

Exploring the implication of science communication practices on a
model for teacher professional development:
Serving up the Pierian Waters

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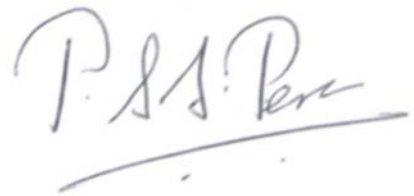
A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The Australian National University

April 2009

Centre for the Public Awareness of Science
The Australian National University

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. The empirical work within was not carried out with any other person.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'P. S. S. Perera', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Sean Perera

Acknowledgement

The journey towards this final product has not been a solitary one. It has been made possible by the support and generosity of many, a few of whom I mention here.

First, I thank my supervisor Professor Sue Stocklmayer. Neither her guidance along this highway of intellectual pursuit nor the support she has generously extended to overcome numerous detours along life's byways can be extolled sufficiently in the space I'm permitted here. One could only be fortunate to have such a guiding beacon.

At the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science, I thank Professor Chris Bryant, Professor Mike Gore, and Professor John Rayner for their academic support and guidance. I also thank the staff members and fellow PhD students at the Centre for their friendship and numerous support during my candidature.

I acknowledge the generosity of the Dean of the College of Science (ANU), the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science, Mr Charles Gunasekera and my parents for the financial support to fund this research degree.

I thank the organizers and facilitators of the CPAS workshops for science teachers, which formed the core of this study. I thank the science teachers from Australia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia who generously offered their time for interviews. I thank Dr Yovina Sontani for translating the interviews with the Indonesian teachers. I acknowledge the groundwork by the National Science Foundation in Sri Lanka during the CPAS workshop there.

At the ANU, I wish to thank the International Education Office, the College of Science Marketing and Outreach Division, University House, the Research Student Development Centre, and Mrs Diane Hutchens at the Postgraduate and Research Students' Association.

Next, I thank my family and loved-ones, for keeping in touch over the miles, for worrying about me and for all their well-wishes, prayers and love, which have not been contained to the last few years alone. I specially mention my Grandmother who understood the importance of this thesis and excused me from her 90th birthday celebrations this year.

No journey is complete without a companion. I've been very fortunate to have Dulamanie who has put up with my frustrations and shared the many tribulations along this journey. I thank you for cooking, looking after me, editing my drafts and making me sit down and write when I just wanted to run away from it all.

To all the many eyes, ears, lips, hands and feet which embodied the universal forces during my this journey, I dedicate this thesis.

Abstract

Science communication, over the last two decades, has shifted its onus from public understanding to public engagement. These efforts have been paralleled in science education, which strives to promote continued student engagement with science. Persistence with more traditional forms of pedagogy by teachers in middle school is a chief deterrent to this endeavour. Since many teachers' inadequate understanding about science is regarded as inhibiting their use of inquiry-based pedagogy, professional development based on constructivist principles has been identified to remedy this problem. This study investigates the constructivist basis for a model of short-term professional development, which has not been addressed in the literature. The one-day workshops offered to middle school science teachers in Australia and overseas by the Centre for the Public Awareness of Science (ANU, Canberra) are investigated here. While the workshops did facilitate conceptual change in the teachers, it was found that the constructivist principles which were incorporated into the workshops' design and delivery were underpinned by science communication practices. The conclusions presented include: the possibility of a constructivist framework for short-term professional development; the need for greater involvement of science communication in science education reform; and the unique challenges which confront science teachers from non-Western cultures.

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*I wondered through a mire:
The literature; deep and waywardly,
To find an un-hewn precious stone,
One that I could polish and make my own.
Since then I've spent years,
Sometimes laughing, through often in tears.
With a shining beacon at my side to be my guide,
I laboured to make that stone shine:
Refining my questions
And shaping my arguments.
Along the way a shard may have been cast aside,
Which may one day be another's.
And now before you I lay my labours:
My thesis, a diamond in my eye.
(The author)*

Prologue

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:

There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,

And drinking largely sobers us again.

Fir'd at first sight with what the Muse imparts,

In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts,

While from the bounded level of our mind

Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;

But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprise

New distant scenes of endless science rise!

(Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*)

The *Waters of Pieria* have long been the fabled seat of the Muses of mythical Greece. In the extract above, Pope refers to the *Pierian Spring* as a source of inspiration and deep understanding. The short-title of this thesis draws on that meaning. The following pages describe a study which has explored how science communication can participate to develop deeper understandings about science, and thereby inspire more effective science teaching. The model of teacher professional development described here, acts as a metaphorical pitcher with which science communication serves up the *Pierian Waters*.

