

Occasional Address

University of Canberra

19 March 2024

- Good evening and thank you for that introduction. I would like to start my address tonight by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.
- Chancellor Lisa Paul AO PSM
- Interim Vice Chancellor Professor Lucy Johnston
- Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education Professor Barney Dalgarno
- University staff
- Distinguished guests
- I join you tonight in formally recognising the achievements of these inspirational graduates that we are here to celebrate. I also celebrate the family, friends, and loved ones, that are also here tonight, and without whose support our graduates could not have achieved what they have.
- I would like to thank the University of Canberra for inviting me to give tonight's Occasional Address. I am honoured and very humbled to be invited to speak at such a memorable and important occasion.
- I am proud to say that I am a teacher and that I love it. Once you are a teacher you will always be a teacher. I have had the privilege of working as an educator and educational leader for almost 40 years – and with this almost 40 years of reflections I have many wonderful memories.
- Perhaps my greatest reflection is “where in the world” do you get the opportunity to have such a lasting and influential impact on the lives of our children and young people, and on yourself.
- Since I was a young girl, I knew I would be a teacher. It was probably in high school where I finally admitted to myself that teaching was my calling. It was three of my teachers in high school that have shaped my career path and really showed me why I wanted to be a teacher.
- I went to high school in a small country town in NSW. Despite becoming a music teacher, my favourite subject was history. My history teacher, Mr Best, had this ability to help us really connect with our learning. Our learning was based around discussion, and he treated us like adults in the classroom. He taught us explicitly both how to study and what to study.
- To me, it was the value-add that he brought to teaching that has stuck with me throughout my teaching career. The investment in teaching us learn how to be better learners has moulded the way that I teach.
- Then there was my high school English teacher, Mrs Brodbeck. She is still alive today and is 97. While Mrs Brodbeck taught us explicitly, she understood there were some of us that were more capable in the classroom than others.
- Mrs Brodbeck was patient with those that were struggling. She showed me the importance of investing in students individually and she brought out the best in people.

Occasional Address

University of Canberra

19 March 2024

- The focus that Mrs Brodbeck gave to the individual shaped how I approached teaching students that were struggling, and how I approached those who were excelling. I thank her for this example. It made me a better teacher.
- Finally, I want to tell you about my high school maths teacher, Mr Holmes. I saw him at a reunion a couple of years ago. Mr Holmes showed me what I was good at, and then he gave me confidence in those strengths.
- He brought out the best in me. He was enthusiastic about learning, and he brought all of us along on that learning journey with him.
- He also taught in the era of the first Apple computer. It wasn't until a couple of years ago I found out that Mr Holmes and his wife sold strawberries in their own time to pay for the first computer in our school. It was a game changer for all of us.
- Mr Holmes showed me that finding opportunities to innovate in teaching was invaluable to students and that I must show students that I am excited about learning and teaching.
- As a teacher, I've tried to find ways of getting students excited about learning. This has paid dividends, especially for the most challenging classes I have had. I thank Mr Holmes for this.
- Telling these stories makes me wonder "where in the world" can you see firsthand the impact of investing in the individual, the impact of showing students how to learn - as opposed to what to learn - and the impact of showing excitement in learning. Teaching – that's where.
- So, at the age of 18, having gone to school in a small country town, I packed my bags and went to Sydney to start my Bachelor of Music Education and that's where it all began.
- When I graduated in 1987, I would never have imagined I'd be standing in front of you today giving this address. In fact, let me tell you about my first day as a teacher. For those that are new graduates, I feel like it's my responsibility to let you know what you are in for. I will seek forgiveness from the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Professor Dalgarno later.
- My first day on the job, I turned up at a NSW public high school of over 1,000 students, and I almost threw up in the carpark. I was absolutely petrified. Every student was bigger than me.
- I walked in and there were four of us who were brand new teachers, all on our first day. We were asked to sit outside the principal's office. Really? My first day on the job and I'm already outside the principal's office.
- The principal came and spoke briefly to all of us and then we met the executive teachers. Then it was off to class.
- My first job on the day was to read out the names of the students in "Roll Call" – our version of home room. I still remember the very first name that I read out – Elizabeth Collagiuri. I developed a strong connection with Elizabeth while I was at the school. She went on to become a highly respected science teacher and school leader in her own right.

Occasional Address

University of Canberra

19 March 2024

- When I began my teaching career, we didn't get the same kind of supports and mentoring that available to you now. But I was very lucky. My first principal was a genuinely lovely man. He would always make the time to stop and chat with the first year teachers.
- He showed me how important it was to be positive about people and about the way they do things, and we were excited to be able to share our experiences with him. As a principal and school leader, I have made it my mission to seek out beginning teachers and spend time with them. I hope it's made a difference.
- Then a new principal started. I wasn't sure what to expect but my second principal was the principal that I would benchmark as the best I've ever worked under. His name is Phil Tucker.
- Phil was a highly gifted leader and entrepreneur. He established the first specialist sports high school in NSW. He came to me one day and said "Jane – I want you to be the year advisor for the first sports intake at the school." I was too scared to say no.
- So there I was on the first day of the first specialist sports intake in a NSW public school, in a hall full of hundreds of students, parents, and teachers - and don't forget I'm still a pretty new teacher - and Phil gets up and says, "And now our year advisor will speak to us." This was the second time I almost threw up at that school.
- Phil didn't know that speaking off the cuff like that had never been easy for me. Maybe he'd picked that up and that's why he sprung this on me. I can tell you now, that that morning was a breakthrough for me. His decision to push me out of my comfort zone has been a game changer.
- I have now developed the ability to speak at any event, in any circumstance, and with confidence in myself. The ability to speak with confidence at any opportunity has been an invaluable skill as I advanced through school leadership roles.
- Phil also taught me that as a teacher and school leader you MUST focus on what is best for children and young people. He was trailblazer of innovation to meet the needs of kids. It was Phil who has underpinned my desire for equity in education for every student.
- When I moved into educational leadership roles, I did it because I felt like it was the only way I could have a say. But I realised that I didn't want to have a say on my own. I wanted to be able to bring people along on the journey with me. Where in the world can you lead others to commit to a focus on children and young people so explicitly. Teaching - that's where.
- Being a teacher is altruistic. We do it for the love of children and young people. I have never taken a promotion because of the pay rise. It's always been about the impact I can have on improving educational outcomes for students.
- When I think about the opportunities I have tried to create for education systems, I think back to a quote from Michael Fullan. He has said:

Occasional Address

University of Canberra

19 March 2024

“Ultimately, success involves transforming “the culture of learning” and related changes in “the culture of equity” (being attuned to the hidden barriers that privilege some while disadvantaging others). Learning and equity together feed well-being.”

- To bring about system change that connects learning and equity to well-being is something that is at the forefront of everything I do. To the graduates, I cannot emphasise enough the connection between equity and well-being for students. Each teacher in each classroom can help make that happen.
- As you enter the classroom, and as you continue your teaching journey, please think about my English teacher, my maths teacher, and my history teacher, and some of your own teachers who epitomised this in everything they did in the classroom, and out of it.
- I can't conclude without making mention of the impact that my husband Michael and my son Ben have had on my career. Michael and Ben are not educators. In fact, they are in careers far away from education.
- The benefit of this is that I've been able to lean on them for an outsider's perspective. They have kept me grounded. I encourage each of our graduates to bring people into your trusted circle who are outside of education. Continue to seek different perspectives to the situations you will face inside the classroom. This will help you look at teaching challenges as opportunities, and with fresh eyes.
- Many of you graduating today will be teaching in ACT schools. I'm excited about this. You are entering a school system where the commitment to public education by the people who work in our schools is unwavering. You are becoming part of a huge teaching family.
- ACT is also a great education system because it is a learning organisation. That's another one of the best things about being a teacher. Where in the world do you have so many opportunities to learn yourself, while helping others learn. In teaching – that's where.
- As you move through your career you will come to understand that your learning will be much more than the time you have spent on your degree. Not one day is ever the same in the classroom. Not one student is like another.
- You will learn to adapt, to think on your feet, and you will find strength and capabilities in yourself in the most challenging of moments that you never knew you had. I wish I could be there for your “lightbulb moments.”
- Adapting is inherent in teaching. It will become even more important into the future. 30 years ago, when I was in the classroom, there wasn't the same technology there is now. We didn't have mobile phones, and Ipads, and tablets, and smart boards.
- We had typewriters. We had overhead projectors. We used chalk and blackboards. For me as a music teacher, vinyl records were used instead of playlists. Our students wrote their assignments with pen and paper. We hand wrote reports.

Occasional Address

University of Canberra

19 March 2024

- Technology will continue to drive the way we teach, and the way students learn. I can see the advancements of technology - such as AI - having a significant impact on the classroom into the future – and I’m hoping for the better.
- Don’t be scared to embrace these changes. Change is good – hard, but good. Look for the opportunities that technology will bring to you and to the way you teach. Seek opportunities to further your studies to help you in your journey. Post-graduate education is rewarding.
- With higher education in mind, I want to share with you that the ACT is also unique in its partnership with the tertiary sector, particularly the University of Canberra. I would like to thank the University of Canberra for its support of the education system in the ACT. The support and opportunities you provide for our teachers is something that I haven’t seen replicated elsewhere.
- The ACT Education Directorate also has strong relationships with the non-government school sector. Some of you here today will have begun your teaching careers with many of our catholic and independent schools. I know you are in good hands.
- As I conclude my remarks today, I want to leave you some final words of wisdom – or perhaps I should refer to them as things I’ve learned along the way.
- Firstly, **teaching is about students – and only students**. Over your career, you will have an immense impact on the lives of thousands of children and young people. This is an honour. Never underestimate the impact you will have.
- Secondly, **always remember that one of your jobs as a teacher is to build the next generation of teachers and leaders**. You will be the “Phil Tucker” to many. You may never know who, but your influence will be profound.
- Thirdly, **always focus on the positives of teaching and of education**. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us one thing, it’s how important teachers are. Where would the community have been without teachers? Teachers were the backbone of many families during the pandemic, and after.
- And finally, **I want you to remember that teaching is about learning**. Learn every second, every minute, and every day. Be a leading learner and continue that circle of teaching, and of life. Grow your own memories and be the best you can be. What will your portfolio be in 30 years? I can’t wait to find out.
- Congratulations, good luck, and enjoy the next stage of what will be a wonderful journey as you grow your own educational legacy. I am certain that in the years to come, at least one of you here today will be giving this Occasional Address.
- Where in the world could I be prouder of the next generation of teachers and school leaders in the ACT? Nowhere.