



# Teach for the Philippines, Teach for Development

An initiative to improve the quality of elementary school teaching in the Philippines is also raising awareness of how central education is for the development of a country.



Fellow Kara Lim decided to apply to the 2-year Teach for the Philippines program. A first-hand experience of development work is what she was hoping to get.

At the Nueve de Pebrero elementary school, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, teaching is serious business. Every day more than 3,600 students take turns over three 4-hour shifts, keeping more than 100 teachers and staff busy from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

"Staff work long hours here," says Valerie Vir Garde-Farol, a programming and training manager at NGO Teach for the Philippines. "The morning shift for teachers, for example, should be over at 12:30. But many work until 3 or 4 p.m. as there is so much to do."

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Clarissa Delgado, co-founder and chief executive officer, Teach for the Philippines

The situation at the Nueve de Pebrero school is not unlike other parts of the country, with an education system struggling to cope with a burgeoning school population. Classes can reach up to 50 pupils and the Department of Education needs to hire more than 30,000 teachers per year just to meet demand. Given these numbers, it's no surprise that despite good progress in the 1990s and continuing commitment on the part of the government, the quality of education remains an issue. Enrollment rates are high, but so is the dropout rate, especially among the poor and other disadvantaged groups. Dropout rates have hovered at 6.0%-7.3% for elementary students in recent years, with higher dropout rates in secondary education, especially for boys. While there is some support for poor students to stay in school through the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino conditional cash transfer program, it is also essential to improve the quality of education.

"The root challenge for us is to improve the quality of teaching in the Philippines," says Clarissa Delgado, co-founder and chief executive officer at Teach for the Philippines, an NGO working to provide all Filipino children an inclusive, relevant, quality education. "There are many obvious and urgent problems in the country, like sanitation and poverty. But, it is our belief that you will not be able to truly address them unless you invest in education."

To improve the quality of teaching in the country, Teach for the Philippines recruits and trains some of the most promising Filipino graduates and young professionals to teach in high needs urban public elementary schools for two years, in partnership with the Department of Education and ADB. Modeled after similar programs in other countries such as Teach for America in the United States and Teach First in the UK, Teach for the Philippines aims to end educational inequity.

A new cohort of about 50 teaching fellow candidates will complete the intensive Teach for the Philippines Summer Institute at the end of May 2015, ready for their school placements on June 1, the start of the new school year. Throughout the year, program staff and partners will coach and mentor the fellows, who also commit to spending one Saturday per month in professional development and in-service training. In addition, the fellows also share lessons learned with the existing public school teachers. The fellows earn a regular public school teacher's salary, about \$445 per month.

## Brain gain

Twenty-two-year-old Kara Lim is not your typical Mandaluyong elementary school teacher. Born in Manila, she lived in Viet Nam and Thailand before moving to Canada, where she graduated with a degree in development from McGill University in Montreal.

"What attracted me to development is the dynamics between rich and poor," she says.

Back in her birth country, she decided to apply to Teach for the Philippines, undergoing a rigorous multi-step process that evaluates not only academic achievement but also drive, resilience, a sense of civic responsibility, and alignment with the NGO's core values. A first-hand experience of development work is what she was hoping to get.

"At a basic level, I wanted to help my country, but I also believe this experience to be an education in life skills: it helps you understand the poor and their problems. I have become less judgmental since joining the program."

Lim plans to enter law school in 2016 and then practice law. But her experience at the Nueve de Pebrero elementary school, she says, will stay with her forever.

Emil Sentillas, a 24-year-old from Masbate City in Bicol, tells a similar story. A teaching fellow at Quezon City's Holy Spirit Elementary School, he was not planning to become an educator.

"My original plan was to enroll in law school after the first degree, but I also wanted to work in development beforehand."

Sentillas worked for the Department of Education for 18 months, where he was involved in project development.

"Then I came across this opportunity with Teach for the Philippines and decided to experience what goes on in the real world." Dealing with the many problems facing the school can be tough at times. Even convincing parents to send their children to class can be a challenge. But the rewards can be amazing. And for Sentillas, this experience has proven to be a turning point that has helped him understand his true calling in life.

"My plan is to go back to project development and possibly teach at some point in my career."

## Mind the educational gap!

At its core, Teach for the Philippines is about developing dynamic young people into the well-trained teachers that are so urgently needed. "Better teachers are vital for improving students' learning outcomes. Unfortunately, most public school teachers don't get the training they need to overcome the challenges they face," says Karin Schelzig, a senior social sector specialist at ADB, which supports Teach for the Philippines with a technical assistance grant.

"Clearly, there is a gap that needs to be closed."

But the program also aims much higher than that. Ultimately, it is about fostering civic responsibility and leadership skills and instilling the value of education in the teaching fellows who will go on to become the next generation of Philippine leaders.

"Our statistics show that of the fellows who complete 2 years with Teach for the Philippines, just over 50 per cent decided to stay in education and public service," says Teach for the Philippines' Delgado.

"But even those who decide to leave this career path will carry with them the notion that education is crucial for a country struggling to lift itself out of poverty."

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