

Julia and the four challenges

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This may sound like the name for a 1960's rock band.

However, I am using it to highlight a speech by Julia Gillard in her capacity as Chair of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).

I don't want to get into the debate about Julia's period as Prime Minister. What I am sure of is that she is a good fit as Chair of the GPE.

If, as I assume, she required the support of the Abbott government to win the position then they deserve congratulations for seeing the benefit to global education and to Australia's reputation.

In a recent speech (the [Kapuscinski Development Lecture](#)) Julia outlined four challenges facing the international community if we are to achieve our goal of education for every child.

The four challenges, which she represented as four overlapping circles were:

- Poverty
- Conflict
- Fragility and
- Emergency.

Within the circumferences of these four circles are the 58 million children of primary school age who do not go to school.

In this speech Julia also raises some other troubling issues.

Firstly, education is lagging within overall development funding. She cites OECD data which indicates that aid to education has declined by almost 10 percent since 2010 while overall ODA has fallen by only 1.3 percent.

The second big issue is educational quality. Julia reports that 250 million children are unable to read or perform basic calculations even though they may have had four years of schooling.

In part she attributes this lack of attention to education in general, and quality in particular, to the difficulty of measuring results in education.

This reflects an enduring concern of mine, the tyranny of the measurable. It is difficult to win support for measures which seem important but where the results are not measurable. This distortion is a by-product of the very welcome focus on results and outcomes. But we need to guard against ignoring important issues where measurement may be difficult.

These are important issues and I am proud that an Australian is raising them for the world to address.

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