known for its 'parrot-phrase' summaries, and people flocked to the library not just for books but also for the parrot's comical interpretations. The librarian and the parrot formed an unlikely comedy duo, making the library a place where learning and laughter went hand in hand.'

(ChatGPT, 2023)

You can read it at you leisure later if you choose – and decide for yourself if it's 'funny'. I'll just warn you that it involves a pun on the word *parrot*. My non-technical skills were sufficient to determine that the anecdote was eminently unsuitable for use in the workshop. Yet as a practitioner with a disciplinary background in literary studies and critical theory and acculturated in the academy on the work of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, I could not help thinking ironically, deconstructively, subversively, playfully. I would use the anecdote after all but with mild sarcasm and surely not as intended by ChatGPT. I introduced the workshop by recounting to the students my unsuccessful efforts to find a funny paraphrase-related anecdote and asking the students if they knew any.

There was an important lesson here, for me ... and hopefully for the students too. I was being candid about my collaboration with ChatGPT at a personal level. I was revealing my mode of working, my knowledge, experience, and learning needs, my attitudes, values, and even sense of humour. To a small degree, I was inviting them

to be co-creators. I was also sharing a critical evaluation of ChatGPT: its limited appreciation of real world context and lack of human understanding or emotional intelligence (even if it can simulate these, sometimes convincingly). As Chris Tessone argues in his critique of AI, informed by Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*: '[AI] Models communicate primarily through conventional patterns and clichés. This makes them seem human, but the similarity to our form of intelligence is only superficial [C]omputers have no world or history' (Tessone, 2023, n.p.).

One of the activities in the session was to explore the use of AI in generating summaries and paraphrases of texts. In my experience, this use of AI seems to be a bigger concern for academic integrity than contract cheating or getting an AI application to generate entire written assignments. Most of us are familiar with the allegation: students run chunks of source text through one of the various paraphrasing applications and then copy and paste the product into their work, sometimes with – but often without – appropriate citation. ChatGPT is accomplished at paraphrasing and summarising, but I chose a more basic tool which I knew many students used: QuillBot.

Teaching how to paraphrase has in my experience always been, frankly, a bit of a drag. I have struggled to engage students with the act of actually reading and writing in class. However, just the mention of QuillBot and the appearance of its interface on the screen was enough to get the rapt attention of the whole group. This technology was something they could immediately and personally relate to. I was on their turf. When I inquired who used QuillBot, I was met with sheepish smiles, deep nods of affirmation, and guilty glances across the room. I had touched the affective domain of learning.

My objective was to discourage students from treating paraphrasing as a mechanical activity of replacing words in a source text with a sufficient quantity of synonyms to get it through Turnitin or other similarity detector and pass it off as their own. Instead, I wanted them to approach paraphrasing as a critical, creative, and meaningful undertaking that brings together reading and writing and is fundamental to higher learning and practices of knowledge production.

The text I chose was a short extract from the beginning of the American Declaration of Independence. I chose this text for a number of reasons. It addresses equality, which is a core theme of the Health and Social Care course, and I hoped it would provide an opportunity for students to make connections with their wider learning. The Declaration's use of the deceptively simple word 'men' is highly problematic and the subject of ongoing debate – this would highlight the role of critical thinking in producing paraphrases. Also, I assumed most, if not all the group, would be somewhat familiar with the document and its historical context.

Since this is my reflection, I want to focus on my own learning as a practitioner rather than the students' learning from the activity.

First, I had not anticipated the challenges the students would have "simply" reading the text. Words like 'unalienable', 'endowed', and 'self-evident' required glossing and discussion. Questions were also asked about the use of initial capital letters for certain of the nouns, such as 'Creator', 'Rights', 'Life', 'Liberty', and 'Happiness'.

Second, contrary to my expectation, many students were unfamiliar with the document and had only a vague awareness of the historical context of the American Revolution and chattel slavery.

Neither of the above were *per se* problems, even if they required me to extend the time allocated to the activity. In fact, they supported one objective of the workshop by demonstrating that reading is a multifaceted activity, with each reader drawing on specific linguistic resources, experiences and wider fields of knowledge to construct their meaning. They also demonstrated that it takes time to do justice to a text.

The focus of the discussion was intended to be on the word 'men'. (In fact, the word Creator led to an equal amount of discussion. Did it refer to God (Allah) or maybe a personification of nature?) Would they retain 'men', but place it in 'scare quotes' (a new expression for many of them) or change it to 'men and women' (And, if so, what about non-binary people?). Or would they opt for a general term like people? However, might such a choice be misleading? Obviously the issue of race and enslavement loomed large. Did men also include enslaved peoples from the African continent and their descendants?

Students were given an opportunity, individually, to write a paraphrase, discuss it with a partner, and then compare their paraphrases with one generated by QuillBot.



Inattentive reading?

Short paraphrase activity

In pairs, paraphrase the following extract:

'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness' (US Declaration of Independence).

QuillBot:

We believe that all people are created equal and that these rights—among others, like the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—were granted to them by their Creator.

The discussion remained inconclusive about the best way to paraphrase the extract and how the word 'men' should be rendered. Thus it demonstrated that good paraphrasing demands critical thinking, reflection, and perhaps even research. Crucially, it can require the writer to take a political and/or ethical stance and assume responsibility for their choices.

(As an aside, one of the most important things I learnt was from a student commenting that it was only after they had read the QuillBot paraphrase that they felt they properly understood the text. Until that stage, I had not really considered how generative AI could be used to help with textual comprehension.)

Rather than presenting QuillBot as a tool for making paraphrasing easier and more efficient, I had used it to slow down and make problematic the process of reading and writing. My emphasis was on the reading process, seldom formally taught in the disciplines and, unfortunately, often neglected by learning developers too.

The literature on generative AI and how it might be leveraged by practitioners also devotes considerably more attention to writing than reading. I interpreted this as a symptom of a systemic desire to get quickly to the product, the output – that is, our own unwitting conscription in the logic of pressurised time. Nevertheless, a limited range of AI technology does claim to support reading.



Reading for readers too busy to read: or, inattentive listening

'There's this incredible app called Listening which turns academic papers into audio and sends it to your phone. So you can listen in your spare time while walking or making dinner or exercising.'

(Listening, 2024)

One example is Listening, heavily promoted on YouTube, which promises to let time-poor students 'listen' to academic papers while 'making dinner' (Listening, 2024, n. p.).

Another is the AI Assistant in Adobe Acrobat which kindly offers to 'Provide a list of the 5 most important points' in the document you have open'.

As the examples show, it is not a deep or critical type of reading that is assumed and encouraged – much less an ethical or reciprocating reading practice, which I will come back to in a moment. When reading is mentioned, it is couched in terms of time saving, increased efficiency, and presents reading as an essentially extractive practice.

In a recent article about generative AI in engineering education, Junaid Qadir Professor of Computer Engineering at Qatar University, emphasises the importance of teaching 'classical human skills and liberal arts such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving', which, he says, 'will not become outdated'

(Qadir, 2022, n. p.). Learning Developers, with their transdisciplinary knowledge and commitment to critical and transformative pedagogies, can play a leading role in determining how these indispensable and, so to speak, timeless skills and arts are taught.

I would contend that teaching 'slow reading' provides one mode of intervention. Here, I am invoking Michelle Boulous Walker, for whom 'slow reading' describes a reflective and meditative disposition to learning, which embraces complexity, is open to otherness, and encompasses cognitive and affective domains. It is a transformative rather than normative pedagogy that consciously runs against the grain of reading as information mining and stands in a complex relation to what Walker calls, citing Nietzsche, the 'indecent and perspiring haste' toward output and production that drives higher education (Walker, 2016, p. 24).

I want to close by referencing a type of slow reading practised by self-described 'Red River Métis and settler and scientist-activist Max Liboiron. It is non-extractivist and relational:



Sitting with a text . . .

'I re-read "Suspending Damage" and "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" at least once a season, as an event to sit with the text, rather than as a source to pull things from (a reading technique I strengthened after reading some of your tweets on extractive reading practices). Your work has easily been some of the most formative in my intellectual and ethical journey. Thank you, Eve Tuck, for your brilliance, pedagogy, and ethics.'

(Liboiron, 2021, p. 15)

Liboiron encourages a reading ethics of reciprocation. They address the reader directly and invite them to do things, to make the time and commitment to co-create, to the extent that readers can give themselves credit as co-authors:



'Reciprocating reader'

'You may continue to read if you are a reciprocating reader, meaning that your reading extends beyond one-way consumption.'

Reciprocating readers might bring their reading out into the world to underline things, make comments on the page or in a notebook, parse things out loud or otherwise engage in the text outside their own head. The *how* is up to you. I only ask you reciprocate to continue reading.

Please reciprocate now, or if you prefer not to, skip this text and go on to another chapter.

(Liboiron, 2020, p. 92)

So I'll end my presentation here, with the suggestion that in the helter-skelter of AI we adopt a slow and meandering way forward, take the time to 'sit with' texts and encourage relationality among ourselves, our students, and beyond.

Thank you for participating in what I lay claim to being the longest paraphrase-related anecdote ever told. Whether or not it qualifies as 'funny', I'll leave that to your judgment.

And just in case you arrived late due to schedule conflicts or last-minute delays, or you were too busy exercising, listening to music, or cooking to give your full attention, here is a ChatGPT-generated 5-points summary for you to take away:



Five-point summary – Thank you, ChatGPT!

- **Rapid Evolution of AI in Academia:** The integration of generative AI into academic practices has accelerated significantly since October 2023, leading to new courses, working groups, and appointments focusing on AI. This rapid change underscores the challenge of keeping up with advancements and maintaining relevance in scholarly discussions.
- **Transformative Potential of AI Tools:** Using ChatGPT, the author quickly and efficiently created a lesson plan on reading and paraphrasing, which traditionally would take much longer. This demonstrates AI's potential to significantly enhance educational planning and resources, though it requires non-technical skills like critical thinking and creativity to effectively utilize AI outputs.
- **Ethical and Pedagogical Concerns:** The use of AI in teaching raises ethical questions, particularly about the balance between making learning engaging and maintaining academic integrity. The author emphasizes the importance of teaching students to critically engage with AI-generated content rather than using it to bypass genuine learning processes.
- **Challenges of Teaching Paraphrasing:** Teaching paraphrasing, especially using AI tools like QuillBot, highlighted the difficulties students face in understanding and engaging with complex texts. The author aimed to show that paraphrasing is a critical and creative activity, requiring deep engagement with the material and an understanding of broader contexts.
- **Advocacy for Slow Reading:** The author advocates for "slow reading," a reflective and meditative approach that contrasts with the efficiency-driven, extractive practices encouraged by some AI tools. This method promotes deep understanding, ethical engagement, and critical thinking, essential skills that remain vital in an AI-driven educational landscape.

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