

BALAI BAHASA INDONESIA PERTH

2020 Annual Dinner, Wednesday 19th February

Indonesian Consulate General, 134 Adelaide
Terrace Perth



Professor David Hill:

My Indonesian story

I was asked to say something tonight about ‘my Indonesian story’. It’s a long story & one that I enjoy recounting, but I’ll endeavour to be restrained tonight... as I’m sure you’d rather be enjoying dinner.

I am proof of two important educational principles:

The role of the innovative inspirational teacher.

and

The impact of experiential learning.

HIGH SCHOOL

I first got interested in Asia in 1967 hearing stories my parents brought back from their Long Service Leave visiting Asia that year. Then in 1968 I enrolled in a brand new Year 8 course in NSW called Asian Social Studies. Our teacher was a young Australian, Colin Freestone, who had just returned from 2 years as an Australian Volunteer Abroad teaching in a rural school in peninsular Malaysia.

This class was inspirational, hands-on teaching with lots of conversations, discussions and a change in teaching style that threw responsibility back to students to initiate their own learning. So inspired was I by that experience, I then went on to study Indonesian language in years 11-12.

Colin and fellow teacher Philip Kitley organised one of the first student tours to Indonesia. In January 1972 we spent a month travelling in Java and Bali. I was 17 and put my life savings into the trip. We are captured here at Imogiri’s royal tombs in one of Phil Kitley’s lovely photos, subsequently used as the cover of an early textbook on Asia.



This trip had profound impact on my life. Before going I had had to make a difficult choice: whether to use by life savings of about \$600 to pay for the trip, or to buy the car that I had hoped – like many young Australians – as soon as possible after getting my driver’s licence. As Phil Kitley predicted to me on the plane back home from Jakarta, I would return to Indonesia again before I ended up choosing a car. He was prescient; I went to Indonesia almost every year in the next decade. I continued to spend my savings on flights to Asia rather than buy a car; it was another decade before I bought one!

TRAVELLING STUDENT

Instead, I ended up spending a year studying Malay at a college in Singapore, then backpacking around SEA and then doing a couple of degrees in Indonesian and Southeast Asian studies at ANU before things settled into place. It was a great period of exploration, picking places randomly on a map of Indonesia and wandering the byways of Sumatra, Java, Madura, Bali, Sulawesi, eating at warungs, waiting to hi-jack anyone who wanted to take the time to talk, travelling on buses made from truck chassis with no glass windows, reading voraciously whatever I could lay my hands on .



In the age before mobile phones – before even faxes -- my ramblings, *incommunicado* for months at a time, were no doubt a great stress for my parents back in Sydney, but being thrown upon my own resources as I explored the archipelago on a student's savings, stretching myself in conversation with Indonesians of all walks of life, I became an adult and gained a reasonable grasp of the language in the process.

DOSEN

During my subsequent three decades teaching at universities, I tried to emulate my own teachers. I was particularly conscious that one of the secrets in motivating students to learn Indonesian and to develop a strong interest in the country was simply to get them there, to get them there *early* in their learning journey, and to enable them to spend a significant period of time there.

It was partly this experience that led to me establishing the Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies (ACICIS) in 1994 to enable Australian students to include at least a semester, and preferably a year, of their degrees studying alongside Indonesians in Indonesian universities.

For most such students, their time in Indonesia was a memorable escapade; for many the experience was a personal or professional transformation; for a good number it has provided the basis of a solid career relating to Indonesia. For me, it was the most rewarding aspect of my teaching career.

IMPORTANT ROLE OF BBIP

Over the years I have been rather undiplomatically critical of the Indonesian government for not having done more to support the teaching of Indonesian language in Australia. The contrast with how countries like Germany, France, Japan, China and Korea promote their languages is stark. I've argued that Indonesia has a largely unmet potential to exercise considerable 'soft power' by promoting Indonesian in communities abroad.

Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth is exactly the kind of collaboration that the Indonesian government *should* – and, in this instance, *does* – support.

I pay tribute to the inspiration of Karen Bailey OAM, who in 2007 with colleagues in WILTA, came up with the concept of establishing a community teaching/learning entity for Indonesian language, the BBI.

In essence, BBIP took Indonesian language learning beyond the school and university classroom, into the general community, breaking down institutional barriers to language learning.

Karen worked with then Vice Consul Bapak Ricky Suhendar to gain the support of the then Indonesian consul-general in WA, Bapak Aloysius Madja and the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra agreed to provide a seed grant of \$10,000. The Consulate in Perth has always provided free use of its building for classes. That support was crucial in getting the concept off the ground.

In 2011 Karen and colleagues managed to gain an Australian government grant of nearly \$400,000 to support the BBIP providing various programs through 2012 and 2013. I played a small role on the Advisory Group for that grant.

Such external funding from this and other sources facilitated the extremely successful Indonesian Film Festival which brought major Indonesian movies and their actors and directors to Perth from 2011 - 2015. It was an amazingly successful public outreach for Indonesia in WA, but has sadly lapsed without sufficient sponsorship in recent years.

BBIP's Community classes have proved a great success, in contrast to the decline faced by Indonesian teaching in schools and universities around the country over the past two decades.

Significantly, the concept of the BBI initiated here in Perth has since been adopted by other states around Australia. There are now BBI in the ACT – I had the pleasure of attending their AGM dinner at the Indonesian Embassy in November last year – and fledgling entities in other states.

But, as many here tonight recognise, running such a community enterprise is hard work, and would not be possible without a strong circle of supporters and collaborators.

Karen has the personality to collaborate, to excite others with her sense of the possible, to make something where nothing exists and to labour long and hard to ensure its success. It is difficult to imagine a BBIP without her at the head, but it is the measure of the success

in building an institution that it becomes stronger and more durable than the individuals who establish it.

CONCLUSION

12 years is a major milestone for a community organisation like BBIP. It's emerging from childhood, about to become a teenager. There will still be growing pains, and the risk of a misstep could still undermine confidence and direction. But I urge all of you here with an interest in Indonesia to consider putting your time and effort into continuing the success of BBIP, by playing a role in its development, either as a committee member, supporter, or simply as a continuing student.

As an interested member of the broader circle of supporters of BBIP, I want to conclude by thanking most sincerely staff of the Indonesian consulate-general here in Perth and the Indonesian government more broadly for the support thus far offered, and for its willingness to expand the concept of BBI to other states and territories.

I want to thank all those who have served on the BBIP committee in whatever capacity, and thereby ensured its continuing growth. Yours is a valuable service for the communities of both Australia and Indonesia.

Finally, I want to thank Karen particularly for decades of service. I know it is hard to step back from an institution you have built from zero, but I know too that BBIP is on solid footing, ready for the next phase of its development. I wish you all the best in your 'retirement'. It is great fun!

Thank you.

David T. Hill

19 February 2020