

PD IN THE CNMI

Tailored PD in Early Reading

By Evelyn Ooka and Jean Olopai

Teachers in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) are, at times, overwhelmed with educational jargon, such as “scientifically research-based,” and making sense of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB).

At the district level, many programs aim to offer support to teachers, such as the Public School System (PSS) program that provides annual professional development (PD) in content areas to large groups. In addition, every year K–8 teachers are offered a reading academy institute wherein educational theory is discussed and practice encouraged. Along with these recognized initiatives, teachers of Dandan Elementary School took initiative and asked to remain a part of

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning’s (PREL’s) Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) research project, Pacific Communities with High-performance In Literacy Development (Pacific CHILD), even though the school, under the NCLB, adapted a scientifically research-based reading program.

Although the district has teachers administer standards-based assessments in all content areas, the teachers of Dandan chose to continue using the early reading assessments developed by the REL. In general, teachers felt that these assessments helped contribute to a more complete picture of what each child knew in reading.

Determining the content for PD was

based on individual teacher needs and those of their students, as reflected in the assessment data. It was decided that a small group of teachers would learn together, then share their experience with colleagues, even after the REL project ended. The group worked with a number of PD strategies in their quest, however, study groups stood out as one of the most memorable and valuable for all. Group members researched, shared, practiced, and reflected on new ideas, then presented to the others what they’d learned. Their commitment became a part of the professional environment that promoted continuous tailored learning for teachers. Over time, teachers became highly skilled in matching appropriate instructional strategies to specific student needs. PD tailored to meet the needs of teachers and students was a successful experience at Dandan Elementary School.

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