A Special Issue on the Scholarship of Generosity: A Festschrift in Honor of Beth Blue Swadener

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Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects. – Dalai Lama

This special issue of the *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal* is dedicated to the scholarship of generosity. It takes the form of a Festschrift in honor of Professor Beth Blue Swadener, whose career, steeped in scholar-activism and reciprocal mentorship, exemplifies this sorely needed praxis (theory into practice) in a world both literally and socially afire. However, while this collection exists to honor one person, it is of broader interest and significance to scholars and students in critical childhood policy studies, for it is simultaneously a hopeful illustration of the ripples made by one person's lifework, and a call to action for scholars to live up to higher education's social responsibilities (Boyer, 1990; Fitzpatrick, 2021; Kromydas, 2017; Patel, 2021). The issue's ultimate purpose is to provide examples that cause readers to think, *I'm already doing that. I know others who are doing that. I'd like to do that*. But first, what is a Festschrift?

Traditions Should Be Questioned, but Not All Should Be Abandoned

Until a colleague of ours, Cristian Aquino Sterling, brought up the idea of honoring Beth with a Festschrift, we had no idea what this was. We have since learned a Festschrift is a German word meaning *festival writing*, and that Festschrifts are collections of writings honoring distinguished scholars' lives and works (Monaghan, 2001). We also learned that before and after World War II, Jewish scholars fleeing Nazi horrors brought Festschrifts with them to the United States, but that since that time they have fallen out of favor for multiple reasons (Horowitz, 1986; Monaghan, 2001). One of these is post-foundational iconoclasm in the academy, with its legitimate critiques of academic conventions and dominant forms of knowledge. Closely related to this are the small gains in pluralizing the academy along gender, racial, social class, sexual, and disability dimensions. Therefore, many contemporary scholars bring different life experiences and know-how with us into the academy—and subsequently less awareness of European-American academic practices. Finally, fewer Festschrifts exist because these kinds of collections run the risk of being "clubbish" and therefore economically unviable for academic publishers (Horowitz, 1986; Monaghan, 2001). However, while all traditions should be questioned, not all of them should be abandoned, for there is no better term than festival writing for celebrating Beth's lifework: her influence on policy studies and her contributions to just praxis with and for children.

How Is This Relevant to Me as a Reader?

It is reasonable for readers who do not know Beth to wonder why they should care. The contributors to this special issue provide vivid and compelling answers to this question, but for now it is most helpful to know that she has dedicated her career to mobilizing scholarly communities for justice-centered, accountable action for the material, social, and psychic benefit of oppressed children, families, communities, and educators in Kenya, Ireland, Greece, the United States, and other parts of the world. Her prolific scholarship spans African studies, curriculum theory, early childhood education, education policy studies, gender studies, inclusive education and disabilities justice, general justice studies, multicultural education, and social studies (see this collection's epilogue for a selected bibliography). These empirical, conceptual, and pedagogical works are unified by an ethos of revolutionary generosity that is far too uncommon in higher education and the societies it reflects. Therefore, this issue is not only the contributors' gift of recognition to Beth, but is also a gift to the field by documenting a collective and celebratory resistance to the tragic times in which we find ourselves.

Defining Generosity and Its Connections to Scholarship

The importance of generosity became clear to us as the post-COVID-19, globally-populist, xenophobic, militaristic, and neoliberal zeitgeist revealed a pervasive absence of generosity.[1] It is a concept that might be dismissed as milquetoast, but only because it is, tellingly, too infrequently reflected upon. In our use, generosity speaks to a deep giving and guileless ethos that transcends niceness, kindness, and helpfulness. It is a value guided by a commitment to criticality (i.e., understanding the operations of power to undo inequities), informed by a deep *regard* for others (meaning both to see and to value; Margolis, 2005) and the courage to join their struggles. This generosity gains additional depth when considered with other underappreciated terms: scholarship, neoliberalism, and activism.

On Scholarship

In order to understand this issue's relevance, and generosity's connection to scholarship more broadly, it is necessary to explain our thinking. What is scholarship? A simple Internet search reveals the term's dual nature. On the one side is academic study, and on the other, a financial means for engaging in that study. While common sense, this double-sided meaning bears closer examination.

The need for financial scholarships highlights how higher education is not separate from the world's political-economic realities. In the United States, this can be seen in a long-term trend of increasing costs to students and, consequently, a debt burden to them that has been linked to higher education's acquisitiveness of knowledge, lands, and money (Archibald & Feldman, 2008; Kromydas, 2017; Patel, 2021). This means higher education institutions are political-economic institutions in which critical childhood policy studies are entangled.

Now, to scholarship's second meaning: academic study. What does this actually mean? Is it about simply knowing things (and how these things come to be known), or is it more than that? In the academy, scholarship is often operationalized as research, teaching, and service, but over 30 years ago, Ernest Boyer (1990) argued that traditional notions of scholarship reflected a cloistered practice, disconnected from the world's many problems. He advanced a redefinition of scholarship as encompassing four, interrelated domains: (a) discovery (research), (b) integration (connectedness of knowledge), (c) application and engagement (service to society), and (d) teaching as a practice subject to public scrutiny. What was key then, as it is now, were serious questions being leveled at higher education about its purposes and value(s).

Neoliberalism and Policies of Ungenerosity

The contributors to this special issue are conscious of global neoliberalism's consequences on people's lives, some making explicit mention of this. Neoliberal is a word used so frequently in (particular) academic circles, often as shorthand for a unitary, right-leaning ideology. To be sure, many adherents of neoliberalism can be characterized in this way through their promotion of free markets, choice, rational self-interest, and their corollaries: winning and losing, efficiencies, and maximizing profit. However, focusing only on neoliberalism's right-wing expressions misses the point, for it is better understood as a ubiquitous, postmodern ideology spanning the left-right ideological binary, albeit in different ways (Bloch et al., 2003; Peck, 2010; Swadener, 2003).

In contemporary usage, liberal refers to "left-ish" concerns for ensuring both individual rights and social well-being (Clark, 1998). However, this careless use of liberal elides its origins in classical liberalism's laser-focus on individual rights in the face of oppressive governments. What is often forgotten is that classical and modern liberalism are linked by the centrality of individualism and fears of oppression. These liberalisms contrast with conservatism's collectivist commitment to preserving *traditional* social order, and radicalism's equal commitment to collectively dismantling unjust social order. Placing these ideologies on a Cartesian quadrant, with left-right on one axis and collectivist-individualist on another (Clark, 1998) is an important analytic (and reflexive) step in the anti-binary analyses needed in critical childhood policy studies.

Neoliberalism and Education

While it is easy to see the capitalist logic in any number of "right-ish" policy proposals across the globe, such as privatization, curtailing or eliminating social safety net programs, and transnational free trade agreements, it is just as apparent in left-ish policies, such as the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act or "Obamacare" in the United States, with its reliance on providing nationwide healthcare through a mixed system of employer-sponsored, private health insurance and private health insurance marketplaces for people whose employers do not offer this as a part of their compensation to workers (for an overview of the peculiar approach in the United States, see Blumberg & Davidson, 2009). In education, this ideology can be seen in nominally free market education policies, for example policies in the U.S. such as school choice, charter schools, and Obama-era Race to the Top grants. The underlying logic is that competition and choice are the engines of educational improvement and the public good (Bloch et al., 2003; Nagasawa et al., 2014; Peck, 2010; Swadener, 2003). Inevitably, this faith in the free market leads to promoting business practices and metaphors, many of which are grounded in industrial-era ideas about "scientific management," which include standardizing products, monitoring their quality, and analyzing work tasks for efficiency (Callahan, 1962).

In education, this can be seen in professional, programmatic, and learning standards; assessing teachers, schools, and children; and linear-technical curricular models with roots in the industrial age (Callahan, 1962; Kessler & Swadener, 1992). Many might ask what is so wrong with efficiency and seeking effectiveness, since they may indicate a sense of responsibility and accountability to students, each other, and society. Our position is that efficiency and effectiveness are not bad in and of themselves, but rather the danger lies in the commonsense diagnosis that it is a lack of competitive pressure and business acumen that ails education, rather than unjust social structures and the exclusivity of *who* is making these policy decisions, *how* these policies are being implemented, and *what* their effects are (i.e., which people benefit and which do not). These are questions that have driven Beth, and which she has encouraged students and colleagues to pursue.

Ungenerosity and the Neoliberal Academy

Higher education has not been immune to the increasing influence of managerialism and corporate thinking. This is exemplified by institutions' focus on branding, revenue, and land acquisition, as well as a culture (by analogy) of always-on production that seeks ever-increasing numbers of students, grant funds, "high impact" publications, and employment "metrics" as a key marker of a college's quality (Harvey, 1989; Nippert-Eng, 1996; Patel, 2021; Shore & Wright, 1999; Tuchman, 2009; Workforce Readiness Project Team, 2006). An ancillary result of all of this is dehumanizing, out of balance work-lives for students, staff, and faculty (see Rowland et al., this volume). This broader trend conspires with other issues faced by higher education institutions to erode public trust in colleges and universities (Fitzpatrick, 2021).

These issues include well-documented, right-wing efforts to paint higher education as simultaneously irrelevant and dangerous hotbeds of progressive indoctrination (Musto, 2021; Sullivan, 2000; "When the College Degree is Useless," 2016). However, to focus only on those critiques is an evasion of higher education's institutional conservatism and exclusivity grounded in intersecting racism/whiteness, imperial English, misogyny, classism, and ableism (Altbach, 2013; Boveda & Allen, 2021; Cheruvu et al., 2015; Dodson et al., 2009; Dolmage, 2017; Margolis & Romero, 1998; Patel, 2021; Rideaux & Salazar Pérez, 2019). This toxic smog is endemic to higher education's traditional environment, where students and faculty are constantly striving to get ahead through self-promotion, and socialization to believe that "rigorous" scholarship involves tearing apart others' work with precision and without empathy. A key reflexive task becomes confronting the ways each of us is complicit—and active—in reproducing a harmful culture. This is a means for both (self) understanding and embracing the responsibilities that critical scholarship entails.

Scholarly Generosity as Activist Praxis

We join with Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2021), who has argued that generosity is an antidote to higher education's valorization of speaking over listening, individualism over community, and competition over collaboration. However, as we began laying out earlier, this is not just about being kinder (though that is a good place to begin). Generosity only becomes scholarly when alloyed with Boyer's (1990) taxonomy of Scholarship, comprising: discovery, synthesis, application, and teaching. We believe it is in deep *givingness*—taking a learning stance, listening carefully, celebrating others' work, and, yes, giving precise critiques guided by empathy and a desire to help others to further their work—that makes this more than a semantic shift from the typical definition of scholarship (research, teaching, and service). This scholarship of generosity is additive to Drew Gilpen Faust's notion of the scholarship of belonging, which speaks to the need to transform the academy into welcoming spaces where multiple ways of knowing, being, doing, and expressing combine to transform the academy (cited in Frenk, 2016). We believe there can be no belonging in the academy without the revolutionary praxis of generosity.

Therefore, scholarly generosity is activist, a term which often evokes particular images of public advocacy, protest, demonstration, and uprising. To be sure, those are part of activist repertoires, but activism can take many forms, and these are only visible examples. For instance, in *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scott (1985) showed the many tools residents of a Malaysian village used to resist centralized agricultural policies that benefited the wealthy. While their tactics (e.g., feigning compliance, pretending ignorance, sabotaging.) were contextual, the applicable point Scott makes is that theirs was an everyday, small, intentional, and collective resistance.

With regard to scholarly generosity, this can take the form of inviting students and less experienced colleagues to co-review or co-author manuscripts as a part of cracking the publishing code. It can be energetically promoting others' valuable work and connecting good folx to each other. It can be incorporating service learning about advocacy into one's teaching, showing how to apply the tools of critical scholarship for social good (Faragó et al., 2018; Richter et al., 2020). It can be any number of small, everyday acts, including viewing the routine practice of mentorship as a holding environment for nurturing generous scholars (Nagasawa & Swadener, 2015; Swadener et al., 2015). This collection exists to acknowledge and inspire similar acts of revolutionary generosity.

About the Collection

We acknowledge that the prosaic, often ritualized aspects of scholarly life may not seem all that revolutionary; however, the contributors to this Festschrift show us how experiencing the scholarship of generosity earlier in their careers is propelling their enactment of it in their various practices. As gifts to Beth and the broader community of critical childhood scholars, each of these contributions exemplify scholarly generosity, hopefully illustrating the transformative potential of humanized scholarship. Therefore, they are concurrently personal, theoretical, empirical, and communal. The issue is organized into three overlapping clusters: generous first encounters, a counter narrative of at-promise (versus at-risk), and illustrations of praxis, all of which are contained by the current neoliberal zeitgeist.

Generous First Encounters

The first grouping of essays speaks to the ways first meetings with Beth put our contributors on their own paths of scholarly generosity. In "Untempered Generosity: Scholar-Activism from the Heart," Jennifer Richter, Kimberly Eversman, and Denisse Roca-Servat open the issue by drawing upon their collaborative autoethnographic work to analyze how their experiences in graduate school, for instance in the student-led activist organization Local to Global Justice, have informed their activist scholarship, both within and outside of academia. In addition to providing a rich introduction to Beth's influences on them, they provide equally rich illustrations of how they are paying it forward as they have dispersed geographically and professionally.

This idea of paying it forward, a theme across the whole collection, is picked up by Bekisizwe Ndimande in his essay, "Mentoring of Courage and Love: The Contributions of Dr. Beth Blue Swadener." Ndimande provides an intimate, honest account of his first meeting with Beth not long after arriving in the United States. This meeting led to a collaborative relationship he calls "mentor-mentee and mentee-mentor," one of co-learning and mutual benefit, which has helped him overcome self-doubt through the joint exploration of decolonization's imperatives with Beth and his students.

Another common thread across first encounters with Beth is the generous practice of breaking bread, which Rebecca Neal, Amy Papacek, and Sher Ratnabalasuriar reflect upon in "A Seat at Beth's Table," (which they conclude really does not belong to her at all). Their blended, multi-vocal essay blurs genres, combining free verse and personal narrative to discuss a dissertation support group (introduced in this collection's first piece by Jennifer, Kim, and Denisse). Of this group Rebecca, Amy, and Sher write,

> Beware the lonely path:
> "Scholarly life is a lonely journey,"
> warnings whispered like ghost stories over a campfire,
> "Beware, the path of writing can be dark,
> and dangerous."

Their experiences of belonging in the dissertation support group buffered that danger, reminding us that the development of critical, intersectional consciousness is not an individual act (Combahee River Collective, 2017/1977).

A Counter Narrative of *At-Promise*

While following a similar, personal-collaborative narrative form as those that preceded them, the next grouping of pieces centers on Beth's and Sally Lubeck's (1995) impactful critical analysis of the term *at-risk* and the parallel importance of creating *at-promise* counter narratives. Sonya Gaches's "Building from 'At-Promise': Scholarship and Mentoring for Transformation" shares, as Ndimande did before, how a momentary encounter can be life-changing. In it, Sonya recounts how the idea of at-promise not only validated what she was trying to embody in her multi-age classroom (which spanned first through third grade), but it also has led her on a scholarly journey to a new life and praxis in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The next essay, "Enactments of Scholarly Generosity: Reflexiones on the Intersection of Our Selves, the Work of Beth Swadener, and Childhood/s Futures, " by Antonieta Barces, Berta Carela, Jennifer Castillo, Michelle Salazar Pérez, María José Ruiz González, and Margarita Ruiz Guerrero weaves together story lines from across a hemisphere into a multivocal testimonio. Their dialogic reflexiones consider past work with children and families contained by *at-riskness*, experiences of being positioned as at-risk, and being the embodiment, individually and collectively, of at-promise. In doing so, they illustrate a mentorship grounded in cultural and linguistic affinity that extends across a multi-generational, intellectual *kinship network* (another of the collection's themes).

Illustrations of Praxis

To be clear, every piece in this collection illustrates praxis, but the final two pieces have a particular focus on application. In their essay "Revisiting the 'At Risk' Pervasive Construct," Yiota Karagianni, Foteini Kougioumoutzaki, Soula Mitakidou, and Evangelia Tressou use their work with Roma children, families, and communities in Greece to shed light on the material consequences of how racist xenophobia, ableism, and classism collude in disabling Roma people. In addition to their valuable analysis, which is of cross-cultural significance, they offer an important critique that warrants quoting at length:

> History and experience have taught us that intellectualized attempts to deconstruct the at-risk discourse are not enough. This kind of critical scholarship has become a heavy academic industry, entrenched in its internal needs and vested interests, but effecting little or no change in the lives of at-risk groups.

To assist readers in making connections between abstract, deconstructive, and materialist analyses, they provide two powerful examples of how their collaborative, activist scholarship led to combining the tools of multicultural and disabilities studies, and how this helped them learn from a brilliant Roma family, transforming their educational work.

The final essay, "Communities of Generosity: Mindfulness for Academics," by Tim Rowlands, Sher Ratnabalasuriar, Warren Fincher, and Missy Hobart discusses a contemplative practices group they have formed to help sustain each other and their commitments to justice and peace within the neoliberal academy. This spiritually-inspired, non-religious sangha (the Buddhist term for a spiritual community) has had the additional benefit of helping them to be more human, present, and empathetic with their students and colleagues. As with other pieces in this collection, Tim, Sher, Warren, and Missy's analysis of their praxis provides some specific advice for others to consider. We

close this Festschrift with reflections on the communities of practice that our colleagues have discussed and of the contemporary relevance of Beth's traditional scholarship (selected bibliography).

Gratitude and Hope

We are grateful for our colleagues' existence and for their generous sharing of themselves in this issue. It is our sincere hope that you will see yourself, your mentors, your colleagues, and your students in their stories. If the possibility of justice for children, families, and communities is to exist in our troubled world, folx like our contributors and the many others who wanted to participate but were unable, as well as a growing collective, are needed in order to transform possibilities into realities. When it feels, as it often does, like our efforts are too small and insignificant, the Dalai Lama (2013) reminds us, "Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects." This collection is one example of that truth.

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Footnotes

[1] Our use of the prefix *post* is not meant to suggest that the COVID-19 Pandemic is over epidemiologically, but rather to acknowledge the world has entered a different social phase vis-à-vis SARS CoV-2. This is similar to the ways postmodernism, postcolonialism, and so forth do not mean that modernism or colonialism have ended.