High School Students View Snapchat AI to Be Like Google: Teacher Candidates Viewing Generative Artificial Intelligence in the Classroom

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Abstract

We know Generative Artificial Intelligence tools have difficulty constructing correct mathematical answers (Sawyer & Aga, 2024), produce biased responses (Wu, 2023), and create inappropriate content specifically for younger audiences (Sawyer, 2024). However, do students know this, and are they using the tools to make these discernments? We explore this question through two examples that illustrate how students use genAI tools in the classroom, specifically from a teacher candidate's point of view.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Mathematics Education, AI Limitations, Teacher Candidates

1 Introduction

Research has identified that teachers use generative artificial intelligence (genAI) in the classroom to create tasks and support instruction (Cruz et al., 2024; Sawyer et al., 2024), but how students use these tools is less known. While Open AI and other genAI formats state that their resources are not intended for individuals under 18 (OpenAI, 2025), there are no formal restrictions on many genAI platforms.

GenAI is identified as a subset of AI technology that creates new content that was learned from the data it was given or trained from (Sharma, 2024). As an educational community, we know that genAI is flawed (Wu, 2023). We know genAI tools have difficulty constructing correct mathematical answers (Sawyer & Aga, 2024), produce biased responses (Wu, 2023), and create inappropriate content specifically for younger audiences (Sawyer & Aga, 2024). However, do students know this, and are they even using the tools to make these discernments?

Therefore, we present two examples of how students use genAI tools in the classroom, specifically from a teacher candidate's point of view. Teacher candidates have a unique perspective on the student population that allows them to observe students in the classroom. As teacher candidates, authors one and three of this paper have observed students using genAI at public schools. This paper presents their observations as evidence to support other teachers' understanding of how students view genAI. While we know that our data cannot be generalizable, we present these stories to demonstrate how genAI is used and present some ways teachers can think about this in their classrooms.

*The authors used Grammarly to proofread this paper. All graphics were generated with OpenAI's DALLe.

2 Practicing in the Trenches: Teacher Candidates' Observations

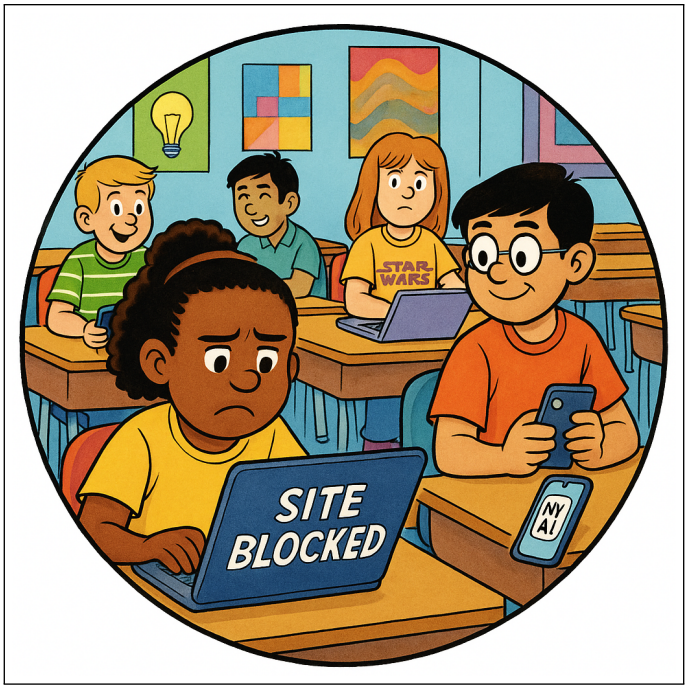
As teacher candidates, our practicum experiences become the foundation that shapes our understanding of schools. While we have our own K-12 classroom experiences on which to base most of our perceptions of the education system, the education system adapts and evolves with time. This evolution becomes a semi-phenomena that we can observe during our practicum experiences. Our preparatory classes become a place for each teacher candidate to share how their home schools, practicum schools, and cooperating teachers handle the varying situations and procedures of a school day.

2.1 Technology in Today's Classrooms

Within these classes, my classmates and I often find ourselves surprised to see the different ways practicing teachers and schools handle the use of technology in their classrooms. With personal technology at the students' fingertips for most hours, schools have faced increasing pressure to screen and monitor what sites students can access. Most schools have placed blockers on sites with generative technology, specifically genAI like ChatGPT. However, if there is anything my classmates and I can agree on, we see that students are just as innovative at finding ways to bring certain technologies into the classroom. They know and communicate with their peers about places in the building where cellular data is at its strongest, meaning students disconnect from school WiFi to reconnect with their social media like Snapchat. In 2023, Snapchat released My AI, a generative technology powered by ChatGPT (Snapchat AI, 2025), and we have personally observed students using this genAI in the classroom.

3 Case 1: Snapchat AI as Google Replacement

Figure 1
Google vs. Snapchat AI: Navigating Classroom Tech Barriers

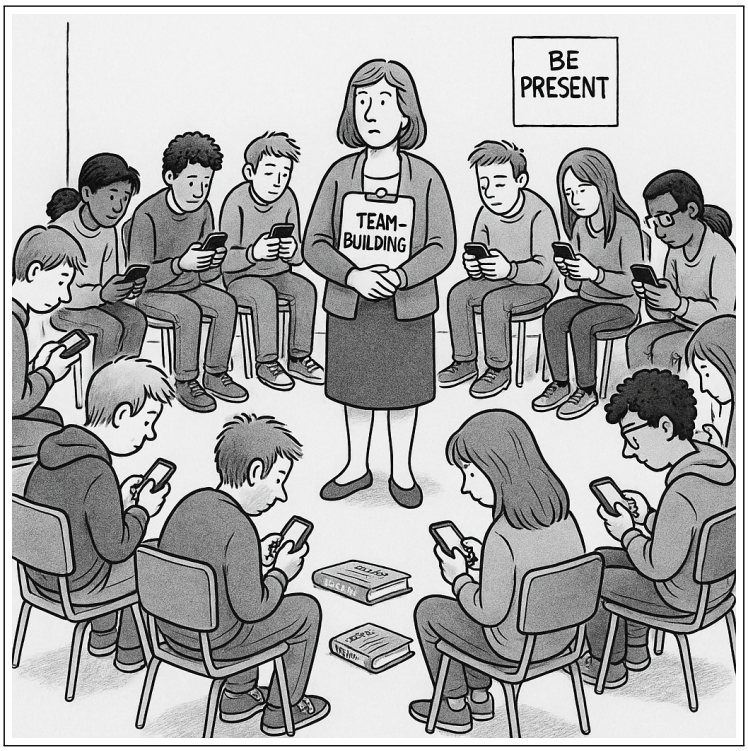


Note: *This comic illustrates how, when faced with internet restrictions, some students persistently seek out workarounds—using AI chatbots on their phones to bypass blocked educational sites, while others are left frustrated or confused.*

3.1 A Typical Practicum Setting

One of my first practicums was with a tenth-grade class at the local city high school. My peers and I worked with a program that supported high school students who wanted to attend college. These students are recommended for the program and must apply and be accepted to participate. This practicum aimed to observe the cooperating teacher and build relationships with the students while tutoring them on their core subjects like math, English, science, and social studies. Students would participate in what my cooperating teacher called "community-building" time. This meant that students were doing social and emotional activities and having discussions with their peers about the parts of their week that were strong and exciting and the parts that they felt needed more support.

Figure 2
Team-Building in the Digital Age



Note: *This cartoon highlights how—even during activities designed to foster social and emotional connection—digital distractions can quietly undermine classroom community, leaving both students and teachers feeling isolated.*

3.2 Student Behavior and Discovery

On Friday, I was in this tenth-grade classroom, doing the casual teacher stroll around the classroom to see what students are doing on their Chromebooks and to ensure they are on task. My cooperating teacher was not there that day, and we had a sweet and quiet lady who took the role and let me give directions for most of the day. This week, the students in my practicum class were assigned to a college in Virginia to research and eventually compile into a presentation to give to the class so that their peers could see and hear information about future schools to attend. It was a seemingly easy task; students were working independently, only requesting help when they could not locate one of the pieces of information on the college's website.

As I continued my stroll around the room, I saw one of the more outspoken boys in my practicum class with his head down. I see this student shuffling with his backpack. I decided that I needed to ask him what he was doing, partly because I was curious and partly because I recognized that it was something he felt was contraband enough that he needed to hide.

3.3 Snapchat AI as a Research Tool

Upon my approach this time, he does not fumble with whatever he has; instead, he reveals his phone and lays it on his desk. When he places his phone on his desk, he continues to reveal that he has been using Snapchat AI to research his assigned college. He typed a message to the My AI chatbot, asking it to give him the school's population, popular majors, and location. He had been copying the responses from Snapchat AI onto his presentation for the class period. My first thought was to question him on how he could have the reception in that particular classroom, as it was notoriously known for having some of the worst cell service in the school.

My second question became why he felt the need to use genAI instead of just researching it on the internet like the rest of his classmates. His response was simple. He explained that he believed that using genAI this way was the same as using Google. He said that while all his classmates were getting their information by just searching "student population at *blank* university," he was doing the same thing using the only genAI software not blocked by the school WiFi. While my third question probably should have been why Snapchat was not part of the school's app-blocking while other social media sites were, I asked him if he was using Snapchat to talk to other people while also using the My AI chatbot. He would not reveal his answer, but it does not take a seasoned teacher to know what he explained.

3.4 Reflection on Student Innovation

As practicum students in our placements, we do not have much authority. I could not do much other than tell him to put his phone away and just do what the other students were doing by Googling the facts about his school. As I left practicum that day, I began thinking about how innovative this student was in his explanation of using the My AI chatbot. He did not sugarcoat his answer and say that it was giving him more information about his school or that it was quicker and easier than Google. He wanted to use it because he believed it did the same thing as Google, even though research identified that it did not. He was already going to be using Snapchat, so why not use its generative technology to complete his assignment?

4 Case 2: Tutoring and the FOIL Method

4.1 Tutoring Program Context

I also observed students using Snapchat AI in tutoring. I was in this tutoring because of my involvement with a club on campus that brings in current teacher candidates to volunteer with the same program. My role in the classroom functioned the same way my practicum did. Because of the nature of this program, the students' primary purpose of being there was to participate in tutoring sessions for their classes. These tutoring sessions became a test of what the practicum students did not know but could not tell the students they did not know. However, these high schoolers could see through us. Hence, the influx of genAI use in the classroom became a primary mode of getting through some tutoring sessions. Little did we practicum students know, though, that the students were using the genAI to get through.

4.2 Working Through Algebra: The FOIL Method

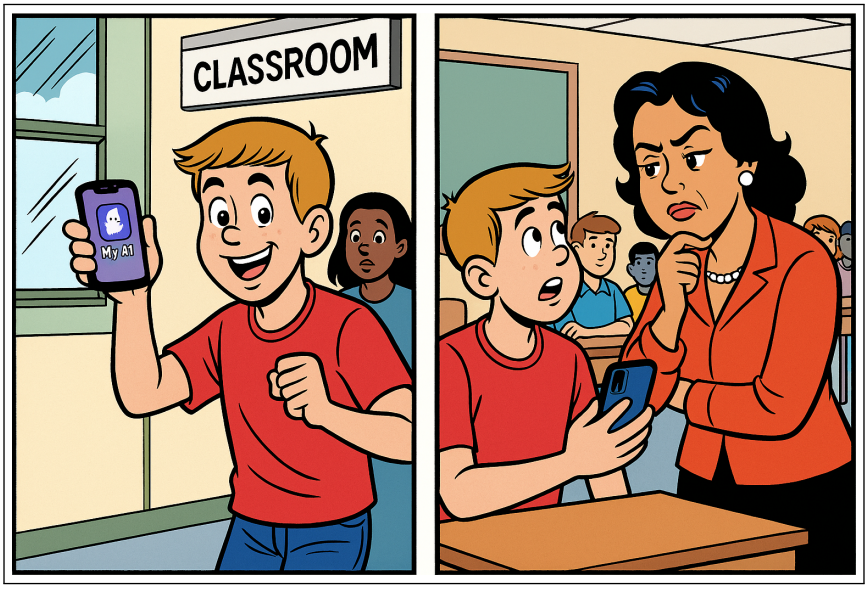
The math problem was for this student's Algebra One class. While this served me well then, I began to regret taking Algebra One in the seventh grade. I admitted to the student that this kind of math was quite a while ago for me, but he did not seem to mind. One thing common among the students in this program was that they were kind and forgiving. We were working on the FOIL method. I could recall the steps of the FOIL method easily, but I could not explain the reasons behind the math, though I am sure I probably could not explain it at thirteen, either. He expressed that it did not make sense to him why the order of the FOIL method mattered. My mind was lost. I was pulling from faint and distant memories of my middle school, but I had nothing to give this student. Again, he did not seem to mind that I was proving slightly incompetent. He asked to go to the bathroom. I happily told him to go right ahead. This would buy me time to come up with a response to build up some of my credibility.

4.3 Snapchat AI Provides an Answer

He came back from the restroom in a semi-quick matter of time. It was not unusual for high schoolers to take their time in the hallways. When he returned to his seat at the math table, he explained that he had an explanation for why the order of multiplying binomials mattered. I was surprised yet relieved. He explained that the order was insignificant if you still multiplied each step. He said that all of the math connects back to what they know about the distributive property of math. He explained this with such confidence to me and his peers. However, I had to be skeptical about where he got this information. To be clear, this student was very bright and could come up with this response independently, but how he explained this semi-complex math operation forced me to wonder what his sources were.

4.4 Bending the Rules: Student Workarounds

Figure 3
Using Snapchat AI at School



Note: *This comic illustrates how students actively find workarounds—like using cellular data and AI chatbots on their phones—to access information for school assignments and how teachers may respond with skepticism or concern when these behaviors come to light.*

Another tutoring requirement was that students were asked to stay away from the internet to answer their questions. They were supposed to rely on their notes, peers, and tutors to come to a conclusion. This student's answer, though, had me thinking that this rule may have been broken. He spilled after giving him the "teacher look" with a tilt of the head and a smirking grin. He revealed that he did not go to the bathroom and instead went to the window at the end of the hallway, where the students had the best cellular reception. He admitted to asking Snapchat AI the answer.

4.5 Reflecting on Student Ingenuity

While I could have gotten frustrated by his dishonesty, my curiosity got the best of me. Similarly to the student from my practicum class, this student used Snapchat AI to fill in his knowledge gaps. He merely had a question about his math and knew the class rules were that he could not use the internet to figure out the answer, so he resorted to an option that did not directly break any program rules. He was treating Snapchat AI in the same way my practicum student did–he was using it like Google.

Table 1. *Student expectations when using Snapchat AI versus the realities observed in practice and research.*

Student's Expectation	What Actually Happens
Snapchat AI gives reliable answers, just like Google.	Snapchat AI sometimes gives incorrect or incomplete answers.
Quickest way to get information, no need to check other sources.	Requires fact-checking—responses can be outdated, made up, or misleading.
No difference between search engines and AI chatbots.	AI chatbots generate text based on patterns, not direct fact lookup.
Accessible even when school blocks other sites.	Not designed for accuracy or use by minors—may reinforce misconceptions.

5 Key Takeaways for Teachers

5.1 Self-Efficacy and Ingenuity

The core of these two instances are very similar. Both students had questions about their assignment and/or their learning, and they took it upon themselves to use their resources to fill in their knowledge gaps. In most instances, this form of self-efficacy and self-determination should be applauded as both students took it upon themselves to seek out the answer to something they did not know. However, they both viewed genAI like Google when we know from research that it will give inaccurate responses and portray them as truth (Schulman et al., 2022).

5.2 The Teacher's Role: Guidance and Openness

So, what does this mean for teachers? First, teachers must know that their students use AI even if they believe the school blocks it. Students are bright, so they are going to continue finding workarounds that utilize genAI; therefore, teachers need to give direct instruction on how to be critical of the tools. By ignoring the existence of or almost making genAI taboo to your students, you are making them want to hide their use rather than demonstrate why it is important to be critical of their use.

5.3 Critical Evaluation of AI Tools

As is shown in these vignettes, these students were confident that using Snapchat AI was as accurate as researching their questions the way they had been taught to on Google. However, as mentioned above, research has shown that using genAI does not always reveal accurate answers to math problems (Sawyer & Aga, 2024). For example, teachers can show how genAI has difficulty multiplying large numbers, which would deter them from using these tools on their math homework. Teachers must hold discussions with their students about genAI's weaknesses and be clear and explicit that when they choose to use genAI, they must employ some discernment. Therefore, these two examples should demonstrate to teachers that they should bring genAI into the classroom to show its shortcomings.

5.4 Looking Ahead

As you can see from these vignettes, Snapchat AI is becoming popular in nearby schools. You might have other genAI tools that your students could use. However, we need to teach students about genAI, what it is, what it does, and how it is not necessarily Google, but a tool that will give back answers based on its training rather than fact.

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