
Deus ex Machina

The place and role of RE in a Generative-AI enabled education system

It's been less than four years (November, 2022) since Generative Artificial Intelligence (G-AI) hit public attention with the launch of Chat-GPT. In that time the scope, reach and impact of G-AI has been phenomenal with about 40% of the population and about 60% of 16-35 yr olds using the technology on a regular basis.

The DfE issued guidance on the use of G-AI in schools but this was rooted in the practical use of the technology for teachers. Whilst this is important and needs to be considered, I would argue that RE teachers have an important contribution to make to the discourse around this new technology and its use and impact on schools and education. There are three important questions where RE specialists can offer an important voice within the discourse, having as they do a skillset already honed over a long time - these are also questions for SACREs and ASCs to consider as they undertake supporting schools in the design and implementation of their curriculum.

Firstly, the **philosophical question** around the nature of the technology and the impact it might have on questions of humanity. What does it mean to be human in a G-AI enabled world? As G-become more sophisticated we may need, as Richard Dawkins has, to engage with the idea of the AIs becoming sentient and grapple what that means in terms of rights and the way in which we treat the 'bots' or 'agents'. RE already grapples with the idea of animal rights, and the question of what it means to be human and is well placed to consider this question.

Secondly, the **ethical questions** around G-AI usage, especially around the nature, quality and ethics of the data mining used to construct the Large Language Models and the social and environmental impact of G-AI usage. RE again is well equipped to consider these ethical questions around the data gathering and bias (the datasets tend towards **WIERD** data (Western, Industrial, Educated, Rich and Democratic) rather than richer global and diverse understanding drawing on its own experiment of hermeneutics and environmental ethics is well established in RE curricula.

Thirdly, are the more **technocratic questions** of how this might enhance, change or diminish the teaching and learning in classrooms. If we think about education and schooling in a more holistic way than the transmission of information and more as a journey of enlightenment then the advent of more and more sophisticated AIs will demand the skills of hermeneutics, sociological and humanistic thinking that sit at the heart of good RE classrooms. In the Ofsted definitions of knowledges RE is the only subject that has "Personal Knowledge" and this will be vital as we consider an education system where children and adults are using G-AI as cognitive scaffolds.

Simply put these developments are too important and too sophisticated to be critiqued and examined only through the scientific and technological epistemological lenses; it is vital that RE brings its own epistemological lens to focus the debate. RE has a vital part in the discourse.

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