



Asia Education Foundation

**Asia Literacy
Ambassadors**
Partnering Businesses & Schools

Small numbers, high achievement

Mount Scopus Memorial College, VIC and Melissa Morris

Mount Scopus Memorial College is a coeducational, traditional Jewish day school in Melbourne, catering for approximately 800 students from 3-year-old Kindergarten to Year 12. It is the only Jewish school in Australia that teaches Japanese.

As a Jewish school, Mount Scopus already has a strong cultural core and a full timetable, with Jewish studies and Hebrew in addition to the usual school subjects. This makes it even more of a challenge to introduce Asia literacy as a 'whole of school' strand, but head of LOTE Michie Bunn saw the Asia Literacy Ambassador project as a way of promoting the study of Japanese at the school.

She explains, "Mount Scopus has a partnership with the Australian Exchange Centre in the Australian-Hokkaido association, hosting Japanese students every other year, but the school has never organised school trip to Japan. We do have a school trip to Cambodia every year, to help a poor community to rebuild a house, but that is always a one off activity. The idea of promoting Asia Literacy is still foreign here."

"Students study Japanese only as an optional subject at Mount Scopus. As a result, there isn't a high level of Asia literacy in the school. In Year 8 this year, there are 30 students studying Japanese and the retention rate at Year 9 is around 20 per cent. The enrolment is small but the academic achievement is very high. It's a pity.

"I saw the ambassador project in a newsletter and noted it because I needed to promote Japanese literacy. The students needed an incentive to study Japanese."

Promoting Japanese literacy

The Ambassador for the school has been Melissa Morris. She has visited the principal and school management, met with students, and the third interaction was when students visited her office. Melissa has lived and worked in Japan, studied the language and participated in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. In

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fact, she now looks after the JET program at the Consulate-General of Japan office in Melbourne.

She says, “The Asia Literacy Ambassador project sounded prestigious but after reading the material, it looked like something that would be exciting for me to do. At the start, it felt as though you needed to be extremely senior and quite a bit older, but reading it in more detail, it sounded as though I would be a good fit. I had studied Indonesian at university as well.

“I was linked with Mount Scopus and the expectation was to share my personal experiences and to try to motivate and excite the students about learning an Asian language; to tell them about how many doors it would open. For myself, I never thought it would lead on to so many adventures and opportunities. I tried to get them to see the big picture.

“I made three visits. The first was “why learn Japanese”, it was around the time students were making choices about electives. I didn’t have much time with the younger year levels, but I was able to spend a bit longer with the seniors and that was so much more effective. The second meeting was with the principal, the board, and the LOTE coordinator.

“The third school visit was in reverse. Years 9, 10 and 11 came to the Consulate of Japan, and that got the best response. I did an introduction to Japan with a colleague. We wanted to show that it’s not about the length of time you spend in Japan, but if you cement your study, it opens all kinds of opportunities. We talked about work opportunities, for examples short term exchange programs and the JET program.”

Melissa says the Consulate has been very supportive in terms of her taking the time to be an Ambassador and while there have been challenges, it has been a valuable opportunity to talk about the work of the Consulate-General and to promote the JET program, resources and library.

The challenges

One of the challenges was around the fine detail of scheduling meetings and activities, the other was around the different aims of the key partners. Melissa explains, “I certainly wanted to share my personal experience, to help motivate students, but what was probably needed was a more on-the-ground champion for the Japanese program.”

Michie Bunn feels that the Asia Literacy Ambassador project was unsuccessful in achieving the school’s goals over just three sessions (the number specified in the project) and that more could be achieved over a longer timeframe.