

My Descriptive Process by Eve Richards

When I returned home to Chicago from Vermont and the Summer Institute I felt that I needed time to contemplate all that I had learned. I was overwhelmed. I had experienced so much and felt deeply touched by the connections I had made with people. I was energized by it all, and yet I felt I needed time and space to really understand this new process, and these new friendships. Where and how would it all fit into my life, both professionally and personally?

Then the emails started coming from my new Prospect friends from New York, San Francisco, Rhode Island and New Jersey. What was I doing with the rest of my summer? Had I ever been to Cinque Terre? How were the children in my new class? When was I coming to see their classrooms? Meet their families?

Very quickly it was the end of August and time to start setting up my classroom. I found myself changing things in part due to my experiences at Prospect and in part because of the comments of Pat Carini. The physical set up had to be different to accommodate more free choice time. A friend sent me a grid that she had seen in one of the Prospect publications, to chart daily observations of my students. At the Institute, I participated in a review of a child who was going to be in my class and I needed to prepare for his arrival.

What I came to realize is that I didn't have time to contemplate it all, but that I didn't need it. The Descriptive Process and my time at the Prospect Summer Institute changed me, immediately. During my time there I was among great thinkers who inspired me to be a better teacher and person. These people, from all over the country, who work in all different teaching settings, had their students at the forefront of their minds. The most important thing was trying to understand them as human beings, as well as elevate their hearts and minds.

The materials from students of the Prospect School and samples of work that participants brought were essential to learning this process of review. Looking deeply at the artwork and writing from Leo and Alva, as well as video projects, anecdotal notes and in-depth reviews, brought us a new understanding of these children. It was through this archived work that we were able to learn the process, do the process and see the power in it.

Through the work that we did together, reflecting on words, questioning, looking closely and respecting each other's opinions, we could so clearly see what an enormous benefit this process would be in our daily work as educators. The deep understanding you gain from a Descriptive Review of a child would make being his or her teacher/mentor/principal so much more

meaningful and productive for everyone. To be able to see each of your students as a true individual and share that information with parents would also be a gift, not just a grade. We were all touched by the work that we did that week and community that we built.

I did eventually find time to look back at some of my notes, my final thoughts from the week. I found words like moral courage, diversity, depth, the importance of play, honesty, patience, intensity, thinking about learning, and equality. These are words that I want to guide my work and by using the Descriptive Process, I know that they will.

Eve Richards teaches third grade at Crow Island Elementary School in Winnetka, IL. She has been teaching for nine years (one in Colorado and eight in Winnetka). She is so glad that she went to Vermont and is busy trying to put the descriptive process to work in her classroom and school. She is hoping to make it to Joan Bradbury's study group on Descriptive Processes during this school year.