

Remembering Patricia Carini

Not quite a novice, I was still a young teacher and just experienced enough to think that I was right. I'd been steeped in developmental theory, particularly in Piaget as interpreted for American educators. It was easy to fall into the categorization of children. So convenient. I thought that if we could just place this child into some preconstructed description, then we would know what to do to move the child on to the next level. That was convenient as well—the idea of the next level. My interest in developmental theory may have been considered progressive in my own school. Perhaps that's why I ended up attending a conference in the summer of 1988 as one of the school's representatives. I happened upon a session given by Jessica Howard, a teacher from the Prospect School in North Bennington, Vermont. I also sat in on a conversation with Alice Seletsky, a New York City public school teacher and regular participant in the Prospect Summer Institutes. Listening to Alice and Jessica, I began to get inklings of a different way to look at learning and imagine what a school could be. My interest, and yes, the challenge to my certainties brought me to the Prospect School the next year for my first Summer Institute.

I heard about Patricia Carini during the first days of that Summer Institute. I heard that she was a co-founder of the Prospect School and The Prospect Archives and Center for Education and Research. Pat's research at the school, as she observed and described its students in that setting, became central to the development of the Prospect processes and to a philosophical stance centered upon the capacity of the person. As I became more intrigued during those days of the Institute, learning about and participating in some of the processes, I looked forward to meeting Pat.

I did meet Pat toward the end of that first Institute, but I didn't have the opportunity to work with her. This waited until the next year when I visited the Prospect School, then returned to Summer Institute. With the guidance of Pat and others, I soon saw the inadequacy of a narrowly framed developmental perspective for describing the capacity of the person. Over the years that followed I attended many Summer Institutes and Fall Conferences sponsored by Prospect. I learned to observe and describe individual children and their work. I began to consider what a classroom could be that supports what children are interested in learning and doing. I brought this way of looking into my teaching. I learned to ask questions and hold onto those questions, not rushing to answers. I brought this way of thinking into my work in the world. I learned to listen, to wait my turn and really listen to what the other person has to say so that I might know something of their perspective. I learned processes that helped me to join my own perspective with those of others. I saw larger pictures woven through those processes that pointed to what we hold in common as human beings, including questions about what it is to live a good life. Pat's work was central to all of this.

There is a more personal side. Pat knew me in a way that brought me into a better understanding of myself. The extraordinary thing is that I came to Prospect work in a late period, long after the time when there were six week-long Summer Institutes and Pat held individual meetings with every participant. Still, she came to know me well and this helped me

during a period when I was feeling the disruption of impermanence in a fundamental and discouraging way. In the early 2000's we had done descriptions of natural objects at Summer Institute. I had followed a pebble picked up on one of my walks. I can see myself now on the road from the Bennington College campus to North Bennington, at an uphill loop in the road, reaching down and taking it up. I brought the pebble to my dorm room, placing it on the windowsill, describing it in different light at different times of the day, turning it, describing it again, many times. Finally, I wrote a poem which I shared with the Institute: *The Pebble*. A half dozen years later Pat sent me a poem entitled *Pebble*. As I say, I had been struggling with impermanence, with reconciling myself to changes that struck me to the core. Pat's words to me: "There are inevitably limits which in the larger context is a good thing. Limitless anything can't do other than harm. I happened not long ago to come across a poem by Zbigniew Herbert I think you will appreciate in this respect... ." I still appreciate this poem, more than a dozen years beyond when Pat sent it to me. I read it closely, following the words in the light of different days, reading the poem again, describing it, many times.

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