

PD IN POHNPEI

What Works!

By Susan Andrews, Janet Panuelo, and Rita Mangarero

Opinions about what the phrase professional development (PD) meant to teachers at Awak Elementary School were as many and varied as the teachers themselves. To our chagrin, the question, “What is professional development?” and more importantly, the answers to the question, were not sought until the project was well underway. The issue was not so much defining the term as it was understanding the meaning of PD and its relevance to the teachers. Does PD have the same meaning for the partici-

share his or her experience and take a turn facilitating. This shift allowed all of us to recognize that effective PD need not come from external sources. Teachers were energized, excited, and able to connect this learning experience to their classroom practice. As one teacher said, “So this is professional development!” We held nine sessions and all the teachers reported feeling empowered after having been a part of such a strong, memorable teaching/learning experience.

It is our experience that a study group is a culturally relevant means of providing staff development in Pohnpei. Once expectations and guidelines are agreed upon and a topic is



Photos: Susan Andrews

▷ Study groups are a culturally relevant means of providing PD.



▷ Teachers took turns facilitating PD study groups.

pants as the providers?

Over the past few years, we have used a variety of PD strategies while working with teachers to strengthen their knowledge in early literacy content. And though progress was made, ownership did not transfer until we set our assumptions aside, sat together with teachers, and posed the question, “What is professional development?” The conversation that emerged was rich, insightful, and meaningful to all. Everyone walked away with a sense of empowerment knowing the choice for learning and personal-professional development is within each of us; PD provides the fertile ground in which new learning may be cultivated.

Following this event, the teachers and local PD providers set up a study group wherein all participants were committed to learn more about a specific topic over time. The group structure was set up to maximize the abilities, strengths, and interests of each participant while scaffolding new learning for one another. Remarkably, each teacher was willing to

selected, the group moves forward—each member participating as they feel compelled, sometimes as a leader, practitioner, novice, or expert, but always as a learner.

Our members chose various locations to meet that contributed to the cohesiveness of the group and allowed for the most culturally appropriate venues to emerge, such as gathering at the NaHS. The following comment sums up what study groups offer:

It takes a while for me to really feel free to ask questions to the PD providers. I'm always thinking that I don't want to say anything because I might be wrong. With the study group setting, I feel good sharing. I am not afraid anymore of whether I make mistakes or not, because I feel like we all are learning from each other. I am not always able to share, but this time I feel free to share.

Susan Andrews, Janet Panuelo, and Rita Mangarero can be contacted at andrewss@prel.org, panueloj@prel.org, and