Wendy Kopp

Honorary Degree Citation

Wendy Kopp
Doctor of Humane Letters
May 25, 2004

By founding Teach For America, you, Wendy Kopp, have reminded us that excellence in education requires a personal commitment. Since 1989, you have inspired a new generation of college graduates of all academic majors to join the ranks of more than 10,000 bright and energetic new teachers who, through Teach For America, have engaged with and touched the lives of more than 1.5 million young students, and have continued on beyond their initial teaching commitment to work toward expanding opportunity for children in low-income communities.

You have taken a single idea from your days as a student at Princeton University and transformed it into a movement. You have taken a concern for the education of children in low-income communities and taught us how to touch those lives and shine the brightest lights of a generation into the darkest corners of our school systems. You have proven that this idea can spark the same notions of hope and personal involvement in others of your generation, and you have built a system where each child can be nurtured and focused. You have proven that, where there is hope for the equal education of children, there is hope for the future, because children are the future.

You have done this in a remarkably simple and quintessentially American way, by transforming your senior thesis into a new life, then into a business plan, then into an important partnership of schools, businesses, and a generation of college graduates. You took a risk and built a nonprofit with corporate seed money. Your organization, Teach For America, will continue to mobilize some of the nation's most outstanding recent college graduates in its mission until we have reached the day when all children have the opportunity to attain an excellent education-as long as there are college graduates who wish to share their knowledge and joy of learning.

Proving that your idea was fundamental and broadly shared, more than 2,500 potential teachers responded to your initial call. The first 500 teachers reached out through six regions to schools in need across the country. Success followed success, and news of your innovation spread, Teach For America became a household phrase as the country recognized the results achieved. A PBS documentary, Teach For America, further advanced the program's recognition and reputation in the minds of Americans and new college graduates flocked to fill the classrooms in disadvantaged schools throughout the country. These individuals went above and beyond with the aim of advancing their students' education. Moreover, those who joined the corps of Teach For America were themselves deeply influenced by the experience; they went on to assume significant leadership roles, both inside and outside of education, in order to expand opportunity for students in low-income communities.

Under your continued direction, Teach For America has continuously worked to increase the impact of its teachers and alumni by improving its systems for recruiting, selecting, training, and supporting those who join its corps. Even today you continue to make Teach For America bigger and better. Since 2001, Teach For America has worked closely with Pace University to create a model program to support core members needing to obtain a master's degree for teaching certification in New York City. More than 300 teachers have come through the Pace program.

For your recognition of the importance of education for every student in America, for your continued focus on reshaping the education of low-income children, for proving that education can work in the toughest communities in America, Pace University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto.

Aniello A. Bianco '61
Chairman, Board of Trustees

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President, Pace University

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