

# WINONA CHANG

## Profile of a Dedicated Pacific Educator

By Julian Heinz

When Dr. Winona Chang retired from the Hawai'i Department of Education, little did she know she would still be showing up for work nearly 20 years later. The energetic 77-year old, who was recently honored by the Board of Directors of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), continues to volunteer two days every week at PREL, devoting her time and considerable expertise to improving education in Hawai'i and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific as a whole.

With a long career in education, Chang has witnessed and participated in various reform efforts surrounding the rethinking of education. For example, she was involved in bilingual education in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific, training teachers in best practices for teaching English language learners (ELLs). Bilingual education is an area that continues to be rethought, as entities in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific adapt practices to meet their own educational and linguistic needs.

Chang also helped modify mathematics and science standards for use in the region. In the past, it was common for schools in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific to use educational approaches and materials that were created for students and schools in the continental U.S. However, most educators now feel that locally developed approaches and materials work best. Chang recalls a workshop in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia, in which a teacher in the Pacific region described teaching a lesson from a textbook made for U.S. schools. The lesson focused on rabbits and their taste for carrots. While rabbits are familiar to most U.S. children, they are not native to Micronesia and therefore do not make a good subject for a lesson for Micronesian students. If education is not grounded in elements that are relevant to students, Chang explains, the students will not see the value in learning and in going to school. Therefore, a critically important aspect of adapting mathematics and science standards was creating sample lesson plans that referred to features of the natural and cultural environment in the Pacific, like a lesson on evolution in which students learn

about the jellyfish in Palau's Jellyfish Lake, or one on patterns that examines the rhythms in Samoan *sasa* dance.

A graduate of St. Andrew's Priory in Honolulu and the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i (UH), Chang spent six years teaching in the elementary grades in Hawai'i public schools before beginning graduate studies at Boston University (BU). After returning to Hawai'i, Chang worked as an instructor and assistant professor at the UH College of Education, teaching methods classes and supervising student teachers. Later she returned to BU to pursue a doctorate in education. With her EdD complete, Chang came back to Hawai'i and worked as a personnel specialist in teacher certification, and

then as a curriculum specialist until her retirement. Although she was officially retired, the devoted educator quickly found herself drawn back to the field of education. When she heard about the bilingual education program being conducted in the region by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), she applied to work on the project. Her work with this program led her to PREL.

Chang has long been a generous supporter of education in the Pacific. Shortly after PREL was formed in 1990, she became the nonprofit organization's first volunteer. This year, when the organization announced the creation of a scholarship program for Pacific teachers and teacher candidates, she was the first to contribute to the fund. These firsts prompted PREL's Board of Directors to give special recognition to Chang at its most recent meeting.

Though Chang shuns public acknowledgment of her own dedication, she is quick to recognize that of others. For example, she

expresses admiration for Islanders who leave home to pursue a formal education but then return to teach in their home entities. She points out that it takes courage to leave home and dedication to return and teach for pay that is often lower than teachers receive elsewhere. It is Dr. Chang's own dedication and courage that have helped her make an invaluable contribution to PREL and the Pacific region.

*Julian Heinz is a contributing writer.*



Photo: Liane Sing

▷ Winona Chang