

## PD

## ...the Oceania Way

By Canisius T. Filibert

As a young boy in Satawal, an outer island of Yap, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Master Navigator Mau Pialug was deemed by his father to be worthy and capable of learning and passing on the knowledge of the seas to the next generation. The young Pialug was made to sit in tide-pools for hours on end until he learned to feel the movement of the water. He learned to translate what each of his senses garnered into mental data that informed his ability to navigate by heart. It is in this traditional sense that Master Navigator Pialug expected his students to learn from him one day.

However, when Pialug came to the University of Hawai'i's East-West Center excited to impart his knowledge of seafaring to his new students, he realized that his own experience in learning sea-navigation was starkly different from what his students in the West were accustomed to. After the first couple of weeks, a professor asked Pialug how the class was going. With dismay, Pialug replied that the students were not listening to him and, instead, were busily scribbling on their papers. He later learned that his students were jotting down lecture notes.

Pialug didn't consider sitting in a classroom to be all-encompassing education, but merely one-half of it. For him, the other half was the performance—the execution of what one has learned from listening and observing. Oceania traditional education relies heavily on performance. Just as there is the concept of “talk-story,” there is also the concept of “dance-story” in which the master evaluates one's performance.

Professional development (PD) designed for Oceania teachers already in the teaching field needs to take this practice of oral/performance tradition into account. Many of the workshops that Pacific island teachers receive are only 1–5 days long, at the most. And much of it takes place in a vacuum where real life application does not readily occur. If the traditional system of education requires listening, observing, and performing, then why shouldn't teacher PD in the Pacific emulate the same? Most would argue that time and money are the culprits, particularly in designing PD for the U.S.-affiliated states in Oceania.

Most island nations in the Freely Associated States receive monies from the U.S. government in the form of federal grants for specific purposes. These grants sometimes require training in areas of learning that no local consultant can provide. Thus,

an outside expert, or consultant, must be brought in to provide the PD. With only a limited percentage of the budget allotted for this, what is usually offered is a short-lived PD experience operating on the assumption that those receiving the PD will continue to practice and share what they have learned after the expert has gone. This constitutes the ‘talk-story’ portion of the training. However, we all know that the learner has only just begun to grasp the concepts taught. The time needed to process the new information will be outside the presence of the expert; hence, the “dance-story” piece of the training is left to the individual to explore on his/her own.

Master Navigator Pialug, in teaching his new students the art and science of ocean navigation, lived in Hawai'i for an extended period. In doing so, he was able to tell his stories and observe his students executing their “dance” of newfound knowledge on short voyages. It is in this manner that Oceanians learn best.

PD cannot be completed in a few days. If the expert or



consultant cannot be present beyond the initial transfer of new information, procedures must be put in place to gauge learning. With today's technological advances, communicating with the expert is only a computer screen away. Though there is nothing more effective than a face-to-face meeting, technology offers many of the Pacific islands another avenue where the practice of oral/performance tradition can still be a reality.

PD experts and consultants who come to the Pacific must be made cognizant of the talk/dance story traditions. Merely telling or demonstrating does not result in true learning for Pacific Islanders. For PD to be valuable, practice with the expert present—either physically or via technological media—must occur. PD providers must be made aware that Oceanians are immersed in the practice of oral and performance tradition from childhood; therefore, by their very nature, they rely mainly on practice and performance.

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