



# **The New IPG**

## **– Student Centred Learning**

**Peter Wickham**  
**(English Language Training Fellow, Institut**  
**Pendidikan Guru Kampus Dato' Razali Ismail,**  
**Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia)**  
**MEd (TESOL) BEd Dip Teach Cert 1V TESOL**



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## Abstract

Change is in the air for Malaysian education, the same changes that has continued to sweep through Australian education for the last two decades. Organic movement from curriculum-centred approaches to client service is seen to be emerging in all forms of education from pre-school to University.

Student Centred Learning stands at the heart of this change, both as a driver of change and as a product of change. Both of these processes are here examined in their historical contexts.

Student Centred Learning has its roots in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century with the rise to prominence of new educational theories. New understandings of the internal processes of the learner's mind have revolutionized our pedagogy to maximise learning. Curricula around the world have been re-written, and teacher training courses revised to accommodate these understandings. Enterprises such as First Steps originating in Australia and spreading across the globe have become the backbone of modern curricula.

The second thrust that has changed education is that of economic rationalism. Client-focussed educational service has become the norm, designed to appease all stakeholders in education, from the student to the employer, from the educational institution to the parents.

This interplay of agents of change in education is examined with implications for the future of Malaysian education. Questions are raised, possibilities postulated and answers are invited.

## Introduction to the Author

I was first employed in education in the mid to late 1970s in Australia, my native country. My initial posting in 1974 was to an all-Aboriginal class in a largely Aboriginal school in far north Western Australia. There I was quickly introduced to the idea that not all students have the same educational requirements as mainstream students. Many of these children had little or no English language proficiency. Many lived in squalid conditions without basic amenities such as electricity, running water and sanitation. Their interests and social activity centred on their traditional beliefs in land, hunting and community status. Many of the lessons I taught were based on their culture and their community expectations. The entire school curriculum was in fact largely influenced by Aboriginal culture and customs. My program of teaching was designed to accommodate not only Aboriginal ideals and expectations, but individual differences in a class in which ages ranged from 8 to 13 years.

In 1981 after three years of linguistic, culture and translation training I embarked on a project of translation and literacy in the Torres Strait. The people of the Eastern Torres Strait were keen to preserve their language and culture, and extend literacy in both English and the own language. My wife and I produced academic papers on Meriam culture, phonetics and grammar. The program ran until 1989, at which time I returned to teaching primary schools in Western Australia.

Since 2004 I have taught and lead ESL programs for adults in China, Turkey, the UK, Saudi Arabia and Australia in a combination of Universities and private language schools. Currently I am employed by Brighton Education and Nord Anglia in a forward-looking mentoring program for teacher trainer lecturers in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia.

These varied experiences in Education in eight different contexts over 40 years place me in a position of advantage to reflect on change in education and its challenges for teachers.

## A New IPG – The Winds of Change

There is much talk of the New IPG (Institute Pendidikan Guru – Teacher Trainer College) and the changes that are being considered for the format and structure of IPGs in Malaysia. It is not my intention to discuss or speculate about Ministry of Education policy here. What is exciting is that teacher training and education in Malaysia is undergoing change during a period of social and world-positional self-reflection as a nation.

School curricula are in the process of being re-written as the educational needs of modern students are taken into account. IPG curricula are being re-considered to provide up-to-date training for new teachers. BMI (English Improvement) and BMM (Malay Improvement) workshops are being conducted to facilitate in-service training of Malaysian teachers, and the advancement for both English and Bahasa Malayu each for their own purposes. It would seem from all indications that change is in the air; the days of set-and-forget teacher training appear to have vanished, as it has in educationally leading countries such as Australia.

One of the proposed planks in the platform of educational change in Malaysia is student-centred learning. Sparrow, Sparrow and Swan (1990) conclude that this approach is not entirely achievable in its purest form; it is nonetheless a desirable goal in any context, and very much in the sights of Malaysian educators.

## The winds of Change in Australia 1990 and Beyond

At this point I direct attention to my own situation in 1990 when returning to teaching service in Western Australia after an absence of 12 years spent in translation and literacy in the Torres Strait. Murray Island in the Torres Strait offered no newspapers or TV, little radio coverage, and neither internet nor mobile phones had yet made an appearance. My exposure to educational change information was minimal during this period. All of my scholarly effort was directed toward linguistics and translation techniques. I was, in effect, a human time capsule buried for 12 years and now dug up to compare education in 1977 with education in 1990. I present my situation as a case study in relation to this hiatus in teaching experience, and reactions to educational change.

On the surface the appearance of teaching appeared the same in 1990 as it did in 1977; teachers still taught students in packed classrooms, there was still a school principal and deputy principals who were in over-all charge of the school, there were still parents who sent or brought their children to school each day and picked them up, and teachers were just as overworked and underpaid as before. A few minor changes had taken root in my absence in the form of changes to curriculum content, and the introduction of technological innovations such as photocopiers and the earliest forms of computers.

Far more fundamental changes, however, were taking place silently and unseen to the casual observer.

This is the point at which I draw a parallel between Australian education 20 years ago and Malaysian education of today. I taught in Australian schools from 1990 to 2004, after which I entered into EFL/ESL teaching in China, Turkey, the UK, Saudi Arabia and Australia. Malaysian teachers will recognize many of these as emerging or recently emerged issues within Malaysian education. This is not to say that Malaysian education exactly mirrors Australian education of 1990. My purpose here is to raise possible points of similarity and so allow insights into the future of Malaysian education, having seen these issues emerge and develop in a different country.

Malaysia as a relatively recently emerged nation has the advantage of looking back on the history of education systems in countries such as Australia and so be well placed to leap right over some of the problems and to mainline directly on to the solution. Bear in mind too that worldwide technology is obviously more advanced in 2011 than it was in 1990. This also

allows Malaysia to progress more quickly in its quest for excellence in student-centred education.

I would be very interested to read anyone's response to the issues and raised herein, especially with information regarding the status of Malaysian education relating to the many points of interest raised below.



## The “New” Australian Education after 1990

### Accountability

The first change noticed was the **increased accountability** required of teachers and administrators between 1977 and 1990. New regulations required regular review and reporting of all employees and their achievements. Accountability meetings between teachers and their upline managers were now scheduled regularly to encourage self-reflection and continuous improvement. There were now compulsory processes for reporting grievances against any employee, whether the complainant be another employee, student, parent or any citizen. Private investigators were employed to transparently probe any and all complaints. Transparency in planning and teaching was emerging in 1990 and has continued to occupy a pivotal place in Australian education. Occupational Health and Safety (discussed below) legislation had laid down advanced new requirements in Duty of Care for everyone in the workplace.

### Smoking

A **total ban on smoking** was now in place. Smoke-hazed rooms were now a thing of the past. Smoking was disallowed anywhere on Education Department premises including buildings, structures, grounds and vehicles. Smoking on the premises was now grounds for dismissal for employees. This ban extended to all employees, students, parents and visitors to the workplace. Societal attitudes to smoking had changed radically during these 12 years of absence, and new workplace Health and Safety regulations reflected this change. Even the recognition of schools as workplaces had been a foreign concept in 1977.

### Registration and Qualification

**Registration for all teachers** was being introduced. This is now handled by state Colleges of Teaching, independent bodies solely concerned with teacher registration including police checks on anyone likely to come into contact with minors, accreditation of qualifications and conferring registration. They also have the power to withdraw registration should a teacher become ineligible under the terms and conditions of registration. All government teachers in Australian schools must be registered to be employed as a teacher. During the 1990s qualifications for Australian school teachers extended from a 3-year Diploma of Teaching to a four-year **Bachelor of Education**. Existing teachers were not required to extend their training, but new teachers and returning teachers were forced to comply.

## Curriculum Framework

Planning now compulsorily involved outcome statements. Western Australia pioneered the now famous **Curriculum Framework** in a work called First Steps. This comprises a set of continua divided into the eight learning areas of Maths, Science, Technology and Enterprise, Society and Environment, Health and Physical Education, The Arts, Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and English. LOTE was a completely new addition since 1977. WA later sold non-exclusive rights to this to US and UK education authorities; it is now almost universally accepted as the most effective educational tool for framing any educational curriculum. It operates firstly on the premise that all statements of planning are couched in terms of student achievement, and secondly that every planning statement is premised on a continuum of achievement statements such that prerequisite level of proficiency is acquired before the present plan is enacted, and that there follows a subsequent level of proficiency which uses the present projected level of proficiency as a prerequisite. Curriculum content had become less focussed on specific knowledge and more focussed on processes and understandings. The teacher now had greater freedom to include subject matter of their own choice so long as it conformed to the appropriate Outcome Statements.

## Reporting and Assessment

**Reporting** now compulsorily utilized the same outcome statements that were used in planning. Alpha-numeric grades of 1977 had all but disappeared in favour of tags on students' course work with positive description of what the student can do in a personal portfolio that followed them from school to school and in some cases from state to state. The emphasis was now placed on what a student could do rather than on what they could not do. This was a huge and far-reaching change; it had turned the spotlight from what the teacher taught to what the student learned.

## Gender Ratios

There was now a **greater proportion of female teacher to male**. In 1977 men accounted for around 50% of teachers; by 1990 this figure had dropped to around 35%, and today around 30%. In primary teaching males represent only 20% of all teachers. There was a general perception in society, in the press and within the Education Departments that there existed a lack of male role models for students. Many more students had no male living at home – a direct result of there being many more single mothers in Australian society. Attempts to lure

more males back into teaching failed, including scholarships for male applicants to teacher training colleges.

### Customer Focus

**Customer focus** in Australian education had intensified since 1977. Government schools were now keenly competing with private schools for government funding. Both forms of schools had turned to parents and students to win them into their schools with personal attention as “clients” as they were now called. Private enterprise terms such as “client” “customer” “outsourcing” “stakeholder” and “profitability” had emerged as regular language used in educational projects, proposals and reports. Regular surveys were now conducted among students and parents to determine satisfaction levels. Educational output was now being assessed as the “product”.

### Educational Funding

**Economic rationalism** was now a fact in education. Schools now had greater self-regulatory powers with regard to funding. Dwindling real-terms government funds were becoming less adequate to compete with other schools in customer service. Private funding in government schools was beginning to emerge as a legally sanctioned strategy to resource public education. Private companies had begun resourcing special events in return for advertising rights. Popular fast food outlets offered free food at school sporting and social events in an attempt to further their economic interests through advertising rights in the school news letter. Moral issues still exist over this. Questions are being asked about the morality of serving children unhealthy food in return for monetary return. Looking at private funding for education in the wider context using a wider focus reveals a moral dilemma; to what extent should these companies be able to dictate policy and curriculum content in return for economic support? In other words, should private enterprise be able to buy a stake in public education?

### School Autonomy

Increased local regulation and administration by “school-based decision making groups” existed by 1990 and continues to increase today. In 2009 the Western Australian Department of Education announced its first batch of “**Independent Government Schools**” (Lamphakis 2009) that are essentially locally governed but owned by the state government. Despite

opposition from unions, this form of school has proved more able to move with the times and provide educators with independent freedom to govern and administer their education program in a rapidly changing world.

### Student Individual Differences

Far more than in 1977, 1990 saw catering for **individual differences** among students in government schools. As a part of the trend toward customer focus and Curriculum framework, teachers were required to set up individual learning plans (ILP) for students based on their unique blend of intelligences (Gardner 1983). Teaching and learning was no longer based on a set curriculum on the basis of one size fits all. Students were now catered for with regard to their learning disabilities, special abilities, medical conditions, socio-economic background, ethnicity, social integration, language used in the home, and a full analysis of their multiple intelligences.

### National Testing

**National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy** (NAPLAN) testing had become mandatory despite massive union campaigns against it. This continues today; all schools nationwide sample test their students for literacy and numeracy. The results determine which schools are underperforming, which are performing adequately and which excel in their educational performance. This forms a part of the “product” referred to in the perception of customer focus and economic rationalism discussed above. Controversy still surrounds this form of testing and reporting. Teacher unions have taken a stance against this testing, claiming that it leads to the establishment of a hierarchy of students and schools.

### Occupational health and Safety

**Occupational Health and Safety** had come into focus much more than it had in 1977. Gone were the days of students being left unattended in or out of class. Gone was the concept that broken machinery was OK as long as it worked despite dangers involved in its operation. Each school now had an OcH&S representative and an OC H&S committee whose assignment was to keep the entire workplace healthy and safe. OcH&S issues that were never even considered in 1977 were hot issues in 1990. Environmental dangers such as fumes and vapours from photocopiers, tripping hazards and potential dangers of certain sports and games now restricted choices for teachers to present to students as part of the learning

program. All classrooms in Australia are now air-conditioned where that is made possible by electricity supply.

### Educational Theory

The 1980's – which I missed by living and working in the Torres Strait – was a fascinating times educationally. Much **foundational educational theory** that we take for granted today – Krashen(1981) with his five hypotheses of language acquisition, Gardner (1983) with his theories about multiple intelligences and de Bono (1985) with his Six Thinking hats had barely begun to surface in educational institutions by 1990, but influenced educational practice increasingly. The study of human thought and learning styles has been fundamental to the development of student-centred education. This was unknown in 1977, still in the making in 1990, but instilled into teaching practice in 2004 when I left school teaching to launch my career as an ESL professional overseas.

### Educational Outsourcing

**Outsourcing** of secondary and higher education had begun to appear in Australia in 1990 but was still in its infancy. Since the mid 2000s this has blossomed into a full sub-industry. In particular, universities now regularly outsource their English Foundation courses to private companies. Educational incursions by private educational companies into all levels of schools since 1990 have become commonplace. In many cases these incursions have replaced the traditional excursion whereby students would travel out of the school grounds to experience realia in society. The cheaper, safer and less time consuming incursion has become the norm. As I have wandered the world since 2004 this phenomenon of outsourcing in education has been particularly noticeable. English as a Second language (ESL) has become a fully recognised industry, with compatible qualifications appearing on university course lists.

### Tenure for teachers

**Loss of tenure** by teachers occurred sometime in the 1980s and continues to this day. The incidence of fixed-term contracts of between 6 months and 3 years has been extended from temporary teachers who replace teachers on leave to all new teachers. Merit Selection Schools had appeared by 1990 and continue to gain popularity today. School teaching in Australia is no longer the safe and comfortable job that it was in the 1970s. Tenure is now

sought and gained for relatively short periods of around 3 years at all levels of teaching. As Baby Boomers have continued to exit the industry through retirement, the number of teachers who have the luxury of continuing in perpetuity has dwindled to an insignificant few.

Teachers in Australia are now required to compete on the open market to retain their jobs in both government and private schools.

### Cost Centres

**Cost Centres** managed by teaching faculty were introduced soon after 1990. Teachers now shouldered the extra responsibility of administering funds to run the eight learning areas, either individually or in committees. This was no longer the sole responsibility of formally appointed administrators such as principals and deputy principals. A certain level of autonomy accompanied the responsibility, allowing teachers to have more authority to distribute funds within their teaching area and make executive decisions about selection of educational resources. These cost centres included such previously such non-included areas as school grounds, school libraries and school canteens. In 2011 the traditionally volunteer position of Canteen Manager is a paid position. The imposition of stringent health and Safety regulations has rendered volunteer managers virtually impractical.

### New technology

**New technology** appeared as if by magic in 1990 as I made my reappearance into mainstream education. Computers, photocopiers, overhead projectors, video, mobile phones, air conditioning in classrooms and whiteboards were being utilised in Australian schools by 1990. These fostered in new possibilities for pedagogical method that were impossible dreams for teachers in 1977. Since then the irresistible march of technology has continued with CDs, DVDs, ever more powerful, lightweight and cheaper computers included computer Tablets and Smart Phones, USB storage devices, Smart Boards, WiFi installation, live streaming, educational software and the whole range of software applications that now encompass social networking websites that can be incorporated into the learning experience by the “tech-savvy” teacher. It appears that the modern teacher ignores this technology at their own peril.

### Class Sizes

Reduction of **maximum class sizes** has continued in Australian schools. In 1977 no more than 37 students could be legally taught in any one class; this had recently replaced a figure of around 50. In 1990 that figure had dropped to 32. By 2004 it had continued its downward way to 30. In 2005 that figure became 28, with the maximum for early childhood and also high school set at 24. Newly built schoolrooms are much smaller than their counterparts from 1977.

### Duties Other Than Teaching

**Duties Other Than Teaching** (DOTT) time was a new concept in teaching in 1990. Two to three hours a week were allocated to specialist Arts, health and Physical Education and Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teachers to allow classroom teachers time to prepare, report and conference.

### Professional development

**Professional Development** (PD) for all teaching staff was scheduled regularly in 1990. By 2004 this had become compulsory, with minimum limits set for PD in each year. Funds for PD became available through specific grants from the Departments of Education. School closure days were scheduled so that whole staff PD could be accomplished more easily. None of this existed in Australia in 1977.

## Reaction to Educational Change in 1990

With the great value of self-reflection, it is apparent to me that my sudden reappearance onto the education scene was somewhat bewildering after so much change to the industry. Even among my peers who had taught continuously from 1977 to 1990 there seemed to be a united cry that “This is not the job that I signed on for”. It seemed that responsibilities and accountabilities had been thrust upon teachers from all directions. Not only had I been absent during a period of change, but that change was accelerating. Not a lot had changed between my parents’ education in the 1930s and 40s to 1977. The next 12 years saw enormous change in educational theory, pedagogy, practice and administration. My reaction was initially that of denial and dogged determination to continue with what I knew and was familiar with. That reaction was readily observable throughout the industry. Even those newly qualified were finding that their training course did not prepare them for the realities of the educational world into which they were introduced after graduation.

PD has gradually changed this attitude. Increasingly PD targeted the topics of Change in Education, and Self Reflection. The reflective process became a part of the educational technique encouraged during PD. It became accepted that educators should be in a continuous state of learning. Life Long Learning is now the catchcry. Teacher training courses now underscore the value of accepting the fact that society is cycling through change at a faster rate than ever before. Emphasis has settled onto methods of learning using current technology resources rather than on teaching. Students are now taught ‘how to learn’ much more than learning facts that can be readily searched on the internet. Teachers are encouraged to think of themselves as ‘learning navigators’ than as fonts of knowledge – a stereotype that societies around the world long ago placed on educators.

The mantle of Learning Facilitator and Lifelong Learner rests more easily on teachers than traditional pressures for the teacher to know everything. Once that title is accepted, the pressure is off the teacher and on the student to perform. Student-centred education places more responsibility on the teacher by way of reflecting on - and responding to – individual needs of students, and providing resources for the student to learn. It does however release the teacher from the expectation that they will know all there is to know about a given subject. Properly resourced and trained, the modern teacher is free to take full advantage of



modern information technology, training their students how to learn in a world that is in a constant state of flux.

## Reaction to Educational Change in Malaysia in 2011

Chairman Mao of China declared that in China was “like 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning” (Li 2006). He was referring to his country as an emerging nation after radical changes to its foreign policy and internal organisation. We are left to ponder where Malaysia is educationally in 2011.

Malaysia, and particularly Terengganu, is recognized as being populated by a tradition – orientated society. Things change slowly. This of course can be both a strength and a weakness. The strength is that valuable aspects of local culture are protected from loss. Individuals are spared the culture shock of displacement. The weakness is that areas of endeavour such as education can lag behind the rest of the world where rapid change is taking place in response to changing social, economic, environmental and political status.

We are hearing of plans for “The New IPG – student Centred University”, “Student Centred Learning” as well as re-writes for various curricula across Malaysia. If educational reform in Malaysia follows that which has occurred in the western world, there is going to be a period of re-adjustment for teachers as they ease into new roles and responsibilities. It is hoped that Malaysian teachers can be cushioned against rapid change by pre-service and in-service professional development that equips and conditions, borrowing from tough lessons learnt elsewhere about rapid change in education. Perhaps the key to handling rapid educational change is the ability to self-reflect and engage in life-long learning.

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