

# **Enactments of Scholarly Generosity: Reflexiones on the Intersection of Our Selves, the Work of Beth Swadener, and Childhood/s Futures**

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## **Abstract**

This multigenerational lived experiences shows the great potential of scholarly mentoring to open and protect spaces for expansive onto-epistemology: the richness of being and knowing that can emerge within the confluence of languages, cultures, ideas, and scholarly relationships founded on co-learning. The authors are examples that the theory-practice divide is a false dichotomy, providing reflexiones spanning their work with children and families labeled at risk, their own experiences resisting containment by at-risk discourse, and the humanizing experience of at-promise relationships, both with each other and within an extended kinship network of critical childhood scholars.

Key Terms: Testimonio, anti-colonialism, early childhood, teacher education

## **Preamble**

Dr. Swadener's voice and dedication always remind me that activism for social justice is a necessary, lifelong praxis for all who strive to build a future filled with hope and promise for everyone. —Berta Carela

Berta's compelling words are illustrative of the passion and commitment that we've shared in writing our reflexiones on scholarly generosity, the focus of this special issue. Berta's sentiments beautifully ground the forthcoming expressions of our thoughts and dreams as Latinx mujeres whose hopes for just futures intersect with the scholarly generosity embedded in Beth's life work.

When asked by the editors how we interpret scholarly generosity, and the hopeful possibilities it incites, we have been inspired to reflect on our own positionalities and

lived experiences in and outside of the academy. We are diverse in our embodied knowledges, and therefore, have each taken a unique approach in interpreting what we believe represents the notion of scholarly generosity in early childhood studies.

Antonieta, Jennifer, and María José begin by sharing their reflexiones on how their lived experiences have shaped their understandings and enactments of scholarly generosity. Then, Margarita, Berta, and Michelle weave reflexiones of their lived experiences and relationship with Beth over the years, and how this has influenced their understandings and enactments of scholarly generosity. We leave readers with thoughts on how Beth's life, work, and influence have inspired questions that reimagine what's possible for childhood/s futures and the world.

### **Scholarly Generosity in Educational Research: Antonieta Barces**

#### **About Me**

I am from Peru and have lived in the United States for almost 20 years. Since I moved from Peru just after graduating from college, I have identified as a Latinx, immigrant, bilingual speaker. This has led me to dedicate my professional career to working with immigrant children and their families. Once I completed my master's studies in early childhood education, my work as a research assistant allowed me to focus and recenter research on embracing the lived experiences of children of color and move away from prescriptive, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). Currently, I'm a doctoral student in the early years of my studies who is committed to transforming early childhood education research into a space that genuinely cares and advocates for all children and their families.

#### **Reflexiones**

To me, scholarly generosity is a mind shift that calls for scholars to go beyond research and pedagogical practices; generosity in academia moves away from an individual benefit mindset based on neoliberal ideologies to a collectivist approach (Fitzpatrick, 2021). Generosity fosters a sentiment of caring for each other that can only emanate from the heart, leading us to develop caring and loving relationships with each other and our communities. As I embark on this next phase of my journey as a PhD student in community with a new generation of early childhood scholars, based on past and current lived and professional experiences, I believe our role is to work together in transforming higher education into a space that strives for equity and social justice. Adopting a generous spirit entails the reimagination of educational research as a field dedicated to communities that have been historically marginalized. In doing so, scholars can open spaces for community members to be collaborators in the educational research process, where their knowledges and lived experiences are embraced.

Fostering scholarly generosity requires us to become active listeners of our communities' histories and the voices that have often been silenced and ignored in academia. My previous position as an early childhood educator allowed me to listen to and connect with Latinx- immigrant families. My engagement in *platicas* about their reflections and struggles as immigrants raising their children in hostile spaces allowed me to understand how their identities and cultures were dismissed and portrayed from deficit perspectives. As a result, these deficit perspectives have perpetuated inequities among Latinx-immigrant communities (Carales & Lopez, 2020; Orellana, 2001). Scholarly generosity calls us to proactively listen and open our hearts rather than nest harmful narratives. Furthermore, adopting a generosity mindset allows us to truly connect with our communities of color so that we can learn about the richness of their lived experiences and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Along with becoming active listeners of our communities of color, scholarly generosity aims to build loving and caring relationships with each other. As educational researchers, we must seek creative ways to engage and connect with communities that have been marginalized (Heiman et al., 2022), such as through *platicas*, *testimonios*, and storytelling (Lopez-Roberston, 2017; Yrigollen-Robbins, 2022). Certainly, scholarly generosity allows us to humanize academia in hopeful ways, intending to advocate with and for marginalized communities with genuine love and care. Moreover, our roles as educational researchers is to constantly interrogate power structures and bring to our research the wisdom of communities of color.

### **Scholarly Generosity: Jennifer Castillo**

#### **About Me**

I am a first generation Latina PhD student at the University of North Texas. I'm a former dual language bilingual teacher with seven years of experience. My current work is with preservice bilingual teachers around *libros acompañantes* that empower, humanize, and accompany racial minorities.

#### **Reflexiones**

As a first-generation Latina, I have had to face situations where my identity and experiences have been questioned and not valued. When I was younger, I felt the need to assimilate to Westernized ideologies in order to make it through school. It wasn't until my graduate studies that I began to unlearn false, dominant narratives that had been created by power structures and deficit thinking. It took some very special people in my life for me to realize that I had something to offer to the world—that my knowledge was valuable although it was not always recognized in academia. It was then that I began my fight towards decolonization and social justice as an educator and researcher (see Ndimande, this issue).

Throughout my journey in higher education, I have focused on creating work that elevates, centers, and empowers marginalized communities. I strive to advocate for, serve, and represent these communities in academia. I'm currently in a position of privilege where I can make decisions about who is represented in my work. I take my identity and my position of authority very seriously and think of how these intersect with my research and those participants with whom I collaborate. My goal is to include work in my field that centers other people of color. I want to make us visible because we deserve to be represented.

One of the most powerful aspects of my research is being truthful and accurately representing the groups of people I'm working with. I didn't see much of this growing up in the books I read, movies I watched, or news outlets I was exposed to. The incomplete and false narratives presented in the media about me and my community affected the way the world viewed us. As a scholar, I'm very intentional in always involving communities in the research interpretation process. Through this form of inquiry, co-constructed knowledge is created and shared with the world.

It is important to historicize what we do because it will help us fight against the oppressive powers of structures that have been purposely organized to exclude us. By focusing on the multiple gifts and knowledge that marginalized communities bring to the world, we can engage as active participants in cultural work that enacts change and moves away from abstractive work. I recognize that I have been blessed to have people in my life who have not let me forget who I am and where I come from. This form of love is special to have. I hope to give the same love to others who need to see their importance in the world.

## Scholarly Generosity in Teacher Education: María José Ruiz González

### About Me

I have been involved in early childhood teacher education in Costa Rica and also in the United States as a doctoral student. Growing up in a large family and in a region of vast ecological, ethnic, and linguistic diversity has motivated me to study the complexity of the human person reflected through our teaching praxis.

### Reflexiones

Teacher education is one of the noblest and most beautiful tasks a person can take on. Educating teachers who will work with children, their families, and communities is a multiplying effect for goodness. That bright idea about the role of education in transforming the world can be dimmed when colonialist relations creep in. Interpersonally, a colonial relationship constitutes a way of relating that rejects dialogue and is instead patronizing. Unfortunately, this colonialism has permeated the field of teacher education. In many ways, we have designed teacher education programs based on little interactions with communities. Through acquired knowledge, some feel entitled to lecture pre-service teachers about how to “handle” minoritized communities, most of the time alienating our student teachers and preventing them from developing a deeper understanding of humanity/nature. I have perceived that the field of teacher education is an arena where we teach people to build “facades of care” when deep down, many haven’t developed strong roots in caring. We think we know how to care, but that is, again, just a facade that will crumble when we encounter points of contention.

What do we do then? How can we build strong foundations of care? What do our teacher education programs lack? My answer is listening. Listening is not only hearing. Listening is to “to hear something with thoughtful attention” (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Growing up in rural Central America, I have always been fascinated by the wisdom of the Campesinos (inhabitants of a rural area). It doesn’t matter how “educated” someone is; there is always a *consejo* that can pierce your heart. No wonder Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1994) defines this as “nurturing advice” (p. 298). I believe that consejos come from attentive listening to nature, the weather, your peers, friends, and family members. Listening in this way implies trying to understand how to serve better and not to fix.

Ever since I moved to the United States, I’ve felt like *something*, not *someone*. I’ve felt like something to label based on a surface level: Central American, English language learner, Woman of Color. While these adjectives make me very proud, I acknowledge that we are incomplete beings, and I also struggle with reductionist labels. I am more than what others imagine as “a minority.” I’ve wanted to receive support and help to grow as an educator and a person. I’ve wanted someone to listen to me and see my strengths and weaknesses to help me thrive.

Learning how to listen should be an ability we strive to acquire, and not simply for mass use: It should be developed to be used on a one-to-one basis. Yes, every person we meet may have some common traits (for example, language, nationality, race, etc.) that might help us understand them. Still, these will always be incomplete understandings as every individual is unrepeatable; there is only one of us—the mold was broken when we were born (Sellés, 2007).

Listening is an act of generosity as it implies attention, pausing, and pondering. Listening to be genuine is an act of accepting and reciprocity. These are also acts of generosity, and, therefore, care because they imply that we offer what others need and not what we can spare. By doing so, growth is mutual and not extraction. If someone cares about

transforming the world, I believe we must start by listening. You may be amazed at how hard this is, but how much the teacher education field needs this balm of tenderness.

### **The Impact of Beth Blue Swadener’s Dedication and Legacy on My Work: Berta M. Carela**

#### **About Me**

I am a Latina Woman of Color, born and childhood-raised in the Dominican Republic. I’ve resided in the United States most of my life, where I have worked with infants to adults, moms to grandmas, aunts and uncles, in homes and in school settings. Social justice in early childhood is my profession, vocation, and inspiration.

#### **Reflexiones**

Across the local and global contexts of scholarship and practice, Dr. Swadener’s contributions to education and social justice are much more than words on paper or in a book. Her foregrounding of children’s rights and voices (Swadener & Polakow, 2011) and her enactment of researcher as activist (Dillard, 2006) is a model for us all. Her approach is also an example of generosity of heart through scholarship and ethics of caring (Elliot, 2007) that can serve as a template in our field of education. Such qualities provide a heartfelt human touch that, for me, as an early childhood educator, are the life force of my own engagements with my students.

When I first flew across the Atlantic and found myself labeled as “at risk,” I did not know that the dictatorship and oppression I had left behind were threatening to be replaced by a different type of control. It took time for me to realize that my legacy and my future had been predetermined by others whose interests were not focused on my rights as a child or as human. You see, unbeknown to me, I had been designated as the “immigrant interloper” in the land of others, someone taking up space who could easily be discarded. Breaking away from that prescribed role of failure to enact who I am today has taken focused dedication, reflection, and the guidance of social justice-minded mentors. With the encouragement of such teachers, I have been able to contextualize and understand worldviews that fill me with hope and the impetus for action. Now, as a teacher of teachers, I pause and reflect about those who have helped shape my academic and teaching experience, and about how they have aided me in gaining perspective through their heartfelt caring and scholarship. Beth has been such a teacher to me.

Histories that point to the oppression of peoples worldwide continue to be made before our eyes. Yet dedicated voices call us all to action in support of one another through knowledge and deeds that center us on the human rights of all. We are fortunate to inhabit a world where previously silenced, “endarkened epistemologies” are the activists’ mantras that guide our actions (Dillard, 2006).

To imbue a scholar’s work with an ever-present drive for activism and social justice requires lifelong dedication and an ethics of caring. In my imaginings about the future of our shared world, I hope to bring to life qualities for teaching with generosity of mind and heart I have benefitted from through my mentors. Beth’s voice and dedication always remind me that activism for social justice is a necessary, lifelong praxis for all who strive to build a future filled with hope and promise for everyone (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995).

## **A Letter to Beth: Margarita Ruiz Guerrero**

### **About Me**

I am a Mexican, Latina, transnational woman who has crossed the Mexico-US border back and forth several times for the past 15 years. As an early childhood educator, my passion is finding ways to break silences, confront injustices, and creatively generate changes by imagining new possibilities. My interest is to create, foster, and support communities that embrace and empower each other with people who share a passion for social justice in our field of early childhood.

### **Reflexiones**

Dear Beth,

hooks (2000) mentions “[t]o be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality” (p. 110). I start this letter with this quote because I believe hooks’s words encompass the scholarly generosity that you, as part of the reconceptualizing early childhood education (RECE) movement, have done for many students and for scholars around the world. The following is a narrative of how our story began. It is a connection grounded in love for our field, in respect and empowerment of differences, and in a commitment to valuing multiple knowledges.

Once upon a star I was in a doctoral program. I was new to everything, and I did not feel part of anything really. When I met Michelle Salazar Pérez, my mentor, a person who I am happy to call my friend, and one of your students too, I felt that I was part of something big and transformative. I felt part of a family, an academic empowering family whose lineage inspires early career scholars (like me) and many graduate students to be conscious of multiple realities, to deconstruct existent systemic oppression, and reconstruct systems that often marginalize the realities of Black and Indigenous People, and other People of Color, by making the changes we want to see not only in our beloved field, but in the world.

The seed of this challenging yet inspiring work started in my first class as a doctoral student. Then at my first RECE conference back in 2014, I met you, and you were welcoming, treating us (all the newcomers) with warmth and love, making us feel part of the movement. The lineage of your work, and who you are as a person, will transcend as a legacy that encourages us to truly love and care about early childhood education and at the same time to keep questioning how our field has been framed and to look for alternatives together. For example, as an early career scholar, your piece “Children and Families ‘At Promise’: Deconstructing the Discourse of Risk,” is something I continue to use in my classes. It has made me and my students question prior and current oppressive practices and rethink possible ways to break existent cycles of oppression. In this chapter, in particular, your vision of starting critical discussions early on in the field of early child education was reflected in your willingness to engage my (our) students in questioning educational practices they may have experienced and that they can challenge and rethink in the future. I am so thankful for this and for all of the contributions and influences you’ve had on my life, both personally and professionally. For this and more, you deserve the most appreciation.

Over the years, I have felt part of an academic family; this academic family is, as my own, full of strong, powerful, intelligent, and passionate women like you. At some point, I began to call you my academic grandmother (with much respect), and I feel honored to know you and to have the pleasure of working with you.

With love and respect,

Margarita Ruiz Guerrero

### **Being in Community With Beth: Michelle Salazar Pérez**

#### **About Me**

I come to this colectiva with multiple and expansive positionalities, which include being a Latina profe and an always-in-process scholar activist. At the heart of who I am and the work I hope to engage in is a love, joy, and deep concern for centering and elevating minoritized knowledges and ways of being in this world. Through shared activism in the arenas of teacher education, research, and community partnerships, I continue to learn from and conspire with material and otherworldly knowings and beings to co-create new imaginaries for childhood/s.

#### **Reflexiones**

Reflecting upon Beth as a person and scholar brings about a sincere sense of gratitude and love. I first learned of Beth's work 20 years ago, when I was pursuing my master's in educational psychology and urban education. I had been learning about resiliency and thought seriously about making it the focus of a master's thesis. When I read Beth's work, however, I learned how much of the scholarship on the resiliency of children of color "at-risk" was positioned within a deficit framework. This, and the work of other reconceptualist scholars, opened new pathways and purposes for my studies, and later as an early childhood scholar and teacher educator. Beth's re-envisioning of children and families as at promise deeply transformed my thinking and what I thought could be possible in academia. This is illustrative of the power of scholarship like Beth's to re/shape our lives, praxes, and worldviews.

Since the moment I was introduced to Beth's work, her scholarly generosity has been a consistent presence in the many seasons of my journey as an educator and scholar. From being in community with her at ASU during my doctoral studies, to the support I've felt from her throughout my profe life, I have immense gratitude for who Beth is as a mentor, friend, and a scholar activist. I hold close to my heart the pieces of her that I see reflected in myself and my scholarship. And I will continue to carry her consejos with me as I/we conspire with the next generation of scholars. Mujeres, like the colegas I've had the honor and privilege to write this piece with, inspire me to be persistent in the many forms of scholarly generosity that they and Beth emit.

As I continue to gain a more expansive understanding of the world and my relations with/in it, I am inspired to keep asking questions that help to reimagine what's possible in early childhood studies. From this, several provocations about the enactment of scholarly generosity come to mind.

- How can we endeavor to enact a spirit that centers Land relations in our becomings, thinkings, and doings?
- How do we continually reflect upon, and shift when needed, how we engage with thought partners who have shared commitments to transforming unjust worlds?
- With the positions we may hold both socially and institutionally, which afford privilege and power, how do we enact a sense of humility, reflexive thought, and a spirit of relinquishing power?
- How do we center the spirit, knowledges, and well-being of minoritized children and educators with whom we collaborate?

- How do we think and act in ways that honor the complexities of issues, lived experiences, and the expansive diversities of peoples within communities who have been minoritized?

Reflecting upon being in community with Beth, this colectiva, and Others over the years, these and other provocations which have yet to be realized, will continue to inspire me to engage in shared visions and actions toward social justice and equity for young children and the world.

### Epilogue

We close by offering our sincere appreciation for the time and space writing for this special issue has afforded us. The reflexiones we have shared are at the heart of Beth's work and scholarly generosity—to inspire, support, and act. And for this, we are forever grateful!

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