



Asia Education Foundation

**Asia Literacy
Ambassadors**
Partnering Businesses & Schools

Students are ‘intrigued and amused’

Lorne-Aireys Inlet P-12 College, VIC and Karen Buckman, PwC

The Lorne-Aireys Inlet P-12 College is a dual-campus school with a P-12 campus at Lorne and a P-6 campus at Aireys Inlet. There are currently some 277 students.

Tony Turnbull, teacher of Indonesian at Lorne-Aireys Inlet P-12 College, has been looking for ways of extending Asia literacy in the school for some time. He says, “I have been involved with the Bridge to Asia project and it was off the back of this that I heard about the Asia Literacy Ambassadors.

“It took a while to find someone who was prepared to make the effort to come out to us (we’re two hours from Melbourne). It would be easier in terms of making some regular contact if the Ambassador lived locally, but the program certainly has the potential to fulfil our ambitions. The first invitation to visit Melbourne University was very valuable – more of this, please, we’re certainly interested in going again!”

In the event, the Asia Education Foundation found Karen Buckman, from PwC, who was willing to make the trip out from the city to talk to Tony’s students – and she had just the right pedigree.

Learning Indonesian

Karen explains, “I lived in Jakarta for three and a half years, until mid 2009, latterly working for PwC. My husband got posted to Indonesia and I went with him. It wasn’t in my life plan. I didn’t know a single word of Indonesian. For three months, I spent six hours a day on language training, so that got me up to conversational level. I then began a post graduate correspondence course in finance. Through my husband’s work connections I was introduced to PwC and I began working for them in Jakarta. It’s a very unusual way to get into one of the big four global accountancy firms.

“What I would say about my experience is that it is so much harder to learn a language when you are older, even with intensive training. It wasn’t that important in terms of

Asia Literacy: knowledge, skills and understandings about the diverse countries of Asia
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needing the language to converse with business contacts – so many business people speak English – but it was from a cultural point of view.

Getting started

She continues, “It was a bit hard to get going initially with the Ambassador program. I was also doing other volunteer work, helping disadvantaged children with their reading. Until that ended, it was difficult to do something else; we had to fit things around the school holidays, and I went overseas for six weeks, but finally, it came through.

“It was Term 2, 2011, before I got down to Lorne, but when I did, I met three different classes – two Year 7/8 and one Year 11/12. I’d lined up a presentation with photographs to give the students insight into what it’s like to work and live in Indonesia. They were very interested. They were intrigued and amused by the local transport arrangements.

“I think my story helped them realise that there will be opportunities that will come to you if you are Asia literate. Four or five of the students are going on a cultural study tour of Indonesia with the school and I could tell them, ‘these are the things you are going to experience’. I think there was quite a bit of traction. Lorne is a small town, so to see these photos and hear about these places abroad from someone who has been there is probably something a bit out of the ordinary.

Day-to-day life in Jakarta

“A few had been on a previous school trip to the area and knew what I was talking about. Several had a little bit of a picture, without really knowing what it all meant. For example, I touched on the day-to-day aspects of life in Jakarta. I told them that, in the markets, there are three different prices. There is one price for locals, one price for foreigners who speak Indonesian, and a third price for foreigners – how much you pay is about the way you are perceived by the traders, so being Asia literate saves you money. All Indonesian citizens require an ID card and on that card you must specify your religion however, Indonesia only recognises five religions. Judaism isn’t recognised, so if you are Jewish, you have to pick something else. It is just not worth upsetting people by claiming you are Jewish, culturally it is far easier to avoid conflict.

“I am going to go down again in a few months’ time, to speak to the Year 9 and 10 class. The Year 10 students have make a decision about whether or not to study Indonesian for their VCE.

“For a number of reasons – because it’s a long drive, because my client commitments have to come first – I prefer to ring-fence a whole day and do as much as possible with the school during that time. By allocating the day, I can focus.”

Although it got off to a slow start, the Lorne-Aireys Inlet Ambassador program has gone well, and one particular student is also providing the inspiration for others. Tony again, “The Australian Indonesian Association sponsored one of our students (and our school generously contributed some of the cost) to send her to school in Jakarta. She has come back literally fluent in Indonesian. She loves Indonesia and wants to do a law degree with Indonesian as a second major.”

It is this kind of success story that motivates both the school and the Ambassador to make sure other students have the opportunity to realise the value of becoming Asia literate.