



Asia Education Foundation

**Asia Literacy  
Ambassadors**  
Partnering Businesses & Schools

## Ballarat to Borneo: it's not such a big leap

Loreto College, VIC and Michelle Jarrett, PwC

*Loreto College in Ballarat is a Catholic secondary college for girls. Founded in 1875, it is an independent school with approximately 800 pupils.*

Michelle Jarrett is a Manager in the professional services firm PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) and she puts at least some of her success down to her passion for Asia and her ability to adapt to different cultures. She explains, "In my early schooling, Chinese was compulsory and from year 8, we had to do two languages, I chose German and Indonesian. During that time I was introduced to many political leaders of Sarawak (Borneo) through family connections and had the opportunity travel and learn. It was these opportunities which fuelled my interest in Asia. I continued with Indonesian until I left school"

"For my gap year, I went to Japan and taught English to every age group, from infants through to 80-year-olds. I couldn't speak Japanese when I arrived but quickly learnt that adapting to the Japanese way of life was as much about body language and understanding the culture as it was about the language itself. It was a big surprise to me how much you can understand about people without speaking their language".

"I joined Deloitte as a University Graduate to become a Chartered Accountant. In my first year I learnt that our Hong Kong office needed additional staff, and although I was still quite junior, to my surprise I was asked to go to Hong Kong for three months. I later found out that it was because of my ability to adapt, hit the ground running and understanding of different cultures that prompted this invitation. This was the first example of my passion for Asia benefiting my career.

"Back in Australia, I made a career change to PwC and in addition to servicing my clients I took on a learning and development role with a focus on supporting our PwC colleagues in India who worked collaboratively with our Australian team members. In essence my role focused on building both the technical and soft skill set of our global

**Asia Literacy:** knowledge, skills and understandings about the diverse countries of Asia  
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colleagues while also educating our Australian team members on how to work effectively with other cultures within the PwC network of firms. My personal experiences in Asia have made me adaptable – working with other PwC offices is no longer a huge cultural shock.”

### **A perfect match**

Michelle’s own background and stories made her the perfect match as the Asia Literacy Ambassador for Loreto College. Yoshie Burrows, head of LOTE at Loreto, says, “Michelle came and spent time with our Year 10 students who were studying French and Japanese. What she said was spot on. They could see how Asia literacy opened up their options and we did a follow up activity where students made posters to promote the importance of learning a second language to fellow students. Some made a movie, interviewing the French and Japanese teachers about how useful another language could be for your career.”

Michelle again, “Loreto College is very similar to my school in Adelaide. I also went to the University of Ballarat and own an investment property in Ballarat, so Loreto was a really good fit and I’m glad the time was taken by the Asia Education Foundation to get it right.

“With a forum of both Japanese and French students, it was also helpful that I had learnt German. We talked about the value of having language skills and the girls were very receptive. I was not expecting them to ask a lot of questions of me (reflecting back on my own experiences at School when we had guest speakers) but they appeared very interested and even came up to me afterwards asking further questions. It was a really positive experience. While the main focus was sharing my own story, experiences and defining moments, the overall message I tried to portray was never to underestimate that some of the decisions you make at school can have an influential impact on one’s future. I think it helped that they saw someone who had attended a similar school, attended a University in their town and was now working in a professional organisation.”

In 2010, Loreto College had an NALSSP Becoming Asia Literate grant and there has been a great deal of support from the college principal and the heads of other departments for the Asia Literacy Ambassador program. There have also been significant benefits for PwC. According to Michelle, “often younger people think of PwC as just an Accounting firm but there is so much more to the firm and so many diverse roles and career opportunities available. While I may have started as a Chartered Accountant servicing clients, my role now is about developing people and working with people across the globe”. Hearing my story really opened the students’ eyes to the opportunities that are truly out there.

### **Personal benefits**

At the same time, Michelle feels she has gained a lot personally from the overall experience working with Loreto. “Sharing your story means reflecting on the defining points and decisions you have made in your career. For me, one of these was being offered the Hong Kong secondment. Stepping back and looking at my career achievements gave me the opportunity to acknowledge the success I have had and the person I have become. It was really lovely being asked questions and sensing the



students' interest in my time in Japan. I'm encouraged by the fact that the next generation has that kind of inquisitive nature."

With the forum under their belt, Yoshie and Michelle are now investigating other opportunities to share insights and experiences with other students at Loreto.