

PACIFIC EDUCATORS IN RESIDENCE

PEIRs Describe Their Projects for School Improvement

By Lisa Vasai Mapu, in collaboration with Dilmai J. Saiske and Peter James

As Pacific Educators In Residence (PEIRs) at PREL this year, our experiences have been filled with personal and professional development and an opportunity to work in a culturally diverse environment unlike any other!

Coming from such different cultural backgrounds has made our internships unique. Both Ms. Dilmai Saiske from Palau and Mr. Peter James of Chuuk are working with the Pacific Mathematics and Science Consortium. I am from American Samoa and am working with the Pacific Center in the area of school improvement.

At PREL, we have had the opportunity to share our traditions and values and in turn learn new and innovative strategies that will boost student achievement in our homes and throughout the Pacific region. We have had the opportunity to work with educators from various PREL programs, including community facilitators and educational specialists from Hawai'i and the continental U.S. Monthly meetings give us an opportunity to talk story and to interface on both a professional and personal level. In the Honolulu office, almost every entity in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific is represented, along with staff from Burma, Canada, and Australia.

In accomplishing our goals, we have gained an understanding of how different our learning approaches can be in the Pacific region. We have learned to adapt and modify instructional strategies. For instance, Dilmai has designed new activities that will be implemented in the mathematics curriculum in Palau. These include using manipulatives in hands-on activities for intermediate school students. She says, "When I return to Palau, I will train teachers to use these activities in the classroom."

Peter has developed a tool-kit for the primary grades in Chuuk. He states, "I have designed kits for teachers in the

region and have worked extensively with them to provide real-life examples of best practices for mathematics instruction. I believe I have valuable resources to share with teachers in Chuuk."

For myself, I have been able to gather research-based models and designs that are being implemented throughout the U.S. I now recognize how important the principal's role is as a strong instructional leader. The success of the school greatly depends on the principal's initiative and effectiveness. By implementing effective instructional strategies and innovative ideas, schools will boost student achievement.

Through my experiences here at PREL, I have been able to identify some of the barriers to school improvement that we continually face in the Pacific region. On my return to American Samoa, I hope to be able to help overcome these barriers and to strengthen our schools by collecting data, assessing outcomes, and identifying areas that need improvement. I have come to realize how vital parent and community involvement is in school success. If educators, parents, community members, and teachers take the time to look at what is being taught and what needs to be achieved, every school in the Pacific region will achieve its mission and goals.

As we complete our residencies here at PREL, we will explore instructional strategies to see what will work in our homes and in the rest of the Pacific region. We have been able to modify programs so that they will be useful to our school systems. We hope that the knowledge we gain through our residencies will help make our classrooms more effective, improve student achievement, and broaden cultural knowledge as we continue to work together.

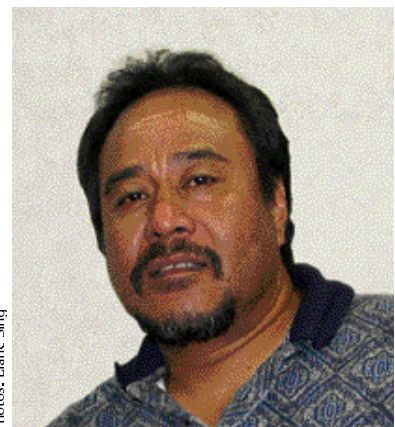
For more information about PREL's PEIR program, contact Program Coordinator Jamie Mitte at mittej@prel.org or at (808) 441-1395. ★



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Photos: Liane Sing