



# TALKING NORTH

The journey of Australia's first Asian language

Edited by Paul S. Thomas

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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

What makes one nation curious about another nation? Curious enough that the study of the other's culture and language becomes a natural commitment or something that could be described as a national project? This question lies behind much of the writing in this book as it explores the history, education policy and changing fortunes of the Indonesian/Malay language in Australia. While formal education programs are central to this discussion, individual effort and chance encounters with the language are also examined in the context of Australia's evolving historical ties with its near neighbours. These relationships have grown in importance since the end of the Second World War, but Australians typically continue to view the region as 'testing'. This is exemplified by the Australian–Indonesian relationship, the primary focus of this volume. While much has been written on the political relationship, this book builds its view of the two countries' interactions on the cultural activity of language learning. This is, perhaps, the most fundamental of cultural activities in any effort to promote mutual understanding.

*Talking North: The Journey of Australia's First Asian Language*

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## 4. WEBS AND RAINBOWS

### Accomplished Language Teaching and *Pelangi* Magazine Bridging Indonesia with Australia

Lesley Harbon

*University of Technology Sydney*

A key concept within the current thinking among contemporary intercultural languages education scholars is that when we are teaching a language we are actually teaching culture, and that teachers and resources mediate the learning of that culture (Buttjes & Byram, 1991; Harbon, 2007; Moran, 2001). Looking back over my forty (plus) year involvement with the learning and teaching of Indonesian in Australia, I have seen evidence that language teachers and the learning resources they provide for their learners, do, in fact, mediate in the learning of cultural knowledge.

I myself am a product of an education system that has allowed me to come into contact with accomplished Indonesian teachers and engaging Indonesian language and culture learning materials. I have learned Indonesian language, and I have learned about the cultures in Indonesia, alongside very accomplished (in my opinion) language teachers both at school and at university. So inspired by their teaching was I that decided to learn the craft of Indonesian teaching myself.

Over the past 20 years I have taught alongside wonderful Indonesian teacher colleagues, observed others from afar, collaborated with native-speaker and non-native speaker Indonesian teachers, comical and serious ones, young and not so young ones. I have learned from resources and materials that had me translate from one language into the other, and which gave me insights into ways of living of Indonesian people. I have engaged with photographs in textbooks that allowed me to escape into another world. I have been involved in the publication of *Pelangi* magazine in the eighties and nineties, and more recently an intercultural textbook series, *Dari Kami Ke Kita* (Morgan, Kohler & Harbon, 2011). I believe I have led an enriched life because of all my culture learning. I have learned about 'other', but I have more importantly perhaps, learned a lot about 'self'.

My reflections in the following paragraphs allow me to indulge in an introspection of my own narrative, to reflect on accomplished Indonesian language teaching, to reflect on teacher preparation programs, to recall names of teachers who have impacted generations of learners of Indonesian in Australia, and to recount the story of *Pelangi* magazine, a particular resource that may be considered to have impacted a generation of Indonesian language teachers and their students in Australia and beyond.

I have chosen two metaphors to explain and make sense of my reflections adding a very personal flavour to this volume. The first is the image of a web. The way I see it, the Indonesian language teacher network over the past 40 years is woven together in a web, and Indonesian language teaching has managed to connect people across Australia and beyond. Like a web encasing all who encounter it, so it has been, it seems, with the connecting of Indonesianists. The lines of connection, I believe, are woven between teachers and resources, creating clear connections, bonding strongly to keep us connected. With social media now, this is even more the case.

The second metaphor I adopt to bring my reflections together is the image of the rainbow. The pelangi/rainbow metaphor was adopted by a group of us at University of Southern Queensland in the mid-1980s as we designed and published an Indonesian language learning resource, *Pelangi* magazine, continuing over 15 years. Like the web, the rainbow also has a sense of joining people and places. *Pelangi* magazine, too, played its role in bonding the Indonesianist network together.

My own story with Indonesian began in the early 1970s. I learned my first Indonesian at Galston High School in Sydney's Hills District as a student in Year 7. Our class experienced 'taster' courses of Latin, French and German, and Donna Wood, our Indonesian teacher, brought the language alive. There were other Indonesian teachers who like Donna had either trained at Sydney Teachers College, or who were teaching Indonesian at this time, from the early-mid 1970s. I recall names such as Geoff Woollams, Peter Reynolds, Louise Robert-Smith, Leonie Wittman, Cheryl Taylor, Jane Jacobs and Wendy Gray. I was being caught up in these first strands of the 'web'.

As an undergraduate in Indonesian classes at the University of Sydney between 1978 and 1980, I was being taught by teachers who had taught my teacher. I enrolled in language classes (and then later *Introductory Javanese*) with Jon Sumaryono, I elected to study Malay literature with T. S. Lie. I explored the history of the archipelago with Peter Worsley. I grappled with grammar and translation in the classes taught by Boy Joseph. I dabbled in some introductory Minang classes with Marcus Susanto. Modern Indonesian literature



came alive with George Quinn and David Reeve. My own contemporaries were Jennie Brown, Cathy Watt, Sarah Moeda, Pat Skinner, Amanda Gibson, Libby Gill, Rosemary Guyatt, Ros Levitus, Sue Jackson, Katrina Hoffman, Lynne Fisher, Kerrie Murphy and Lynne Laguida. I stood in awe of others who studied there: Adrian Vickers, Ratih Hardjono, Wendy Robinson, Alex Murphy and Melissa Gould-Drakely.

My key memories of life in the Indonesian and Malayan Studies Department for those three years were not just what and who I could see, but what I could hear and smell. Who could forget Pak Sumaryono's hearty laugh, or the *selop* sound of Pak Li's slippers clapping along those corridors? Who could forget the aromas of the various professors' pipes and *kretek* cigarettes? As for inspirational teaching, it would be hard to beat Tony Day and Jennifer Lindsay's idea to blend Javanese wayang performance with Norman Hetherington's Mr Squiggle-style puppet characters in a unit of study about the arts in Indonesia. I still keep the memorabilia surrounding W. S. Rendra's visit to our hallowed halls at that time. These strands of the web were glistening and mystical (Lindy Norris, this volume, calls them 'heady days') and were nothing like I had ever experienced before.

Perplexed by the question of how to continue an involvement with Indonesian after graduation, I, like many others at the time, progressed to a one-year Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education at Sydney Teachers College, and trained as an Indonesian teacher. In 1981 there were only a small number of us in Miriam Albert's Indonesian Curriculum class: a small class compared to the more than fifty in French and German, but a much larger group than my current pre-service Indonesian teacher group in the same program nearly thirty years later, where often there is only one pre-service Indonesian teacher in the whole group of fifty. I qualified as an Indonesian teacher, not knowing how this career path would enrich my life as I moved out through higher and wider strands of the web.

My first teaching position was Indonesian teacher at Tennant Creek High School in the Northern Territory in 1982. The Northern Territory Teaching Service and the Department of Education had established Indonesian at a number of schools in the Northern Territory at that time, especially at primary schools. The reality was that Northern Territorians were travelling more to Bali and Jakarta than to Sydney, Canberra or Melbourne and were keen for their children to learn Indonesian. The Indonesian teachers in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin rarely gathered together to meet and share due to the isolation of each town. However, from 1982 to the end of 1984, we met 'virtually' via a cutting edge technology called 'teleconferencing'. The NT Languages Curriculum Officer, Vince Phelan, funded and supported

us all in our isolation. I had now, it seems, found a place to locate myself in another area of the spider's web.

While in Tennant Creek, I received a letter of invitation from Abe Kelabora, in Melbourne, inviting me to be a founding member of the *Indonesian Cultural and Educational Institute* (ICEI). The ICEI was established in order to promote the teaching and learning of Indonesian. It was intended, among other things, to support teachers and assist with access to teaching resources. Sadly, as I lived in the Northern Territory, there was no possibility of me attending meetings in Melbourne, but at least this part of the web was spinning out to collect me in its grasp, out in the Northern Territory's 'never-never'. At an ICEI Conference in Melbourne in the mid-1980s however, I met Indonesian teachers from other states and territories, including Lindy Norris, Umi Quor, Phil Mahnken and Kathy Kiting, and we learned much from each other as we faced common problems.

From teaching at secondary level in the Northern Territory, I took hold of the web and moved interstate. I accepted a position at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (now the University of Southern Queensland) in Toowoomba. I taught Indonesian alongside Junedi Ichsan. The parts of the web were all inter-connected: Pak Ichsan was not only the author of an Indonesian textbook I had used at school, *Lantjar Berbahasa Indonesia*, but also my Indonesian teacher at an adult learning class at Macquarie University in my final year of school in 1977. My Masters level research higher degree thesis during this time examined the notion of motivation among the adult learners of Indonesian who were enrolled in our Associate Diploma in Asian Studies program (Harbon, 1990; 1991).

Colleague Indonesianists at USQ Toowoomba included Peter Wicks (also an authority on the writings of Singapore writers such as Catherine Lim), Adrian Allen (also a geographer whose vision it was to establish the Japanese Garden which sits behind the USQ campus), Philip Kitley (an Indonesianist of long standing, who moved to Jakarta for a period as Cultural Attaché at the Australian Embassy before returning to academia), and Allan Bruce (a visual arts lecturer and a strong advocate for Southeast Asian visual arts education).

It was the strong support that Ichsan and I received from our Asian Studies colleagues that assisted us in creating *Pelangi* magazine (see Figure 1), an Indonesian teaching and learning resource that supported Indonesian teaching and learning in Australian education institutions over a 15-year period. The web was now wider and stronger. *Pelangi* was published for a period of 15 years between 1985 and 1999. Darling Downs Institute Press published *Pelangi* between 1985 and 1989 and the University of Southern Queensland Press continued between 1990 and 1999. *Pelangi*'s predecessor was *Warna*

*Sari*, created by Pak Dede Sujatna in Western Australia years earlier. *Pelangi* took over where *Warna Sari* had left off.

The magazine was published as *Pelangi Rainbow* for 14 issues between 1985 and 1988. The name changed to *Pelangi: Australia's Cultural Magazine on Indonesia and Southeast Asia* from 1989 to 1992 for 16 issues. Then from 1993 to 1999 for the final 28 issues, the name changed again to *Pelangi: An Educational Magazine About Indonesia*. In total there were 58 issues published. Subscribers to *Pelangi* were mainly secondary school teachers of Indonesian across Australia's states and territories. Junedi Ichsan was the General Editor between 1985 and 1986, shifting to the role of Editorial Advisor in 1987. I began as Executive Editor from 1985, then became General Editor from 1987 to 1989, and Editor from 1989 to 1999.

The first Editorial Advisory Board included Peter Wicks, Adrian Allen, Philip Kitley and Allan Bruce. Ross Steele joined the Board between 1986 and 1988. Wenny Dahlan joined the Board after 1990; Richard Gehrman and David Williams joined after 1995. Between 1998 and 1999, the Editorial Advisory Board comprised Philip Kitley, David Williams, Julia Read, Linda Hibbs, Gerard Ross and Yacinta Kurniasih. We were joined by Henny Supolo Sitepu as Consultant Editor in Jakarta from 1994. Desmawati Radjab from Universitas Negeri Padang was our native-speaker proof-reader from 1998 to 1999.

*Pelangi*, with its underlying metaphorical image of a bridge between the cultures and the source of the 'pot of gold', published the writing of many authors over the 15-year period. It included travelogues, short stories, interviews, descriptive narratives, case studies, research, in-country program reviews, book reviews, recipes and jokes among other things. I interviewed the famous I Wayan Gandra (Balinese gamelan), Peter Mares (radio's *Asia Pacific* program), the author Umar Kayam, and a particular highlight for me was the opportunity to interview W.S Rendra on one of his visits to Canberra. The Australian Foreign Minister at the time, Gareth Evans, wrote the foreword for our 50<sup>th</sup> issue. Among the notable contributors were Harry Aveling, Sujit Mudjirno, Allan Bruce, George Quinn, Bryce Alcock, Toni Pollard, Julia Read, Les Brooking, June Ross and Dede Sujatna. *Pelangi* can even pride itself on publishing the earlier writing of Dewi Anggraeni and Ikrar Nusa Bakti.

As an added focus for primary school learners of Indonesian, reflecting my own move into teaching Indonesian at primary level, was the addition of *Pelcil (Pelangi Kecil)*, a pull-out section of each edition of the magazine where teachers in early childhood education could construct their own small early reader. The storylines and simple language and culture notions worked well in primary school language programs.

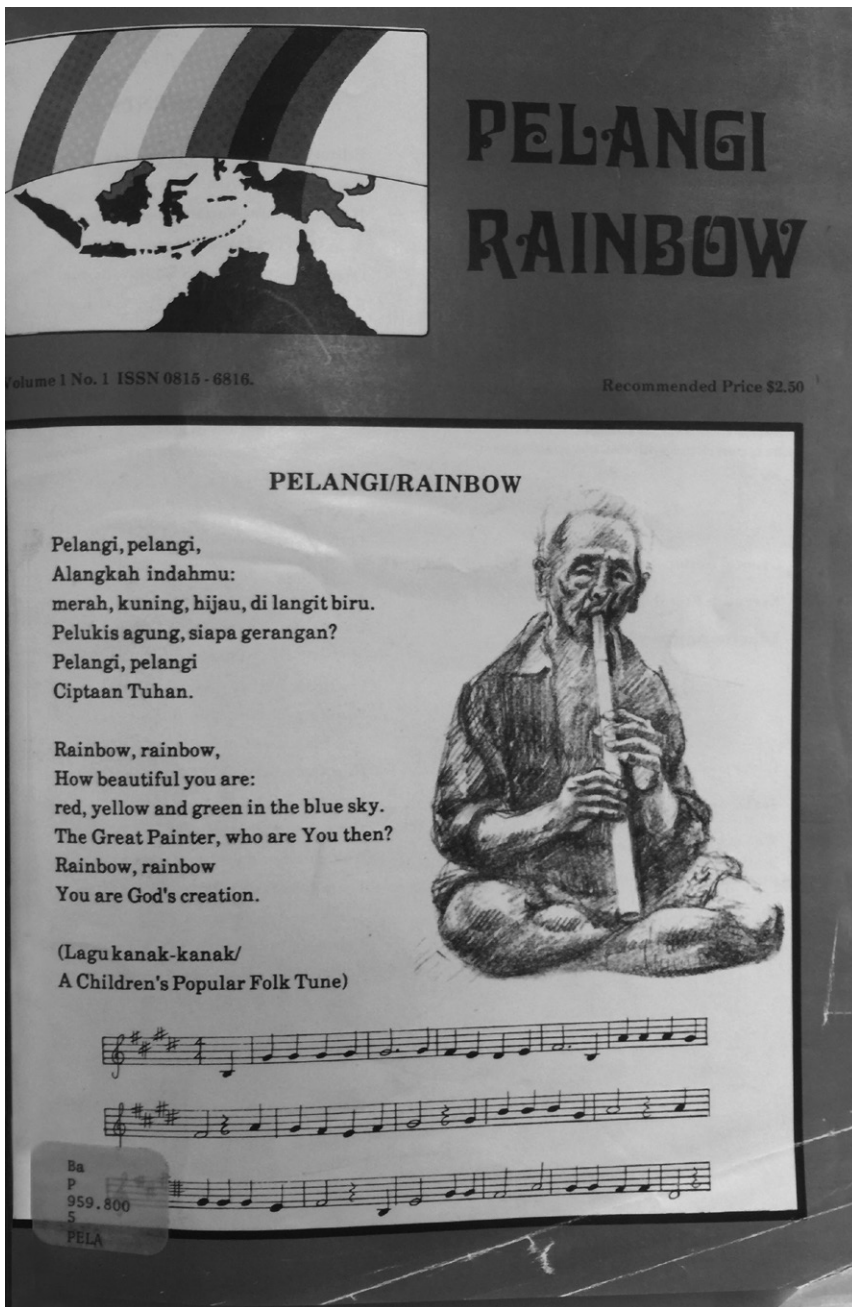


Figure 1: Cover from the first issue of *Pelangi* magazine Volume 1, number 1 1986.

Wenny Dahlan, daughter of the Canberra-based Indonesian writer, Achdiat Karta Mihardja, whose novels were in the curriculum I had studied at The University of Sydney as an undergraduate at the end of the 1970s, was soon recruited to replace both Ichsan and I after our respective moves away from USQ: Ichsan to Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University), and me to Parkes in the Central West of New South Wales. The web where I was now located took on other foci and meaning.

This next interstate move saw me progress into primary school Indonesian teaching. I became Indonesian teacher at Parkes Public School for a six-year period between 1990 and 1995. The children who began learning Indonesian in Year 1 with me in 1990 graduated from primary school at the end of 1995, having experienced an Indonesian language learning program of close to 200 hours, which by no means gave them any level of real spoken or written proficiency, rather an awareness that different people from different parts of the world speak in a different code and one of them is Indonesian.

My time at Parkes Public School allowed me to take over the weaving of different parts of the web. Because of *Pelangi* magazine, Parkes became known as a centre for the learning and teaching of Indonesian language and culture. We received visits from the Sydney Consul General of the Republic of Indonesia, we visited the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra. We linked with Yolanda Albina's program at Daramalan College in Canberra and her Computer Assisted Language Learning which was clearly motivating learners there.

Parkes was a hub for a series of visits by Indonesian exchange students. Families in the town hosted Rotary and Lions exchange students from Indonesia, and my own family hosted a 17 year old AFS Exchange student from Kudus Central Java for a year in 1992. As well as studying Year 11 and assisting with various *Pelangi* tasks, Adim Dwi Putranti became an engaging assistant teacher for the Indonesian program at Parkes Public School. She called herself the '*kamus berjalan*'. Interestingly the web has extended as far as Kudus, Central Java now, where Adim has opened *Pelita Nusantara* bilingual playgroup, with much of her curriculum built upon what she learned about early childhood education in Australia.

The web was expanding even in the Central West of New South Wales. Indonesian language programs sprang up at Bogan Gate under the direction of Indonesian teacher Lynn Britt, at Red Bend College Forbes with Indonesian teacher Dawn Phipps, and with Gae Golsby in Young. The web we had woven in Bogan Gate and Parkes stretched out to enlist the assistance of Russell Darnley and Tina Pentes of Asia Field Study Centres, and we took a student and parent study tour to Bali in 1994 from Parkes and Bogan Gate.

The web's outreach connected with Indonesian-focused activity at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. My work with Julia Robertson, Bob Hill and Noel Thomas involved Indonesian teacher re-training. How curious now that the web had spun me closer to eventually meeting David T. Hill OAM, Bob Hill's brother from Murdoch University in Perth.

In the mid-1990s I moved to take up the position of Lecturer in Primary Languages in the Faculty of Education at The University of Tasmania. I reflect that the web continued to be strongly woven during that time. Indonesian teacher education in the Faculty of Education at The University of Tasmania between 1996 and 2002 remained chiefly in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood and Primary) degree program on the Launceston campus. Within the structure of the four year degree, there was the opportunity for pre-service primary teachers to elect either a beginner or continuers Indonesian language course. This is where I came across Faculty of Arts lecturers Phil Mahnken (initially in Launceston, before his move to the Sunshine Coast), Ismet Fanany (also in Launceston, before his move to Deakin University), Pam Allen (from the Hobart campus), and later Barbara Hatley (Launceston campus). Pam's inspired teaching and curriculum offerings meant that as many as 15 pre-service teachers in each year cohort came through with an Indonesian language expertise, and these graduates were able to contribute to staffing the Primary Languages policy implemented in Tasmanian schools at the time. These young teachers were to receive outstanding support from stalwarts such as Phil Mahnken, Pam Allen, Umi Quor, Kaye Wilson, and later Julie Browett and Greg Ashman. The accomplished Indonesian teachers in Tasmania at the time included Jo McGee, Umi Quor, Vicki Brumby, Ingrid Coleman, Vicki Fischmann, Vicki Hales, Jan Paine – to name just a few.

Ismet Fanany's relationship with the State University of Padang in West Sumatra Indonesia, meant that he had a well-established in-country Indonesian language intensive course in Padang. I was able to build on this for language teacher education, offering a similar program with an in-school teaching component after winning an Australia-Indonesia Institute Grant which led to me coordinating the Australia Indonesia Rural Areas Exchange Scheme (AIRAES) program in 1998 and 1999. The AIRAES participants that year still keep in touch with me and with each other: many among the Australian group, the wonderful Declan, Gary, Rod, Steve, Jaclyn, Lamanda, Angela, Hayley, Suzanna and Belinda, are still engaging with Indonesia. Every now and then I receive emails from many of the Indonesia group too, including Afrianto Daud who has undertaken postgraduate study in Australia since that time. My research work with Professor Atmazaki at Universitas Negeri Padang still continues.

I jointly offered, with University of Tasmania academics, Michele McGill and Mary Fearnley-Sander respectively, two further ‘short term international experiences’ (STIE) in Tasmania before I moved to The University of Sydney in 2002. In-country professional development programs are enrichment experiences for pre-service teachers, and they are now included (at least for Asian languages) in the Commonwealth government’s Endeavour Language Teacher Fellowships programs.

Well entrenched in the ‘web’, I continued in my role with the preparation of more Indonesian language teachers through the first decade of this century. As well, I have accompanied my pre-service Indonesian teachers to the early childhood classroom of Veronica Carnell, daughter of Steven and Esther Dharmanto, whom I had met during our undergraduate years at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana in Salatiga, Central Java, the venue of Sydney University’s In-Country Indonesian Language Program, where Sydney students fast-tracked their degree by studying in-country, essentially a predecessor to ACICIS.

A report, *The Current State of Indonesian Language Education in Australian Schools* (Kohler & Mahnken, 2010), tells the grim story of a declining amount of Indonesian language education programs across Australia (see also chapters by Firdaus and Hill, this volume), and the picture is not much better for Indonesian language teacher preparation programs at this current time. Harbon, Fielding, Moloney, Kohler, Gearon, Dashwood and Scrimgeour (2012) mention this as they lamented the challenges for preparing language teachers in Australia at present. Yet although I have seen the decrease in numbers of pre-service secondary Indonesian teacher enrolments in the past ten years, I still believe that the beginning Indonesian teachers are clearly committed to becoming accomplished teachers.

The Endeavour Language Teacher Fellowships have provided support to Indonesian teachers over the past 10 years. However, even more support is needed to keep the cycle of teaching and learning going. Teacher re-training is one way that some state systems have coped with teacher supply issues, but when that combines with teacher retirement or teacher career direction changes, re-training cannot provide a total solution. Sadly we have to concede that there is a political side to Indonesian language teaching and learning here (see Firdaus, this volume, for a longer discussion about policy and politics impacting studies of Indonesian in Australia).

Indonesian language teacher educators around Australia – Michelle Kohler, Anne Marie Morgan, Ilian Yang, Greg Ashman and Lindy Norris notable names among them, continue to provide quality pre-service learning experiences for

pre-service primary and secondary Indonesian language teachers. The web, it seems, has stretched far and wide and the rainbow has connected people, places and high quality, authentic learning materials such as *Pelangi* magazine.

In these paragraphs I have only just captured one small part of how extensive and broad sweeping the webs and rainbows actually are. In the days before the world wide web phenomenon, *Pelangi* magazine filled a gap for much-needed, authentic teaching and learning resources. Even in the far-from-ideal current context, I believe that accomplished Indonesian teachers and their cutting-edge and authentic materials are still ‘making a difference’ with their inspired teaching. With Bali, Boats, Bombs and Beef continually paraded on our television and social media screens, I can only emphasise once more of the importance of the ‘culture learning’ I mentioned at the start of my reflection.

Indonesian studies has been in the curriculum for more than 50 years now. The challenge, however, is to watch how and where the web is spun, and how far and wide the rainbow settles, in the next 50 years and beyond. Keeping our sights on where we are connected on the web, or where the rainbow begins and ends, is a responsibility for all of us.

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