

From Chalkboards to Chatbots: A Practical Guide for Teachers

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In 2005, I walked into my first classroom filled with dreams and aspirations to inspire students. My tools were modest; a whiteboard, an overhead projector, pens, markers, a lesson planner and a few well-loved teacher manuals. After school and on weekends, I poured countless hours into crafting lesson plans and grading assignments—a true labor of love.

Over the years, my teaching tools have evolved. The overhead projector gave way to a digital projector, and I received my first laptop. But nothing prepared me for the buzz in 2022 around ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence (AI) platform rapidly entering education conversations. Is AI taking over? Will teachers be replaced by machines? Students are just going to cheat, right!?

Honestly, cheating has been around since the dawn of time, and it's highly unlikely that AI will replace the human heart that teachers bring to the classroom. AI is simply the latest tool to take the world—and education—by storm. I can only imagine the trepidation teachers felt when chalkboards were replaced by whiteboards and overhead projectors; eventually giving way to computers, which have become commonplace in modern classrooms. But the biggest shift came with the advent of the internet. Classrooms became globally connected—an exciting change, though it also brought fear of the unknown.

Every stage of technological advancement has brought both positive and negative effects; it's all about how we choose to view and use them. Personally, I have been excited for the advancements that technology has brought to education. When my school provided me with a laptop, I was able to communicate with parents faster (no longer needing to make phone calls after school to

quickly relay information), plan lessons more efficiently, and track student progress without having to manage loads of paper documents. The internet additionally allowed me to access teaching resources, complete professional development, and stay current with educational practices. The internet became a tool that aided my creativity and productivity as a teacher.

AI is the newest challenge facing educators. There is still much we don't know about AI's role in education, and new AI-powered tools seem to appear every day. This can be overwhelming for classroom teachers, making it hard to know where to start. To be honest, I was initially unsure about ChatGPT and basically ignored it for a while. Then, one day, my school's media specialist introduced me to Magic School AI, which piqued my interest in generative AI and opened up new possibilities for my teaching. Magic School AI's Raina (a chatbot) has been my teacher assistant ever since. In fact, she assisted me with writing this article. Raina assisted in creating an outline for the article, provided feedback on my writing, and edited the article to ensure its readability.

My interest in this new tool evolved further when I made a shift in my career from classroom to instructional staff. In 2023, I left my classroom to be an instructional technology facilitator. This new position provided me the opportunity to support teachers, who wear many hats beyond just teaching — counselor, coach, mediator, communicator, and planner, to name a few. I saw AI as a tool for teachers to lift some of that burden, allowing teachers to thrive, not just survive.

Diving headfirst, I've realized I've only scratched the surface of AI's potential in the classroom. I am learning new ways to utilize AI in education. My goal is to share what I've

learned to ease the concerns of both students and teachers, and to help move the modern classroom forward.

AI is everywhere. We can't escape it. Try Googling something—you'll get a list of web sources, but you'll also see an AI-generated summary. Or maybe you ask Alexa to play your favorite playlist while you work. Need help keeping track of your to-do list or remembering appointments? Digital calendars offer scheduling assistance and reminders. You get the idea.

Despite how deeply AI is woven into our daily routines, conversations about its use in education often spark worry and skepticism. But the reality is, our students need to be ready—not just for the technology we use today, but for the innovations coming down the road.

Additionally, as educators, embracing AI as a tool, not a threat, opens doors to time-saving automation, innovative teaching methods, and personalized learning. Just as whiteboards replaced chalkboards and computers reshaped classrooms, AI offers new opportunities for growth. It's all about how we choose to use it.

AI: The Teacher Assistant

Let's first look at AI for teachers. AI has the potential to support their work in many important ways—helping lighten the load and freeing up time to focus on what really matters: connecting with students and inspiring learning.

Take lesson planning, for example. AI can jumpstart the process by generating ideas, suggesting resources, or even drafting outlines. After all the countless hours I've spent crafting lesson plans after school and on weekends, I can say having AI as a helpful assistant feels like a breath of fresh air. It doesn't replace the creativity teachers bring but makes customizing lessons to meet the unique needs of each classroom more manageable. I have used Raina as a sounding board to flesh out ideas for lessons or had it make suggestions for lessons

based on content I am teaching. Raina has helped me turn my ideas into detailed lesson plans in half the time it would take to write them by hand.

Beyond planning, AI has assisted me in creating lesson materials like worksheets, quizzes, and multimedia presentations tailored to different learning styles. This makes it faster for me to adapt instruction for diverse learners—helping me differentiate without feeling overwhelmed. I can provide information about my students (no names or identifying information) and AI can use that to tailor lessons and materials to meet the needs of the individual students. It can scaffold a worksheet, create sentence starters or level a reading passage in a matter of minutes.

Grading is another area where AI really shines. It can speed up grading for objective assignments, provide immediate feedback, and even analyze trends in student performance. This doesn't replace the thoughtful, personalized feedback teachers provide; instead, it frees up time so they can focus more on engaging with students. I give AI my rubric and provide information on particular aspects I want the AI to focus on then it generates a summary for me of the assignment and several bullet points of feedback for the student. I then can compare the AI recommendations to my own; quickly providing the student personalized feedback on their performance. In the past I would second guess my judgment or struggle to write clear, focused comments for my 100+ students.

AI also tackles those behind-the-scenes tasks we all know take up so much time—scheduling, attendance, communication management. Digital calendars with AI reminders keep me organized, and AI-powered email filters make sure important messages don't get lost. These small supports add up, reducing stress and helping us not just survive, but truly thrive in our roles.

Future Ready Students

This shift in the classroom mirrors a larger trend happening in the workforce. As employers move toward AI-powered productivity, they're increasingly seeking candidates who can navigate and utilize AI tools daily. Just as teachers need support, our students must be prepared for the realities of a world where AI is a key part of almost every industry. Our students won't be ready for these positions unless we equip them with these skills in the classroom.

As students acquire the necessary skills for future careers, AI can play a crucial role in helping them succeed—both in the classroom and beyond. Modern classrooms are filled with students from diverse backgrounds and with varied academic needs. This is where AI can be a game-changer. It has the potential to provide tailored support for each student—whether by translating materials, adjusting reading levels, guiding students through complex tasks, or sparking creativity. AI doesn't just support learning; it helps level the playing field, giving every student the opportunity to succeed on their own terms.

Practical Uses of AI in the Everyday Classroom

Now that we've established why AI is so crucial in the classroom—both for preparing students for the future and supporting teachers in their roles—the next step is understanding how we can start using it today. The good news? There are already accessible AI tools that can make an immediate impact. Whether you're looking to save time, enhance your lessons, or provide personalized support to students, there are practical ways to integrate AI into your teaching strategy right now.

Here's a few of my favorite AI tools for educators.

1. **Magic School AI:** This platform was created by an educator who understands the demands of the classroom and wanted to enhance the “magic” each teacher brings to their classroom. There are an abundance of tools on the platform which can be overwhelming. I recommend starting with a couple. My choices would be Raina, AI Prompt Assistant and Tool Recommendations. Raina is a chatbot that allows teachers to ask for assistance with any number of tasks or questions. The AI Prompt Assistant will guide teachers with developing powerful, concise prompts which will maximize the output of any AI tool. Tool Recommendations will make suggestions for the tools that would best fit your desired outcome; taking some of the guesswork out of which tool (of the nearly 100 tools available) to use.
2. **Brisk Teaching:** Brisk is a browser extension that provides a powerful tool for creating engaging, quality instructional materials. Once you add Brisk to your browser you can create anything directly in the browser and it will save to your Google Drive. For example: You are browsing a webpage on cytoplasm. You want to transform the information provided by the webpage into a lesson with interactive activities for students. In the past you would have had to spend time designing and creating materials. This might have taken hours. Brisk can create a presentation, make guided notes, design an escape room, and a myriad of other instructional materials based on the webpage in a matter of minutes. Freeing up your time to focus on delivery of the lesson and supporting student learning.

3. **AI powered gaming platforms:** Much to our chagrin, students love games. Digital/video games to be precise. So why not use this to our advantage. There are several excellent platforms that use the power of games and AI. **Kahoot** and **Quizziz** are two terrific examples. These two platforms have been around for a while, but recently they have gotten facelifts and harnessed the power of AI. Teachers can create more than just games with these platforms and they can do so quickly with the help of AI. Create engaging lessons, formative assessments, dynamic assignments, and build classroom communities with these tools.

AI Tools for Students

While AI tools for teachers can streamline classroom management and lesson planning, their true potential shines when applied directly to student learning. Teachers can create more personalized, engaging, and effective learning experiences for every student by incorporating AI powered tools.

Middle schoolers are beginning to develop more autonomy and independence. While we strive to give every student individualized attention daily, it's often not feasible with multiple classes of 30+ students. With AI chatbots students can explore topics, ask questions, and receive instant, personalized feedback. This kind of AI support helps students become more independent learners, building confidence as they receive timely guidance on writing and other tasks. It also helps level the playing field by lowering barriers—whether a student needs extra support or enrichment, AI tools adapt to meet diverse needs, promoting equity and inclusion.

By engaging with AI in a safe environment, students develop critical digital literacy skills and learn how to use technology thoughtfully, preparing them for the evolving

digital world. AI encourages creativity, personalized learning, and immediate feedback—key elements that help students grow and stay motivated.

Here's a few AI powered tools that teachers can use with students:

1. **Magic Student:** Magic School AI offers a student facing side where teachers can guide student interactions by setting up focused activities or providing rubrics and guidelines, ensuring AI feedback aligns with classroom goals. Teachers are able to monitor the conversations so that they can provide guidance, gain insight to students' understanding of content, and keep students safe online.
2. **School AI:** Here teachers can choose from pre-existing spaces or create their own. Spaces are customizable chatbots that students can use to explore various topics in a safe, controlled environment similar to Magic Student.
3. **Canva:** This creative space offers student access to AI tools that can be leveraged for designing presentations, videos, and graphics. Teachers can provide oversight and guidance as students utilize AI tools while allowing them to be creative.

AI Anecdotes from Real Classrooms

I've had the chance to witness firsthand how students engage with AI and the real benefits that come from it. In one social studies class, a group of English Language Learners (ELLs) would sit quietly every day, observing but rarely participating. The teacher, who I mentor, wanted to find a way to reach and engage the students with the content. Together, we decided to try Magic Student.

The teacher set up a Magic Student classroom featuring the translate tool and a customized chatbot designed to guide the students through the assignment. At first, the

students took it slow, but once they grew comfortable with the technology, the transformation began. They started submitting assignments that showed a growing understanding of the material, and their participation in class increased—they were no longer just quiet observers.

In another classroom, a teacher I coached wanted students to improve their ability to write strong claims. We created a MagicStudent classroom using the writing feedback tool. Students submitted their writing and received targeted feedback they could use to revise and strengthen their work. The final writing pieces showed clear improvement compared to previous assignments.

Another teacher used a School AI space to help students explore propaganda and create their own examples. This was a lesson she had taught for years, but students often struggled to grasp what propaganda really was or how to produce effective examples. With AI support, she noticed a marked improvement in the quality of students' final projects.

These experiences show how AI tools can empower students, support diverse learners, and help teachers reach their goals in the classroom. It's not about replacing the teacher's role but providing new ways to engage students, personalize learning, and foster creativity. When AI is thoughtfully integrated, it lifts both teachers and students—helping classrooms

thrive and preparing learners for the digital world ahead.

The world of AI continues to grow and evolve, and there's still so much to learn about this powerful tool. While AI holds incredible promise for education, it's important to acknowledge the valid concerns that come with it. Students must be explicitly taught how and when to use AI responsibly. Issues like cheating and misuse are real and must continue to be addressed thoughtfully and proactively.

At the same time, we can't ignore the growing presence of AI in our everyday lives. Preparing students to navigate this digital landscape is no longer optional—it's essential. Equipping them with the skills to interact confidently and ethically with AI will help them thrive in the future workplace and become productive members of society.

To fellow teachers, I encourage you to start small with AI in your classroom. Pick one tool that feels manageable, give it a try, and reflect on what you learn from the experience. Keep exploring, keep learning, and keep adapting. Just as educators once adjusted to whiteboards, projectors, computers, and the internet, we can thoughtfully embrace AI as a partner that supports teaching and learning. The journey with AI is just beginning. Together, let's embrace its possibilities and create learning environments where both teachers and students can truly thrive.

Emily McEntire is an instructional technology facilitator and curriculum writer with a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction, specializing in Middle Grades. She brings extensive classroom experience teaching social studies and elementary grades, along with leadership roles supporting beginning teachers and leading professional learning communities. Passionate about integrating technology to enhance academic achievement, Emily actively serves as a mentor to educators and advances innovative teaching strategies in middle school settings. Her work focuses on supporting novice teachers and leveraging technology for engagement.