

## ***Has education lost its way...?***

According to our speakers at the second of the Eastbourne Winter Series, education *has* lost its way.

The fundamental questions we needed to ask ourselves, said Drs Deborah Stevens (above) and Lynne Bowyer (below), were what we wanted students to learn, why we wanted them to learn, how we wanted them to learn and what the purpose of education was. To answer the last question, Deborah and Lynne said the purpose was to develop the whole person, to foster young people who were knowledgeable, responsible, healthy, caring and connected.

"In our rapidly changing technological environment, we need young people to live well together. From 2020, the 'digital curriculum' will be mandatory in schools. As a society, we need to consider how we embrace these changes."

Deborah said the planned New Zealand curriculum was a good one – "There is no need to throw the baby out with the bathwater, but there is a need to refresh the bathwater."

Deborah believes the problem lies with the way the curriculum is being taught, assessed and experienced. "I see life like a bowl of noodles rather than a box of chocolates. And the fact is, there are more noodles in the bowl than ever before. We need to examine what values our young people will embrace when they become citizens. The Greeks knew life was complicated, that a person's psyche and body need to be equally nourished.

"We see young people living primarily in a 'belly' society, a society of hyper-stimulation that provides instant gratification through social media, texting, peer groups. Young people are connected to their peer groups as never before.

"Once a household had only one landline phone and it was usually in the dining room where everyone could overhear conversations. Now young people have their own devices. From these devices, advertising invades their lives, and it is from this advertising that young people's main messages and sources of values are coming."

New Zealand's market-driven society had also given rise to cultures of materialism, individualism and relativism, she said. Relativism meant different points of view of what was desirable or not in society were not being critiqued.



Despite better nutrition, greater opportunities and choices, Deborah and Lynne believe the overall well-being of young people has declined. "We see greater aggression and depression among young people. They tend to externalise faults and they lack the ability to learn from their mistakes. We see rising rates of binge drinking, earlier sexual behaviour and alarming increases in anti-depressants prescribed for young people. The answer is to get young people to think – about the ethical issues they face and their place in society."

The role of education was to encourage and nurture thinking in young people. "It's not about locating information, not about learning fixed responses to pass endless assessments. Young people learn values from being with each other, from being guided by their elders, by sharing experiences and being exposed to the eternal values expressed in art, music, poetry, literature."

In their contact with teachers around the country, Deborah and Lynne have observed them becoming demoralised, frustrated and overworked - the emphasis on standardised testing is undermining their professional responsibilities.

"Teachers want to provide a fun, challenging and student-focused atmosphere, but instead they are always having to look towards the next assessment."

Through the *Centre for Science and Citizenship*, a charitable trust that works in schools and with community groups to discuss ethical and social issues, Deborah and Lynne have the opportunity to work with young people for a whole day, engaging them in a wide range of social, ethical and political issues, e.g. reproductive technology, the Treaty of Waitangi, genetics, the end of life and euthanasia. "We find young people are hungry to engage in these issues, to have the opportunity to express their own values."

For more about the *Centre for Science and Citizenship*, go to [www.nzcsc.org](http://www.nzcsc.org)

Winter Series co-ordinator **Anne Manchester**