

New Mexico Teacher Performance
Reflection on Annual Teaching Professional Development Plan (PDP)

May 10, 2012

Head Teacher Feedback to Andres Plaza (optional):

Andres, as always, I love reading your PDP learning journey! This year you employed ten different techniques, activities, and games to help students learn Chemistry vocabulary. You devised a well-crafted PDP with a clear outcome measure and presented multiple artifacts to demonstrate the ways in which vocabulary was applied and practiced. You stretched yourself as a teacher noting, "During the past two years, I selected topics that were comfortable for me . . . however, this year, I focused on vocabulary instruction, which was always something that I recognized as very important to science but never felt particularly skilled or comfortable instructing." Andres, I like the risk you took in pursuing this PDP.

Your thoughtful reflection and clearly marked artifacts aided my understanding of the student learning outcomes you presented.

Some thoughts: As you reflected upon your PDP journey, I looked for practices that might be used across content areas to increase word knowledge. For instance you note the use of annotation where students highlight words and in the margin, explained what the word meant in relation to what they were going to do in laboratory investigation. You also discussed use of note cards, posters, two-column notes, and experimentation. Your reflection offered significant lessons. You indicated that strategies must be taught, but then students actually have to practice them. You wondered, "How do I force students to actually use the strategies and learn vocabulary on their own?" Sean Ottmer, our school's English 10 teacher, has had a similar question, and ultimately, like you, he concluded that you actually have to teach how to study note cards and allow students to practice in class. You also indicated the importance of repetition. Words are not learned instantaneously. I appreciate your suggestion that images create a better explanation of vocabulary than words, whether through note cards, Powerpoint presentations or videos. You even managed to "sneak-in" a timeline project in which students engaged in an authentic task in which vocabulary was strengthened. Hands-on activities are also critical as established through your use of "slinky play" to demonstrate properties like frequency, wavelength, and amplitude. You did not feel that the "Mile a Minute" activity was as effective because sometimes student descriptions did not correlate with an increased understanding of the vocabulary term. You loved the game called "Around the World."

PDP Next steps: Next year you hope to use "rings" to help students keep their vocabulary cards organized. You also felt that note cards and Powerpoints with images as well as videos aid our students and you plan to continue their use next year. You found the two column note structure very useful. You said you loved the "Around the World" game as a vocabulary technique. I hope you will share this particular practice with your colleagues. It sounds like the kids also loved it.

Observations: I conducted both formal and informal observations of your classroom this year. Formal observations were linked directly to your PDP. Jenn Gable, our physical science teacher and Science Department Chair, said because of you she is now using the "around the world" with freshmen because it worked so well with the juniors. Jenn Gable, observed you as you experimented with the teaching dimensional analysis.

You asked me to observe the class as they practiced the "Mile a Minute" activity. While you ultimately concluded that this was an activity in which students did not learn vocabulary in the way you hoped, in our post-observation, you said this game reinforced for you the importance of incorporating games in both RTI sessions and regular classroom. I always enjoy visiting your classroom Andres. Keep inviting me in!

Andres, you are just a tremendous teacher. It is no wonder the Class of 2012 gave you the "School Genius" award. You create thoughtful and dynamic lessons and are cognizant to provide timely feedback to students. I am also very appreciative of your work with our school's MESA program. This continued exposure to science through MESA fosters our students' excitement for this field of study. Last but not least, congratulations on the successful completion of the Online Portfolio for Alternative Licensure (OPAL). It is clear that you are finding ways to "hook" students in the field of science through exciting and engaging activities that support student learning of complex skills. Quite frankly, this OPAL submission was national board certified work.

Congratulations on another great year of teaching! Our students are very lucky to have you.

Julie Radoslovich
Head Teacher