



Asia Education Foundation

**Asia Literacy
Ambassadors**
Partnering Businesses & Schools

Ambassador with two complementary roles

Dominic College, TAS and Craig Proctor, CSIRO

Dominic College, in the city of Glenorchy, just north of Hobart, was formed in 1973 and was the first co-educational Catholic college in Tasmania. Classes range from kindergarten to Year 10.

Sonia O’Leary, languages teacher at Dominic College, found out about the Ambassador program through the Asia Education Foundation newsletter and then had a call from Emily Bond. Emily had a willing Ambassador based nearby – Craig Proctor, from CSIRO – and she was looking for a matching school.

Sonia says, “I wanted to take part in the Ambassador program to extend the conversation with senior students about the importance of learning languages. It’s not seen as important by students or their parents. I wanted to get someone who is living and breathing a second language in their workplace. Craig fitted the bill perfectly.

“We’re still at the early stages, but he has come into school and spoken to Year 7 classes. The first went well. We haven’t been thinking about it as just three activities. We are looking at what would be best for the students. We think of it as a longer term program and I like that flexibility. Emily keeps in contact, but we have the say in how we do it.”

Indonesian language in the workplace

Craig has a long and varied involvement with Asia. He explains, “I studied Indonesian all through high school. I had no idea it would be so important to my work. At the end of high school I didn’t touch the language for 15 years, but I went on a month-long holiday to Indonesia in 1989 and it renewed my interest. Returning to Hobart, I enrolled in night school and repeated my matric year in Indonesian.”

Asia Literacy: knowledge, skills and understandings about the diverse countries of Asia
ambassador.asiaeducation.edu.au



This renewed interest in the language led to new opportunities opening up at work. “At CSIRO we have strong collaborative relationships with tuna fisheries. One of my colleagues required regular contacts with scientists at the research institute in Jakarta. He couldn’t speak any Indonesian and he would call me in to act as translator. Our labs also had occasional visits from Indonesian oceanographers and again I would be called upon to assist, having the language skills.

“In 2002, the opportunity came up to join the pelagic fisheries area. My senior colleague involved in the Indonesian work retired and I stepped into his shoes. Before that, most of my research activity was only in Tasmania, which didn’t give me the opportunity to use my language skills, so the new research area was very attractive. I do around five visits a year to Indonesia, each lasting two or three weeks. I am involved in a range of projects, covering tuna, lobsters, sardines and sharks.”

An Ambassador for Asia Literacy

For Craig, the Asia Literacy Ambassador project is covering familiar territory. “I was already involved with the Scientist in Schools program, which is very similar to this one, giving talks to the pupils at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School. I love talking to school kids about research and having this Indonesian component has been great. Ingrid Colman is the once a week (or so) Indonesian teacher. I usually give a talk to the Grade 5-6 classes prior to heading off on my Indonesian trips. From there, I send back photos, descriptions, as a (pdf) Powerpoint slide show, which Ingrid presents to the class. We’re considering doing something at an even more interactive level; a blog or live-chat session for example. But would it be practical? Often when I travel to more remote areas in Indonesia the internet links aren’t so good. I give my talks in a mix of English and Indonesian. I have to say, I was a little bit worried – maybe this would be too much for the students, but it hasn’t been a problem.”

While the students are undoubtedly the main beneficiaries, Craig believes both the Scientist in Schools program and the Asia Literacy Ambassadors program have provided payback for CSIRO and on a personal level. “I rate the importance of learning another language very highly, so it has been hugely beneficial for me, and CSIRO has a very strong ethic of science citizenship. I was pleasantly surprised when I mentioned the Asia Literacy Ambassador program to my line manager and then to my chief. Both were very supportive. As I was already doing Scientist in Schools, I offered to take leave to join the Ambassador program but they said no, they were happy for me to do it in work time.”