

# The Pacific Communities with High-performance In Literacy Development Annual Institute in the CNMI

By Susan Hanson and Evelyn Ooka

**P**acific Communities with High-performance In Literacy Development (Pacific CHILD) is a rigorous regional research study of a principles-based professional development program that Pacific Resources for Education and Learning's (PREL's) Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific (REL-P) will conduct in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and Hawai'i by the 2008–2009 school year. The purposes of Pacific CHILD are to improve 4th and 5th grade teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching reading comprehension for all students—especially English language learners (ELLs)—and to improve student achievement in reading.

In June 2007, Pacific CHILD began in Saipan, CNMI, with four schools, but this was only the beginning. (See the sidebar for a list of the CNMI schools, principals, and teachers involved.) After 2 years, another group of CNMI schools will receive the same professional development for 2 years. In addition, eight schools in American Samoa received the professional development program from July 23 to August 3, 2007. PREL will implement the study in Hawai'i during the 2008–2009 school year.

From June 18 to June 29, REL-P program specialists, Susan Hanson and Evelyn Ooka, conducted the first Pacific CHILD annual institute with 18 4th and 5th grade teachers from four different elementary schools in the CNMI. The purpose of the annual institute is to introduce teachers to the various research-based strategies for effective teaching and learning of



Photo by Susan Hanson

reading comprehension that they will be using during the study for the next 2 years. The components of the 2-year professional development program include annual institutes, structured learning teams, lesson demonstrations, observations, and debriefs. The content of the professional development program focuses on three research-based components—vocabulary, and the reading comprehension strategies of text structure and question generation—as well as the following formats of instruction: differentiated instruction, interactive learning, and cognitively-rich environment.

The first week of the institute began with an overview of the Pacific CHILD study. The Program Specialists then began the process of building teachers' knowledge, which included techniques for teaching vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and pedagogy. This included the research that supports effective teaching and learning

in reading comprehension, demonstrations, and opportunities for teachers to practice the techniques.

During the second week, the Program Specialists focused on classroom teaching with 60 4th and 5th grade students. The students attended each morning of the second week for 3 hours. In the afternoons, the instructors provided information and activities to extend the knowledge of the teachers and provided guidance, as teachers worked in peer groups called Structured Learning Teams (SLTs) to prepare lessons for the next day. Each SLT had approximately four teachers. The teachers learned from members of their SLTs, as well as from other teams.

Each day began with the two instructors providing demonstration lessons with 4th and 5th grade students. Following the demonstrations, the instructors and teachers debriefed the lessons. The debrief included such

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questions as, *What did you notice about the lesson? How did the teacher provide explicit instruction? What did the teacher want the students to understand? How did the teacher get 100% participation?* and *How did the teacher help the students link the concept to comprehension?* According to research about how teachers learn, opportunities for teachers to discuss instructional strategies and techniques together assist their ability to plan and implement their lessons more effectively.

The participants then worked in SLTs. Using the demonstration lesson as a guide, the SLTs planned and implemented a follow-up lesson with a small group of students. This proved to be a very successful sequence for the 4th and 5th grade students and the teachers. The students received in-depth knowledge regarding a key reading comprehension component, and the teachers were able to implement a lesson with the same focus as the one they just observed and debriefed.

As SLTs implemented their lessons, the instructors conducted observations of participants' teaching. Each observation was preceded by a pre-observation conference that focused on what the teacher wanted the students to learn, assessment of student learning, and the specific feedback a teacher wanted to receive. A post-observation conference followed in which the participants were given time to reflect on their lesson, what went well, the students' achievement of the objectives, and what the teachers might do differently and why.

For teacher observations, the instructors used the Pacific CHILD Observation Protocol. The protocol provides descriptors of the levels of implementation for each of the reading comprehension and instructional components. In addition to an implementation rating, the observer recorded descriptive notes on a summary sheet. After the observation, the teachers were given a copy of the protocol and the summary sheet to place in their professional portfolio.

The 2-week annual institute ended with both 4th and 5th grade students as well as the teachers, receiving a certificate for their participation. One

elementary student was overheard saying that he wished the reading institute wasn't over. Other students expressed their desire to return next year. One teacher made the following comment in the final evaluation of the institute, "I learned a lot from it and now I can assure myself that I can teach vocabulary, text structure, and affixes to my students and they will learn from it and enjoy it as well."

As part of the institute, we collected daily ratings on teacher learner outcomes and provided participants the opportunity to write comments on their day at the institute. On the final evaluation (day 10), teachers commented that the best parts of the second week were:

- "Being able to work with students, and with my group to plan and evaluate our lessons."
- "The involvement of the students and seeing the evidence of learning, and their (instructors') reflections or comments were a plus."
- "The SLTs working together and supporting each other at the same time seeing everyone's teaching style and their great ideas."

One teacher said, "I really learned awesome strategies. I hope that I can keep it (the strategies) forever for the benefit of my students and myself as well."

To ensure that the reading comprehension and instructional strategies are fully learned and implemented, the Pacific CHILD program will continue to provide 2 years of ongoing professional development to the teachers involved in the study through the following:

- Weekly SLT meetings with assistance from REL-P staff.
- Two visits per month to each classroom that will include observations with pre-/post-observation conferences and demonstration lessons by REL-P staff.
- Three mini-institutes in the school year (fall, winter, and spring).
- A second annual summer institute followed with another year of weekly SLT meetings, observations, demonstrations, and mini-institutes.

## Schools, principals, and teachers implementing Pacific CHILD in the CNMI from 2007–2009:

### Dandan Elementary School

Principal: Jonas Barcinas

- 4th grade teachers: Juan Cuellar, SiAna Echaluse, Claudia Santos
- 5th grade teachers: May Cruz, Rachel Reyes

### Kagman Elementary School

Principal: Ignacia T. Demapan

- 4th grade teachers: Yolanda Igisaiar, Corazon Taisacan, Angie Wheat, Nelly Sablan
- 5th grade teachers: Sam Joyner, Sally Limes

### Koblerville Elementary School

Acting Principal: Eric DLG

- Evangelista
- 4th grade teacher: Karen Alla
- 5th grade teacher: Lynn Mendiola

### William S. Reyes Elementary School

Acting Principal: Lynette Villagomez

- 4th grade teachers: Rowena DeLeon, Augusto Evangelista, Marji Pangelinan
- 5th grade teachers: Amanda Angel, Monica Pangelinan

*Pacific CHILD is aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that emphasizes the importance of improving teacher quality. Pacific CHILD improves teacher quality through ongoing, sustained professional development over 2 years, improving teaching, learning, and student achievement in reading comprehension, and continuously evaluating teachers through regular structured observations by highly trained educators. In addition, the NCLB requires that all students make adequate yearly progress. Pacific CHILD focuses on all students and particularly the English language learners who are often part of the underserved population of students in our schools.*

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