Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0332

Blackburn, Jean Edna

(1919 - 2001)

Born	19190714, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	20011202, Adelaide South Australia Australia
Occupation	Educator, Feminist

Summary

Jean Blackburn was a feminist, socialist and staunch advocate of the critical importance of good quality teaching and resources in shaping children's' lives. After completing an economics major at the University of Melbourne in1940 she became a research assistant for the Department of Economics. A mother who experienced the isolation of suburban living, she worked with Winifred Mitchell in organising the New Housewives' Association to help overcome this isolation.

She later completed a Diploma in Education and began her teaching career. In 1969 she was seconded as a consultant to the Committee of Enquiry into South Australian Education issuing the Karmel Report in 1973. This was the first of several such appointments. In 1983 she conducted a public enquiry into Victorian senior secondary education, issuing the Blackburn Report in 1985.

Details

Jean Blackburn took pleasure in the fact that she was born Jean Muir on 14 July, Bastille Day. The great democratic values of freedom, equality and solidarity inspired her ideas and values, and shine through her writings. She was born in 1919 in Melbourne and was educated in the public school system. The fact that, by the age of 21, she had graduated as a BA with Honours in Economics was largely a tribute to her own determination and thirst for knowledge. At the University of Melbourne, Jean joined the Labor Club and then the Communist Party.

She worked as a young woman with the War Office of Industry, before marrying Dick Blackburn and moving to Adelaide. Her work there as a secondary school teacher, while raising her family of three children, led her on to a public career in education policy. She left the Communist Party after the invasion of Hungary in 1956.

After working as a consultant to a 1969-70 Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia headed by Prof. Peter Karmel, she was appointed Deputy Chair of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission in the early 70s, and a full-time member of the Commission for 7 years from 1974 to 1980. Her strong commitment to public values, her capacity for intellectual rigour and engagement with a range of views and her ability to express significant ideas in a lucid and inspiring way meant that she had a profound influence on Australian education. She was also one of the most profound feminist thinkers of her time.

From 1983 -85 Jean Blackburn chaired the Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Schooling in Victoria. She was the inaugural Chancellor of the University of Canberra from 1990-91, chaired the Victorian State Board of Education from 1991-92 and was founding chair of the State Suffrage Centenary Committee in South Australia from 1992-93. She was awarded honorary doctorates from three Australian Universities. She died in Adelaide in December 2001.

As well as this record of distinguished service and influence, it is Jean Blackburn's personal qualities and strength of character that explain her place as one of our most loved and revered leaders in education.

Events

2014 - 2014
Inaugural Australian College of Educators Jean Blackburn Oration given at Wilson Hall, The University of Melbourne.

2002 - 2002
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Edited Book
Who's Who in Australia 2002, Herd, Margaret, 2002

Book
Changing Approaches to Equality in Education, Blackburn, Jean, 1986

The Study of Work in Society : A Curriculum Proposal, Blackburn, Jean, 1987

Australian Wives Today, Blackburn, Jean, 1963

Title I and the Disadvantaged Schools Program, Blackburn, Jean, 1979

Sound recording
Changing approaches to equality in education : lecture given at the Australian National University on Nov. 19, 1986, Blackburn, Jean, 1986

Report
Report. Volume 1 /Ministerial Review of Postcompulsory Schooling, Blackburn, Jean, 1985

Newspaper Article
Passionate for Schools Equity : Jean Blackburn, Hannan, Bill, 2001

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
Papers of Jean Blackburn

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Jean Blackburn interviewed by Peter Biskup [sound recording]

Interview with Jean Blackburn, economist, educationalist and Chancellor, University of Canberra [sound recording] / interviewer, Peter Read

Jean Blackburn interviewed by Wendy Lowenstein in the Communists and the Left in the arts and community oral history project [sound recording]

Jean Blackburn interviewed by Tony Ryan for the Conversations with Australian educators oral history project [sound recording]

State Library of South Australia
Interview with Jean Blackburn [sound recording] Interviewer: Allison Murchie

Interview with Jean Blackburn [sound recording] Interviewer: Kirstin Marks

Interview with Jean Blackburn [sound recording] Interviewer: Allison Murchie

Launch of the Barbara Hanrahan Memorial Exhibition [sound recording]

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