

THE HON JULIA GILLARD MP
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
Minister for Education
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Minister for Social Inclusion

SPEECH

'Teach for Australia' Reception

21 January 2010
Melbourne

Tonight I am here to offer my sincere congratulations to our 45 pioneering Teach for Australia associates.

You are playing a unique role in creating a new and better future for Australian schools.

I want to commend you for your effort and commitment through this first period of intensive training. I know you worked amazingly hard, with the course running 70 hours per week for six weeks.

I'm glad you at least were allowed to take Christmas Day off!

You have taken up a great challenge - the challenge of being the first to pursue this innovative pathway to attaining a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching.

A pathway to help you make a difference in our schools, starting next week with your two-year placement in schools across Victoria.

And you've risen to the occasion.

I thank the University of Melbourne and the Teach for Australia team for making all this possible.

I also thank the Victorian Government, including the Victorian Education Department, for working with us to get this program off the ground.

Each of us in this room is driven by the same passion, the same desire to ensure every Australian child whatever their background, gets a world-class education.

Each of us in this room believes that demography is not destiny, that children from the poorest and most difficult backgrounds can learn and achieve and if they fail to do so, we the adults have let them down.

And each of us in this room believes that teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement.

Professor John Hattie puts it this way: 'It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation.'

That's why through our Smarter Schools National Partnership the Rudd Government is delivering \$550 million to lift the quality of teaching and leadership in our schools.

The National Partnership on Quality Teaching will strengthen teaching across Australia, whether it's in Nhill in rural Victoria or in central Melbourne.

This National Partnership targets critical points in the teacher lifecycle to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders in our schools and classrooms around the country.

And this National Partnership supports Teach for Australia.

The power of Teach for Australia is its ability to recruit high-achieving graduates who may otherwise not have considered a career in teaching.

Teach for Australia is creating another important pathway in teaching.

There are many great teachers, who have come to teaching through the most traditional forms of teacher education and many inspiring, passionate, talented teachers will emerge from that pathway in the future.

But there is strength in diversity, in creating new ways to harness the best and brightest of our nation to tackle the challenging task of teaching.

I see in this room inspiring people with a mission to make a difference to those students who need it most.

And shortly you will be in schools, joining established teachers motivated by the same mission.

I expect you to be welcomed by those teachers because I believe the best people aren't afraid to be surrounded by the best people.

If I was one of the 45 pioneering Teach for Australia associates in the room tonight, I think I would be a little bit scared.

A little bit daunted by the next phase of your Teach for Australia journey when you start teaching and learning in some of our most disadvantaged schools.

But you should be reassured by the fact that you are here tonight because Teach for Australia recognises that you have exceptional leadership skills and knowledge in your chosen fields.

And you are here tonight because you have successfully completed your first phase of intensive learning.

And you will continue to learn and grow because Teach for Australia will keep supporting your development, by combining continuous study with on-the job training and support as you work towards your university teaching qualification.

And let me be clear. I absolutely reject any criticism that this program won't adequately prepare teachers for the realities of the classroom.

We've all heard the calls from new teachers and their employers that we need a greater focus in our pre-service teacher education on in-class practicum and on-the-job training.

That's what Teach for Australia is all about. As associates you will be mentored for two years in the classroom and continue to complete your university studies in school holiday periods before receiving your formal teaching qualification.

Evidence tells us that this approach has already proved successful.

We have done our research, looking to best practice examples from across the world, not to just mimic them but to learn from them.

Teach for Australia has a wealth of knowledge on similar overseas programs.

Its membership of the Global Teach for All network has helped us develop a program that will work for Australia.

Similar overseas programs, such as Teach for America and Teach First in the UK, have shown the great benefit of attracting a diverse range of high-achieving graduates into teaching.

These high-achievers might have been heading for law, accounting, management, consulting or similar careers.

But, like you, they were attracted to a program that offered them an opportunity to make a difference. An opportunity to teach in schools where inspirational and talented people are urgently needed.

Not surprisingly, many graduates remain steadfast in their passion for teaching long after they have completed the program.

In some cohorts, over sixty per cent of participants remain in teaching or stay involved in education over a much longer period and have a positive impact on students and schools.

Even after they finish teaching full time, they retain an active interest in contributing to education through partnership; through the kind of social entrepreneurship that helps to develop innovative new programs.

You will have heard the inspiring story of Michelle Rhee, a graduate of the Teach for America program. Today she is the Chancellor of Washington DC's public school system.

Before this, she founded the New Teacher Project that has recruited thousands of people to teach in schools across the US over the last decade.

Michelle is a leader in education who keeps her sights on creating change that she believes will raise student learning outcomes.

I had the opportunity to hear Michelle talk in Washington and she told a story from her own experience that struck a real chord with me.

She told of a discussion she had with a principal of a school in Washington which had been shown through testing to have fallen radically behind educational benchmarks and well behind the results being achieved in schools teaching similar children.

When she asked the principal for his analysis of what he thought should be done to lift standards, he initially struggled to offer a view and simply maintained that really everything was fine.

Finally, somewhat frustrated, Michelle Rhee said to him, 'would you send your grandchild to this school?'

To which he replied 'Well, if that's the standard.'

And of course she said to him forcefully, 'yes that's the standard' and suddenly he was full of ideas about what needed to be done.

I'm in the fortunate position of saying that in Australia I have never had a conversation with a school principal that went like that but I have had plenty of conversations about aiming high and achieving excellence.

But let's take this moment to affirm that Michelle Rhee, in that conversation, reached the crucial truth at the heart of our education revolution and our shared passion for change.

It's a great question. Would you send your child, your grandchild, your brother or sister, your niece or nephew to this school?

That's the standard I want to be the Australian standard.

Teach for Australia aims at that standard and, in doing so, creates opportunities for change.

And our new teachers here today are the lucky first to help us achieve this goal. You are on your way to making history.

From next week, donning your new teachers' caps, you will enter schools across Victoria and will look to create change in your classrooms.

I know you understand, more than anyone else, that you have a challenging road ahead, but I am equally confident you will meet those challenges with creativity and compassion.

I look forward to following your progress as you embark on this journey. A journey that will not only change your own life but could potentially change the lives of hundreds of Australian children.

Thank you.