International Women’s Day Lunch

Brisbane Club

Friday 7 March, 2008

Welcome Address

Welcome to the annual IWD Lunch at the Brisbane Club and thank you all for your support of this important event.

Part of our aim today was to also provide a donation for the Second Chance Programme for homeless women in Brisbane – more of this later.

One of the arguments I frequently hear in my line of work as principal of a single-sex girls’ school, is that society is co-educational and sex separation only occurs in prisons and toilets. So why would schools choose to be single-sex and keep such illustrious company?

Simple. Girls learn differently and at different rates to boys; girls thrive on collaboration rather than competition, and the research confirms that the encouragement, mentoring, confidence and support they receive in an all-girls’ environment positions them well as they enter adulthood. Unfortunately, when they enter the wide world the equality we tell them it is fair and reasonable to expect, is often not forthcoming. They then require the mentoring and support of the women they encounter in life.

How can we accept the argument that if society is co-ed it equates to co-equal – when actually all we really do is co-habitate? Adele Horin wrote a salient piece in the Sydney Morning Herald entitled “Sorry, wrong number: get with the times and try again” (March 1-2, 2008 p.39). She is commenting, of course, on the Prime Minister’s panel TEN, of which only ONE is a woman (and she gets arts of course), and to make matters worse, when there was an inconvenient outcry, he appointed some token women to be the NINEs’ brides. Great.

And today, the reported scrapping of the carers’ bonus, which has provided an estimated 400,000 carers over the past 4 years with up to $1,600 pa… and who are predominantly the carers…?? Women.

Today is not about me talking, because our guest speaker Dale Spender will be inspiring us after the main course, but I would like to leave you with a some of Adele’s words to give you all something to sink your teeth into along with your lunch:

We should not be counting. It’s soooo 1970s. We should have no need to calculate gender imbalance in 2008. We should be able to put our minds to the high-minded topics the Government wants us to address – the future of the environment, social inclusion, the cities, the economy … but unfortunately, someone has to do the counting and it’s always the minority. Funny how the sex once considered hopeless at maths is fated to do the sums. Every time women stop adding up, someone subtracts them.

Friends, just as our schools can’t stop preparing our girls for a better, more equal future, neither can we stop our vigilance or our voice.
I would now like to introduce Dale Spender. Dale probably needs no introduction, but on a day such as this, when we are celebrating women’s achievements, I believe it is important for us to be reminded of accomplishments.

Dale Spender (AM FRSA BA DipEd MA LittB PhD DUniv) has been an author, a feminist and an educator (and public speaker) for most of her life. She started her career as a high school teacher, went on to become a university lecturer (at James Cook), and received her PhD from the University of London. She has lectured at many universities at home and overseas (including MIT and Cambridge) and given more than 300 international keynote addresses. She has authored or edited more than 30 books, (many about women writers) founded academic journals, written and presented television programs (BBC and ABC), and is a regular (and sometimes controversial) commentator in newspapers and other media. She is currently writing a book Changing Minds: The Education Revolution.

She has been a director of her own business (AHOOT – AHead Of Our Time) and has served on numerous boards and advisory bodies in the public and private sector. A former Chair of CAL (Copyright Agency Limited) she has always been fascinated by the realities of Intellectual Property (IP) and has been a keen observer of the way the IP regime has been transformed by the digital revolution, and in the winners and losers. For the last 10 years she has concentrated on studying the changes in the practice of online writing (and reading) and on developing a model of digital authorship for education and learning, along with the implications for teacher training. (She has written a range of reports on these issues.)

She is also a founding member of the Second Chance Programme which raises money for homeless women.

On Australia Day in 1996 Dale became a Member in the Order of Australia for service to the community as a writer and researcher in the field of equality of opportunity and equal status for women.

Ms Amanda Bell
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