Artists' approach to graphic recording for the DEFI event in March 2023

Preparation for the event

Graphic recording involves representing abstract concepts visually; listening for key ideas and metaphors and creating images and text that capture something of the speaker's ideas to give participants something to jog the memory and reflect on afterwards. Preparing to do graphic recording for the DEFI event this year was a little different this year.

Last year, the artists met and spent an evening going through old national Geographic magazines cutting out images that we thought might be useful to collage into our drawings for the event. Having a random-input collection of images to hand at the event sparked creativity – linking seemingly unrelated images often helped us make a jump to a useful insight.

This time, in keeping with the AI theme, we decided to use AI in our responses to the speakers. We went on a quest to work out: first of all - what is an AI image generator? Which one is best? And what is the best way to generate a sophisticated image using these new tools?

The three of us each trialled a different AI image generator – Craiyon, Dall-E and Stable Diffusion. They all work in a similar way – the user enters a word or phrase in a search bar and the image generator produces an image or series of images.

We decided to generate and print out images from the AI generators before the event, searching for phrases from the event programme and description of each keynote speaker. We planned to collage these into our responses during the event.

As new users, we didn't realise that AI image generators are best used to describe literal images rather than abstract concepts so when we entered "21st century skills", we were non-plussed by images of groups of deformed people: with limbs, fingers, eyes and mouths missing or in the wrong place, and all in army uniform. Although we enjoy using random images in our work, we could see that we needed to try a different approach to get something that might be somehow related to the topic.
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Then we tried something simpler – "critical thinking" – these images were naïve and child-like and looked OK at first glance, but on closer inspection they looked wrong.

This "critical thinking" image reminded us more of the Clockwork Orange crossed with the Young Ones.

This reminded us of Dadaist collage, which made us wonder: what if we created a prompt asking for this style? This led to some beautiful but bizarre outcomes:

"What is the future of human creativity in the style of Dada" :

We ventured over to Dall-E to try again – "*global intelligence systems in the style of Hannah Hoch*" (another

Dadaist collagist) and were blown away by this one: clearly not all AI images generators are created equal. We had had enough of Craiyon.

The event:
Our process evolved quickly during the event.

During the short talks, we generated lots of images on our respective platforms, in response to key ideas that we heard from the speakers.

We printed these and displayed them for discussion in the breaks. The speed that images could be generated meant that we had many more images than we normally would have been able to draw.
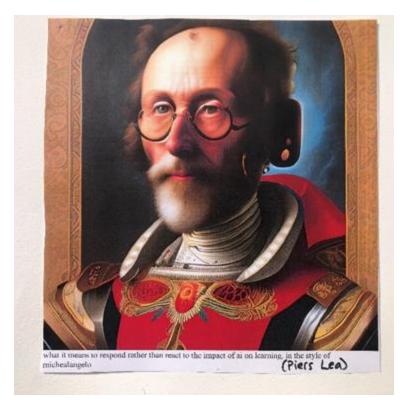
The differences between the platforms became startling as we tried using the same prompt and comparing them.

We were delighted to take suggestions from delegates of what prompts we should use. After Anna Katariina Wisaskanto's keynote, Piers Lea of the Learning Technologies Group suggested "what it means to respond rather than react to the impact of AI on learning in the style of Michaelangelo" (result from Stable Diffusion pictured)

what it means to respond rather than react to the impact of ai on learning, in the style of michealangelo

(Piers Lea)

As the morning went on, something began to niggle. The speed and sophistication of the AI images beguiled and intrigued everyone; it was fascinating to enter a prompt and to wonder at and discuss what the AI must have been thinking to produce these results. However, the images were often enigmatic, and despite their visual sophistication, the AI seemed to struggle to come up with something that communicated the complex concepts.

By lunchtime, despite all the talk of creativity, we felt that the AI was actually stopping us from being creative and responding to the ideas in a meaningful way.

Rebecca Hamer of the IB had explained in her keynote how creativity should start with problem definition. Our problem was that we wanted to creatively synthesise the proceedings of the day, incorporating AI as well as our own drawing skills. According to the IB, the next stage is idea generation and experimentation. This was the brainstorming and sketching out stage when as a group of artists, we talked through how we were going to get all aspects of the day, as well as some of our AI generated images into our final outcome. The first question was – what are we going to create?

Michelle came up with the idea of creating an illustrated story to bring everything together in our own creative synthesis of the "story" of today's conference. This was our own creation, from our own perspective. We responded to the fact that many of our AI images were male, and so we created a protagonist who was very much the opposite of that – a young girl called Pandora (the name playfully suggested by a delegate).

Our story was generated entirely by humans, we were responding to the many images that we had collected over the course of the day, as well as our memories of key points in the speakers' presentations. Then we joined the dots with our collective imaginations, making connections and brainstorming and sketching out ideas together to create the different stages of the story. As the story boarding went on, delegates also joined in, suggesting ideas to enrich the narrative. To start our story, and to reflect the educational nature of the conference, we imagined a classroom in the not-too-distant future. We collaged in some of the AI images of "children collaborating" from Craiyon, with their uncannily deformed faces and hands. After a day at school when many activities (generating images, writing stories, assessments) involved AI doing things for people, Pandora had a dream when she was visited by some of our sinister fantasy art robots from Stable Diffusion. They told her that her she shouldn't dream of being a writer as that role had been taken by robots, reflecting our experience earlier of feeling that the AI generators were creating all the images.

Every protagonist needs a helper, and Pandora's dog took this role. Miro the dog became her creative mentor, encouraging her to continue with her dream to write her book. We illustrated Rebecca Hannan's 3 stages of creativity at this point, which Pandora needed to use to create her book as we felt that this was a key aspect of the conference.

Anna Katariina Wisakanto talked in her presentation about claims that ChatGPT displays a "woke" bias and that Conservatives demanding a more "Conservative ChatGPT". When this prompt was searched on Stable Diffusion, it produced an image of a bearded white man, a cross between a Confederate soldier, cowboy and a pirate. We decided to add this character to Pandora's book.

We wanted to reflect the feeling of unease that many humans have about the idea of robots taking over the world, so the next episode in Pandora's book was a robot battle. The robots might have different opinions – some would obediently be wanting to serve humans, some might favour overturning human civilisation.

The conclusion of Pandora's book is an explosion of questions – how should we move forward into the unknown as a society where AI is a new normal? How can we integrate new technologies into our lives, finding a balance between the Yin and the Yang of AI? How can we make sure that AI is unbiased and reflects the diversity of our society? And most importantly, how can we ensure that we continue to use our critical thinking skills about the technology and about the output from AI?

There are no easy answers, and Pandora's book doesn't have a traditional happy ending… but we hope that as humans, we will!

Afterwards:

We were aware that things move quickly in the AI world, so we visited Craiyon again a few weeks after the event. We entered "21st century skills" to the search bar. This time there were no soldiers, and things had got a lot more racially diverse.

On trying the new "art" option with the same prompt, we got a white be-spectacled 6-year-old poking either a gun or a telescope up their nose and a rather beautiful image of a black child being sprinkled with Lego confetti.

However, despite the new options and diversity, very few of the images could have been used on their own without further input, and the hands had not got any more convincing.

We wondered: did we experience the ChatGPT Dunning-Kruger curve that Anna Katariina Wiskanto talked about in her keynote during the course of this project?

We feel that we now understand the strengths and weaknesses of AI images generators, and the benefits they can offer – a great starting point for creativity when given the right prompt.

ChatGPT through the lens of the Dunning-Kruger effect!

100%

1 — Wow. ChatGPT is able to answer all my questions. It quickly generates very elaborated answers that are credible and coherent. Finally a chatbot that behaves like a super human.

Ready now. Now I understand where the real value of ChatGPT resides. It can definitely give my productivity a boost, but it's important to recognize when it gets things completely wrong. **HFS**

Confidence level in ChatGPT

2 — Wait a minute. ChatGPT is powered by a Large Language Model (LLM) which is ultimately a statistical tool used to predict language without understanding it and produce "statistically plausible" answers.

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Damn. This means that ChatGPT will occasionally generate incorrect answers by unintentionally stitching wrong snippet of information together.

0%

Got it. ChatGPT is great when there isn't a precise "right answer". But it cannot be trusted when the answer must be "perfect" to be reliably useful.

No knowledge (believe the hype) ——— **Knowledge of ChatGPT** ——→ **Enough knowledge** (understand the reality)