

## DESCRIPTIVE PROCESS

**The process** of collaborative descriptive inquiry:

- Was developed by the work of the Prospect Center for Education and Research (Vermont, US) and specifically by its director, Patricia Carini, and has been used to work with teachers in schools, helping them gain collective understandings of students' work and their own practices and helping them document their work.
- It is a disciplined process that is slow and that maximizes dialogization with ourselves and with the group in a Bakhtinian sense
- The core of the process is the valuing of *human capacity widely distributed*. Through disciplined description, a group can collaboratively cut through generalities and abstractions, make the complexity of the classroom reality more visible, and enlarge understandings that can generate ideas for collective action.
- It questions expert knowledge.
- It is collaborative –
  - holding our range of differences,
  - putting things alongside each other,
  - enlarging individual understandings,
  - developing an inquiry stance and going beyond the critical to embrace hope.
  - It makes the complexity of lived reality visible and generates collective ideas for action.
- It is descriptive –
  - has us work on using non-judgmental language, cutting through generalities and abstractions,
  - helps us us learn new ways to talk with each other,
  - builds trust in groups, **showing "rough edges" of work. It is not "show and tell"**
  - It engages group in imaginative responses
- Over time, it provides a historical record of the inquiry

### Focus Question

***Describe in detail a performance of a young multilingual child you teach. In doing so, describe your actions as a teacher with regards to that performance. What are you grappling with?***

### *Format of the Process*

- Everyone sits in a circle.
- After introductions, the facilitator reminds the group of **why** we do collaborative descriptive inquiry and then reminds them of **the process** that will be used.
- The facilitator **states the question twice** and tells participants that they will have X minutes to gather their thoughts and take notes on their thoughts
- **Individuals take turns describing in detail** according to the question. (Make sure they are rich thick descriptions). The turns are taken in the order in which the group members sit. There is no “skipping around.” It is possible for a group member to simply “Pass.”
- There are no interruptions or questions while the description is being done. The others **listen carefully and take notes** so that they can ask questions when all individuals in the group have taken a turn.
- After each participant has shared, the facilitator who has been listening attentively and taking notes now **identifies the threads** that have come up during the description.
- Each participant then has a turn **asking a clarifying question of each one of the presenters**. The person replies. The turns are taken in the order in which the group members sit. There is no “skipping around.” It is possible for a group member to simply “Pass.” And you go around until there are no more clarifying questions.
- Each participant now has a turn **making recommendations** to each of the presenters, based on what they have heard, and their experience. Again, the turns are taken in the order in which the group members sit; there is no skipping around, as with clarifying questions, until there are no more recommendations; and it is possible for a group member to Pass.
- The facilitator then **summarizes again the threads** that have come up in the description of practices and **the recommendations** that have been generated by the group, and then reminds them of **follow ups** that they could support.

***The role of the facilitator***

- Like a conductor, the facilitator’s role is not to play an instrument, but to direct by paying close attention without interrupting. The facilitator’s role is to:
- Remind the group to describe carefully, and others to listen attentively and take notes for clarifying questions.
- State the focusing question at the beginning.
- Listen attentively and take summarizing notes.
- Pull the threads at the end of the description, and mid-way if it is a large group.
- Remind participants gently, if needed, that the task is to describe practices of teaching and learning.
- Direct the clarification questions and answers, and the recommendations.
- Thank the participants at the end.
- The facilitator also writes and disseminates notes of the inquiry sessions so as to provide a historical record of the movement in the group and of the body of knowledge they have developed over time.

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