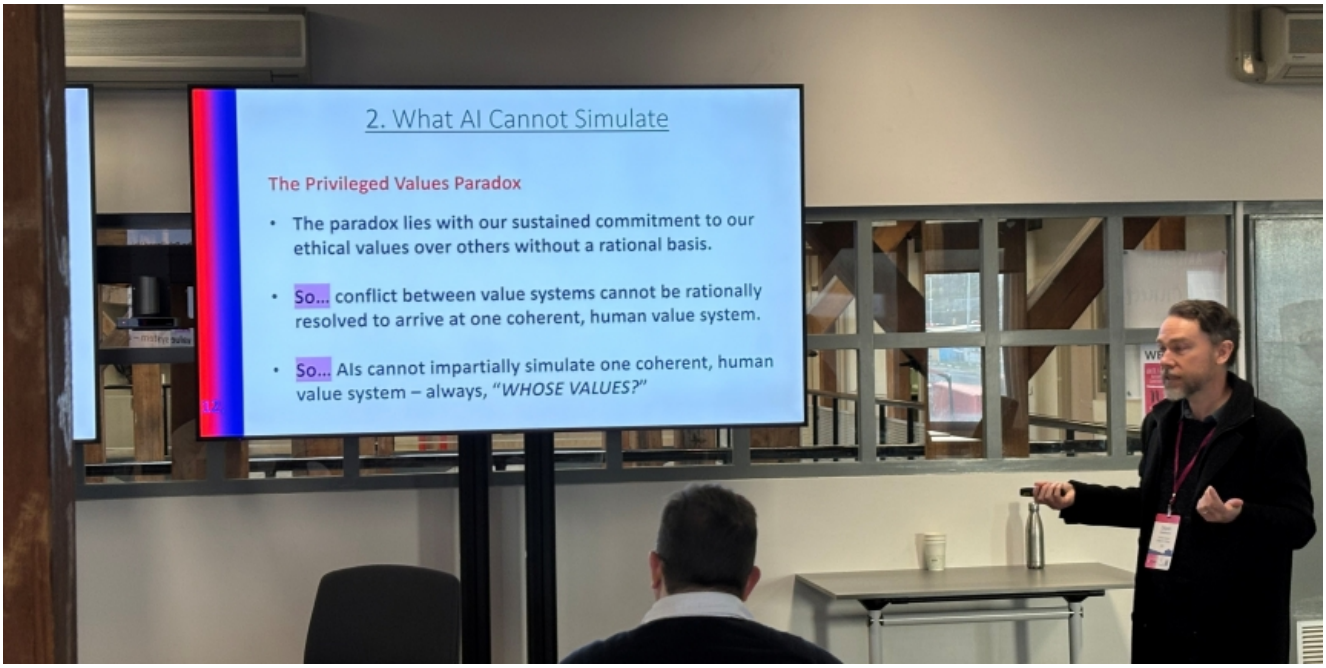
THE WAY

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FUTURE-PROOFING ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF AI

During the July break, Dr David Gawthorne and I attended the AATE/ALEA Conference in Hobart, a national conference bringing together primary and secondary educators, school leaders and literacy experts. Whilst there were a variety of presentations on grammar interventions, reading strategies, bringing poetry to life, creative writing workshops and Young Adult Author panels, there was an evident need to discuss how Artificial Intelligence (AI) affects the English classroom.

In his presentation, Dr Gawthorne engaged with the media hype regarding job security within education, the "rise of the machines", and specifically how to future proof English education. Surrounded by educators who are engaging with these issues across the country, David spoke clearly about human nature and the desire to define their own values, to share ethical beliefs, and that these lead us to construct and critique all types of texts. He acknowledged that whilst AI's capabilities to produce entertaining texts may increase significantly, our interconnected life in community reveals a desire to see our shared values represented through human produced texts.

The subject of English is about more than learning how to write or create texts. It is about the connections between texts, culture and values. It helps us to reflect on what we value – our vision of the good, the bad, the right, the wrong – and understand how values are influenced by what we read and watch every day.

Particularly, Dr Gawthorne concluded that we need to exercise caution in handing over the means

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of cultural production as this may cause society to drift from the shared values that matter to us. As educators, we need to consider the helpful and unhelpful elements of AI, ensuring that we motivate students to continue developing skills that seem like they could be handed over to AI. Individual human learning remains essential in order to hold onto their values, rather than delegate their thoughts, beliefs and views to the generated text determined by a technology trained to identify the patterns between words. Increasingly, these will be patterns produced by machines and not by us, if we allow that to happen.

Mrs Millie Pettett
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