



Asia Education Foundation

**Asia Literacy
Ambassadors**
Partnering Businesses & Schools

We're all part of a bigger world

Bendigo South East Secondary College, VIC and Robert Pica,
WorkSafe Victoria

In 2008-2009 Flora Hill Secondary College and Golden Square Secondary College came together and were renamed Bendigo South East Secondary College. The state school, some 150km north west of Melbourne, has more than 1000 pupils.

BSEC Indonesian teacher Beverley Harvey found out about the Asia Literacy Ambassador program by email and leapt at the chance. Although she doesn't have any slack in her schedule, she felt that this would be a worthwhile venture. She says, "I had to juggle things, but Emily Bond at the Asia Education Foundation was really helpful and that made it easier." Beverley was also helped by Vicky Zhou, teacher of Chinese at BSEC.

Beverley again: "It's particularly the boys you need to convince that learning a language is important – that sense of 'you are part of a bigger world'. The match was made really quickly, but our schedule is so tight, it was difficult to organise a visit. It happened later in the year, after the students had chosen their options, but Robert went down very well. He was a good role model for the boys – he had presence and really related to them – and you could tell by the body language that they felt he had made some good points. If nothing else, I think it made the students who hadn't chosen to continue with languages feel that they shouldn't knock anyone who had." Beverley felt that Robert was a very good match for her students.

Language learning

Robert studied Indonesian for six years at high school and four years at university and he is keen to pass on his passion for the language to young people. He comments, "Unfortunately, many Australians are ignorant about Asia and Asians. The Asia Literacy Ambassador role struck a personal chord with me. My reaction was heartfelt.

"I haven't had a lot to do specifically with dealing with Asia in my career. Just after university I worked for a chemical company and some of the managers put me onto an

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



Asian account, but I've not had an abundance of contact through my work. I am currently studying an MBA that does have a strong emphasis on developing ties with Asia." Although he has not needed the language in his career, he believes being able to speak Indonesian has fed his interest in Asia and has help build his Asia literacy.

Ambassador interaction

"Given the tyranny of distance, I have been able to make two visits to BSEC. I had an initial meeting at the school just to put a face to a name and to get a picture of the school in my mind. Then I went back to speak to Years 7 and 8.

"The talk seemed to go quite well. The questions from the Year 7 group were interesting – some questions I was expecting, some I wasn't. One child queried whether Asians were going to take over Australia. I try to make children understand the difference between myths and stereotypes and the facts. Another asked, 'What's the weirdest Asian country name?' (I thought that must be Tajikistan).

"I do like to think that the kids who were listening to it took at least one point away. I wanted to try to make them understand the importance of Asia, not to be fooled by negative stereotypes – to be a bit wiser, a bit more understanding.

"On a personal level, it has increased my confidence with public speaking. I am hoping to move down the Asian path with my career and this has been good experience, good for networking. From my point of view, I hope I have helped open eyes and minds to Asia."

If there is room for improvement in the program, Beverley feels it is to overcome the issue of distance. "I would have liked Robert to be able to drop in more often. A closer relationship would enable it to be more one-on-one. The idea is good; it's more that you need someone in your local community. It doesn't hurt to have someone different, and from Melbourne – but they can't just drop in. You could try to get into regional cities to find who it is who is using Asian languages for business – maybe councils and trade associations could help."

An added bonus for all concerned was a story, with photo, which appeared in the local newspaper, promoting the importance of learning Asian languages in school.