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Conceptualising Generous Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

In an era of neoliberalism and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to revisit the meaning, value, and praxis of scholarship. This article documents exploration of the emerging concept of generous scholarship, a compelling yet ill-defined and undertheorised construct that inspires our scholarly practices. We analyse the extant literature about generous scholarship and related constructs to address three guiding research questions: What is generous scholarship? What are its actions? What are its implications for scholarly life and the academy? A descriptive theory-generating research design led to a robust conceptual framework involving five principles of generous scholarship: social praxis, reciprocity, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, and agency. Generous scholarship is an intentional, collegial approach to scholarship that helps to mitigate the sense of isolation and depletion of energy often associated with managerial, production-oriented academic contexts. We argue that individuals and institutions that embrace generous scholarship may attract and nurture a vibrant cadre of academics, replenished in mind and spirit. Academics, university administrators, and higher education policy-makers are encouraged to address or resist the pressures inherent in their current workplaces and to carve space for generous scholarship.

Keywords: generous scholarship, praxis of scholarship, descriptive theory-generating research design, collegiality, academic culture

Introduction

This article is an exploration of the emerging concept of generous scholarship, a compelling notion that inspires our scholarly practices despite remaining ill-defined and undertheorised in the extant literature. We developed a descriptive theory (Fawcett & Downs, 1986) of generous scholarship by articulating key working principles that enshrine the intentional and reflexive practice of generous scholarship as praxis. Our goal is to contribute to critical debate by presenting a robust framework for generous scholarship as a countermeasure against competitive and individualistic norms in academia.

The words *generous* and *scholarship* are rarely used in the same sentence, except as an acknowledgement for funding. Scholarly work is often considered a solitary act, frequently fueled by pressures to publish in prestigious outlets. In the UK, Kinman and Jones (2003) surveyed 782 academics, of whom 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the pressure to publish has increased, 80% experienced heightened pressure to undertake research or consultancy, and 78% felt pressured to obtain research funding. Role overload and workaholism have become prevalent among academics (Torp, Lysfjord, & Midje, 2018). Vostal (2015) maintains that working conditions in academia have worsened over time, increasingly mimicking pressures and competitiveness in for-profit corporations, which could seemingly leave little space for altruistic relationships between colleagues.

Managerial approaches that embrace competition and reward individual accomplishment threaten collegiality and academic friendship (Enslin & Hedge, 2019; Knowles, 2017). Tight (2014) argues that “collegiality in its fullest form ... was only ever experienced by a small minority of those involved in higher education” (p. 302). At the same time, there are increasing calls for collaboration and cooperation between scholars and with communities. Many granting agencies favour community engagement in projects, as well as local and international collaborations. Commitments toward open-access publishing are seen to promote knowledge sharing with a wide audience and to recognise that knowledge is communal. There is a continuing push for Boyer’s (1990) “vision of scholarship ... dedicated not only to the renewal of the academy but, ultimately, to the renewal of society itself” (p. 81).

Over the past two years, academia has faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, including abrupt transitions to online teaching and learning, and unexpected redirection of research efforts. In this context, Malisch et al. (2020) report that “shifts in household labor, childcare, eldercare, and physical confinement have increased students’ and faculty’s mental health needs and reduced the time available to perform academic work” (para. 1). Such challenges require academics to shift thinking and adopt new sets of skills, practices, and values that are respectful and sustainable (Corbera et al., 2020). Now more than ever, it is time to demonstrate practices of care, community building, cross-cultural understanding, and respect for difference in academic and everyday life (MacLeod, 2020; Walcott, 2020).

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Long before the current pandemic, our team of four began to contemplate the value of sharing and collegiality in academe. At a residential academic writing retreat that we co-hosted in 2007, a retreat participant introduced Russell's (2006) term *generous scholarship* as part of a discussion about supporting each other as writers. The term seemed well suited to capturing a perspective we had been trying to advance in our practice for years. We sensed that the concept of generous scholarship had been an unacknowledged feature of multiple aspects of our lives as academics—as writers, researchers, reviewers, instructors, mentors, and supervisors. The concept aligned with our professional ideals. We were excited by its potential to extend existing higher education frameworks and enable movement toward a more collegial, collaborative approach to scholarly practice. Over the ensuing years, we have found ourselves returning repeatedly to the concept in our discussions. We decided to explore generous scholarship theoretically and to turn the idea into an actionable framework, which is the main contribution of this paper.

Initially, we were aware of two papers (Knowles, 2017; Russell, 2006) that used the explicit term *generous scholarship*. Russell (2006) uses the term to inspire environmental education researchers to show open-mindedness and humility in working with colleagues from different disciplines. Knowles (2017) describes writing retreats as settings that foster generous scholarship. We found generous scholarship to be a compelling term, yet it had not been taken up in the scholarly literature.

In our explorations of generous scholarship, we also turned to papers that advance similar notions. Under the phrasing of *intellectual generosity*, Thorne (2013) urges those in the field of nursing to mentor students, review journal articles, and share their wisdom to “develop the broader scholarship base for the discipline” (p. 279). Macfarlane (2017) identifies *collaboration-as-intellectual generosity* as the most idealistic type of collaboration. Arber and Gallagher (2009) define *generosity of spirit* as a combination of *generous heartedness* and *generous mindedness*, where the self is open to others, given to others, affected by others, and able to cope with demanding and disruptive people. Losh (2018) identifies *generosity* as one of five attributes (along with hospitality, reciprocity, foresight, and responsibility) of the people who have mentored her. She provides no clear definition of generosity but associates the term with demonstrating appreciation for others' ideas through citations and open conversations, providing feedback that advantages novices and outsiders, accepting career choices that differ from one's own, and extending one's support beyond those groups to whom one has formal obligations. Joy (2013) advocates for *generous reading*, which entails radical openness to others' intellectual projects and continual encouragement to “think again.” Davis (2010) explains that *generous critique* involves giving credit for existing strengths and contributions while engaging critically with problems or weaknesses and suggesting possible improvements. Caddell and Wilder (2018) advocate for *compassionate collegiality* built upon a foundation of care and kindness enacted through the generous sharing of time, ideas, and guidance. Others promote the importance of *compassion* (Maginess & MacKenzie, 2018; Tsui, 2013; Waddington, 2016), *collegiality* (Hall, 2002; Nagy, 2014; Tight, 2014), *academic kindness* (O'Brien, Graf, & McKellar, 2019; Talbot & Pownall, 2020), *academic friendship* (Enslin & Hedge, 2019; Metcalfe & Blanco, 2021), and *responsibility* (Hall, 2002; Noxolo, 2009). None of these papers, however, captures the depth and richness that we associate with generous scholarship.

We delved more deeply into the notion of generous scholarship through an in-depth comparison of Russell (2006) and Knowles (2017) in an effort to elicit common working principles. We enriched our conceptualisation of generous scholarship by extending our analysis to related constructs. We specifically attempted to conceptualise generous scholarship, the ways in which it could be enacted, and implications for praxis. These efforts led us to identify five principles of generous scholarship: social praxis, reciprocity, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, and agency.

In this article, our goal is to articulate key principles of generous scholarship that can be enacted across a range of disciplines. We describe the process and the outcomes of our research to encourage further discussions on this topic and inspire academics to enact these five principles as a foundation for scholarly praxis.

Methods

In this project, we used a descriptive theory-generating research design (Fawcett & Downs, 1986) with a focus on exploring the emerging concept of generous scholarship and developing a robust conceptual framework. Figure 1 provides an overview of the methodological approach we used in conceptualising generous scholarship.

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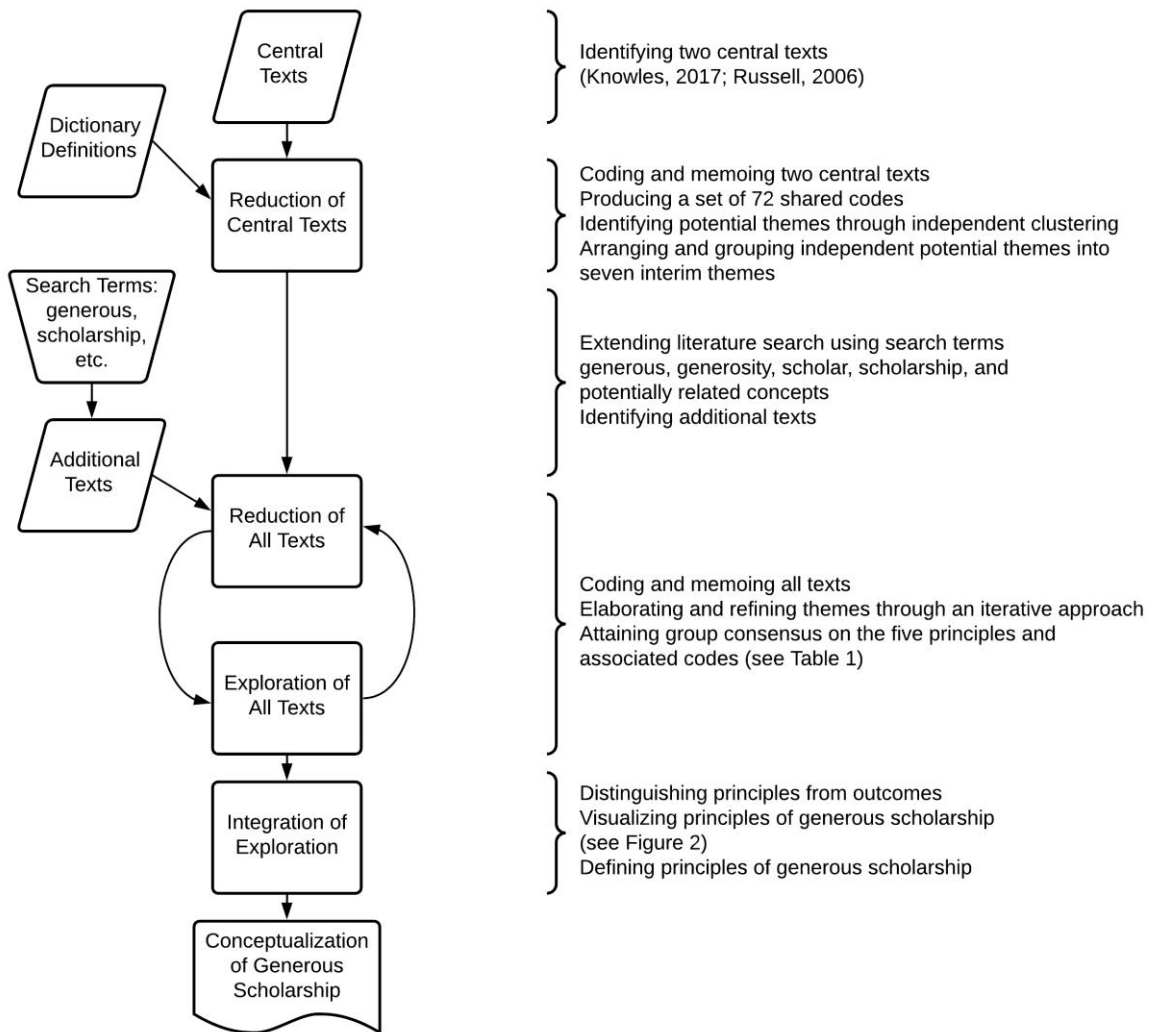


Figure 1 Methodological approach used to conceptualise generous scholarship

Descriptive theory-generating research design

The term generous scholarship is used in a small set of published papers (Craig, 2020; Knowles, 2017; Macleod, 2020; Russell, 2006, 2016), but no coherent definition is provided. We therefore felt it was important to identify the characteristics of the concept and to theorise the structural relations between those characteristics. As Fawcett and Downs (1986) explain, descriptive theory development is a process suited to answering *what-is* questions, such as our guiding questions:

- What is generous scholarship?
- What are its actions?
- What are its implications for scholarly life and the academy?

To answer these questions, we adopted a qualitative methodological approach to analyse textual data and develop a thematic network of ideas (Attride-Stirling, 2001) related to generous scholarship. Throughout our investigation, we also contemplated the relevance of identity development for scholars, aspirations toward being particular kinds of scholars, and purposeful and intentional decisions around constructing and enacting particular scholarly identities. Our position was that, as academics, we must return something of value to communities and that the benefit of our scholarly work must be larger than building curriculum vitae. For us, the construct of generous scholarship seemed to have potential to achieve these goals and change academia.

Data analysis and results

Data for our study consisted of academic papers (i.e. textual data) that use generous scholarship or related terms. Attride-Stirling (2001) provides a detailed and structured approach to qualitatively analysing textual data and providing a visual representation of themes and connections between them. This process consists of three stages: (a) reduction or breakdown of text, (b) exploration of text, and (c) integration of exploration to present findings. We followed this iterative process of continual abstraction and interpretation as illustrated in Figure 1, and as described in the following sections.

Reduction of central texts

Knowles (2017) and Russell (2006) were the two central texts that launched our analysis. To clarify the existing understanding of generous scholarship and to articulate the features of this concept, the initial phase of analysis engaged all four team members in deep reading of these two central texts, constructing individual lists of codes for each text, and memoing about generous scholarship and our analysis process. We then met, compared our code lists and memos, and discussed them to clarify any discrepancies. Following the tradition of qualitative analysis, we also kept minutes from all meetings.

Noticing that Knowles (2017) and Russell (2006) do not use the same words to describe generous scholarship, and that the same words may not have the same meaning, our memos included lists of terms and meanings according to the two texts. For example, the code “reach others where they are” in Russell (2006) relates to “use common language” (p. 409) and be “willing to confront and acknowledge our own deeply cherished assumptions” (p. 409), whereas for Knowles (2017) “reach others where they are” relates to providing “tailored workshops, consultations, and peer review” (p. 58).

During this phase of analysis, we also coded the ideas that Knowles (2017) identified as contradictions to generous scholarship: silence, neoliberal values, demoralisation, isolation, performativity, stress, individualism, time-poor or time-stretched academics, the publishing imperative, and the productivity imperative. These codes helped us establish important boundaries when grouping and labelling themes related to generous scholarship.

We also consulted dictionary definitions of *generous* and its synonyms. Our attention was drawn to the definitions “liberal in giving” and “characterised by a noble or kindly spirit” (Generous, n.d.). Applying these definitions to *scholarship* confirmed our sense that *generous scholarship* could be a virtue of the heart and of the intellect.

We collectively reviewed and discussed the initial codes to determine which concepts were essential to generous scholarship. We also explored what is scholarship but not generous, compared to what is generous but not scholarship. We concentrated on distinguishing and removing codes that could reflect concepts other than generous scholarship. This review prompted us to question whether the initial codes “writing confidence” (assigned to Knowles, 2017, pp. 54, 59, and elsewhere) and “writerly identity” (assigned on p. 58 and elsewhere) were specific to writing retreats or applicable to generous scholarship, so we marked them for potential removal.

Through these extended discussions, we created a list of 72 shared codes. This list includes 56 codes drawn from either of the central texts (Knowles, 2017; Russell, 2006); 1 code (*honest*) that appeared in neither central text but had been deemed as essential to generous scholarship during our collective coding discussions; and 15 codes (identified by asterisks) from Knowles (2017) that we had not yet deleted but thought were possibly more relevant to writing and writing retreats than to generous scholarship.

The next step involved identifying potential themes from the 72 shared codes. Three of the team members individually clustered the codes into thematic categories, including the asterisked codes only if they deemed them essential for generous scholarship. The goal was for each coder to create approximately 6–10 potential themes.

In the following face-to-face meeting, the four of us compared the three individual clusters of potential themes and discussed them in detail in relation to our understandings about the characteristics of generous scholarship. This process involved working back and forth between the two central texts (Knowles, 2017; Russell, 2006) and continually revisiting and refining our understandings of generous scholarship. We found this process to be an effective way to organise our individual and collective understandings of the concept.

Together, we aligned the clusters and codes from each of the individual coders into coherent groupings (Attride-Stirling, 2001). We reviewed each cluster identified by the independent coders as potential themes to decide if and how these themes could fit together. We reviewed the excluded codes to ensure that we had not overlooked an important component, and we inspected the codes that had the potential to fit under multiple themes or possibly be distinct. Additionally, we considered if any higher order categories or relationships should be signaled (e.g. think, feel, act; structure, action). At this stage, no obvious higher order structure emerged.

This phase of the analysis led us to seven interim themes: social praxis, peer learning, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, agency, intentionality, and professional integrity.

Reduction of all texts

As we were working to refine the interim themes identified through our analyses of the two central texts, we extended our data sources through successive additional literature searches using the terms: generous, generosity, scholars, scholarship, scholarly identity, and potentially related concepts that arose during the coding of the central texts and in our analysis meetings (e.g.

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academic friendship, academic kindness, agency, collaboration, collegiality, compassion, engaged scholarship, integrity, intellectual virtues, open-mindedness, responsibility, service scholarship).

Individual members of the team read and coded these additional texts, which then contributed to subsequent group discussions. Our primary focus was on coding texts located with the search terms *generous* or *generosity*, including three additional sources (Craig, 2020; Macleod, 2020; Russell, 2016) that use the term *generous scholarship*. We were more selective in coding the texts located through the other search terms, focusing our attention on text segments that could elucidate characteristics associated with generosity.

Coding these additional texts affirmed the appropriateness of the shared codes and interim themes across different disciplines (education, higher education, nursing, social psychology, social work, sociology, women's studies, geography, philosophy, theology, rhetoric and composition, medieval studies, digital humanities, mathematics, organisation studies) and across the three areas of scholarly practice (i.e. research, teaching, and service).

Exploration of all texts

We iteratively explored the codes and themes in view of the entire set of texts (the two central texts plus the additional texts), summarised them, and worked to develop a cohesive interpretation of generous scholarship. With reference to our initial list of seven interim themes (social praxis, peer learning, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, agency, intentionality, and professional integrity), we reread portions of the texts that directly related to these themes, discussed relationships within and between the themes, and consolidated citations from our sources to describe the themes. In summarising our findings, we determined that our thematic analysis was leading us to a set of principles that characterise generous scholarship.

We decided to rename peer learning as reciprocity, which joined social praxis, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, and agency as the five core principles of generous scholarship. We determined that the remaining interim themes (intentionality and professional integrity) did not stand as principles. We came to see intentionality as a subcomponent of agency. In contrast, we saw professional integrity as embedded across the principles. Drawing upon the conceptual analysis by Banks (2010), we considered professional integrity to entail three components: (a) conduct that is morally right and consistent with (b) commitment to a set of related values and (c) the capacity to engage in reflexive sense-making while being accountable for one's decisions and actions in relation to those values. This overarching perspective on professional integrity places it at the heart of generous scholarship; however, a scholar who holds a different set of values could act with professional integrity without upholding the principles of generous scholarship. These refinements left us with a set of five principles of generous scholarship: social praxis, reciprocity, generous heartedness, generous mindedness, and agency.

At this stage, our definitions of the principles still contained some ambiguities. Although most of the concepts coded in our initial stages later became either principles of generous scholarship or were embedded in these principles, there were some codes that spoke more to potential outcomes of this approach to scholarly life than to the principles. One such feature was Knowles' (2017) contention that writing retreats help to foster "intellectual (and spiritual) replenishment" (p. 78). We felt that this concept of replenishment applies beyond the context of writing retreats; however, it speaks to the benefits (i.e. outcomes) of generous scholarship rather than constituting one of the principles.

After removing these potential outcomes from our conceptualisation of principles and their subcomponents, we continued to explore relations among the five principles. We noted potential tensions in our conceptualisation between actions that benefit individual scholars and those that benefit others or communities. We realised that we needed to distinguish between generous scholars and generous scholarly communities to understand generous scholarship. With group consensus on the final set of five principles, we proceeded with the final stage of analysis to integrate our findings.

Integration of exploration

Attride-Stirling (2001) calls this last step of analysis, "integration of exploration" (p. 391). In this stage, we returned to our research questions (What is generous scholarship? What are its actions? What are its implications for scholarly life and the academy?) and refined the principles of generous scholarship and their relationships. The final set of five principles (social praxis, reciprocity, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, and agency) and the associated codes are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1 Five Principles of Generous Scholarship and the Associated Codes

Principles	Codes	Russell (2006)	Knowles (2017)
Social Praxis	Collaboration, cooperation	√	√
	Collegiality, culture of collegiality, collegial network, collegial ethos		√
	Vigorous culture		√
	Common goal to contribute to knowledge	√	√
	Common good	√	
	Common language	√	
	Community, community of scholars	√	√
	Social practice		√
	Discourse communities	√	
	Relationships, social interactions, social networking, sociality, connectedness		√
	Supportive network		√
Reciprocity	Reciprocal relations, reciprocity, sharing		√
	Peer learning, partnerships, non-hierarchical mentoring		√
	Capacity building	√	√
	Bridge difference	√	√
	Cross-disciplinary alliance, university-wide citizenship	√	√
Generous Mindedness	Learning focus, prioritising learning	√	√
	Attentive	√	√
	Intellectual generosity	√	√
	Intellectual support		√
	Reach others where they are	√	√
	Imaginative or playful engagement	√	√
	Vigorous debate	√	
	Intellectual openness, open-mindedness	√	√
	Confront assumptions	√	√
	Plurality of ideas, canvas and share diverse perspectives	√	√
	Constructive	√	
	Ongoing conversations	√	√
	Critical, critical dialectical discourse, critical conversations	√	√
	Difficult conversations	√	√
	Honest feedback, careful feedback process	√	√
Expertise sharing		√	
Explaining	√		
Generous Heartedness	Affirming		√
	Ego-less	√	
	Humble, humility	√	√
	Kind		√
	Non-antagonistic, non-adversarial	√	
	Good will	√	
	Respectful	√	√
	Thoughtful	√	
	Listening	√	√
	Building trust, gaining trust	√	√
	Sharing struggles, vulnerability	√	√
	Helping others, being supportive	√	√
	Nurturing		√
Committing time to others	√	√	
Agency	Sense of agency	√	√
	Responsibility, obligation	√	√
	Courage to practice	√	√
	Intentionality	√	
	Motivation		√
	Taking action	√	√
	Contributing	√	√

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The next step was to develop a model to reflect the interrelations among these principles. We discussed various metaphors (e.g. tree, fruits, seeds) and a concept map as means to organise the five principles. Each of us individually created an image that was discussed at a subsequent meeting. A final diagram illustrating the five principles of generous scholarship is presented and discussed in the next section.

Limitations of the approach

We developed this descriptive theory inductively, starting with a small number of available sources explicit to “generous scholarship” before expanding to other sources using the concept of “generosity” and related notions. Acknowledging that qualitative data analysis is a subjective process, our goal was to develop a theory situated in the richness of academics’ experiences of social life. To increase the credibility of our findings and conclusions, we provided a detailed audit trail of the research process (Thyer, 2012). Following Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) guiding principles, we sought to achieve authenticity by comparing different academic realities, reviewing literature from different disciplines, and describing (rather than prescribing) actions that would potentially empower scholarly communities. By doing so, we attempted to maximise study rigour, transparency of the research process, trustworthiness of the data and data interpretation, and clarity of our ontologies and epistemologies as scholars.

Conceptualisation of the principles of generous scholarship

We identified five core principles essential for generous scholarship: social praxis, reciprocity, generous heartedness, generous mindedness, and agency (see Figure 2). The first two (social praxis and reciprocity) are requisite characteristics of scholarly communities in which generous scholarship can be enacted. The latter three (generous heartedness, generous mindedness, and agency) are simultaneously collective features of generous scholarly communities and individual features of the generous scholars within those communities.

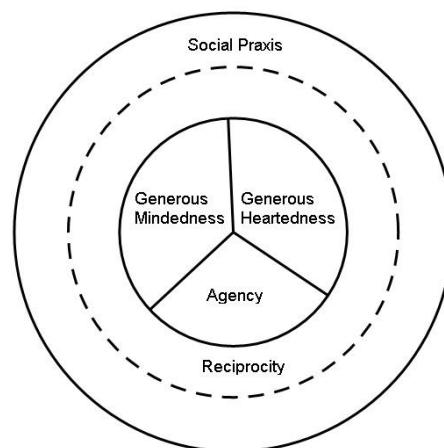


Figure 2 The principles of generous scholarship

Social praxis defines the environment in which generous scholarship can be enacted. Generous scholarship is rooted in discursive, collaborative, and collegial communities of scholarly practice. Such communities negotiate, develop, and sustain social networks guided by common professional values, language, and goals. The members are committed to developing and maintaining relationships that are ever expanding and deepening, providing a vigorous culture (Knowles, 2017) that is dynamic and alive. Generous scholarship foregrounds collegiality and peer support as obligations for academics (Hall, 2002; Nagy, 2014). Attention is devoted not just to individual needs, but also to the collective common good.

Reciprocity is integral to the interrelations within generous scholarship. Interactions among generous scholars involve peer-to-peer learning partnerships and mentoring that seek to be non-hierarchical and reciprocal (Knowles, 2017). Chain reactions and circular generosity occur in which generous acts by one individual prompt generous acts from other individuals (Barnett & Land, 2007; Burwell & Huyser, 2014; Narayanan, 2020). These are multidirectional relationships in which generous scholars learn with and from other generous scholars across career stages, expertise, and experiences. Reciprocal mentoring has positive implications for the learning and success of individuals and of the scholarly community (Harvey et al., 2009; Richter et al., 2020). These interactions may be difficult in nature and sometimes require bridging differences to increase synergy and build scholarly capacity within and across disciplines and communities (Russell, 2006, 2016). Reciprocal relations between and among members of a generous scholarly community provide the necessary environment for the remaining principles to flourish.

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Generous mindedness is focused on using mental energy to advance another individual or their ideas (Kupfer, 1998) and to appreciate the positive aspects of others' situations or perspectives (Arber & Gallagher, 2009). Intellectual support and intellectual generosity are at the heart of the engagement. Generous mindedness emphasises cognitive or intellectual components, prioritises learning, and affirms others as scholars. Expertise is shared through ongoing conversations characterised by constructively critical and honest feedback, even when this necessitates engagement with difficult topics (Russell, 2006, 2016). Generous mindedness involves acknowledging existing strengths and contributions while providing specific suggestions to address any problems or weaknesses (Davis, 2010). Rich criticism involves evaluation on terms appropriate to the work not limited by the status quo or standard metrics (Bartlett, 2018). Ideas are advanced by considering multiple perspectives and confronting assumptions (Russell, 2006). Generous mindedness demands an open mind and attentiveness to other individuals and their perspectives to reach them where they are (Knowles, 2017). It entails vigorous and courageous intellectual exploration that is at the same time imaginative or playful (Russell, 2006). Generous mindedness requires effort and involves valuing, having faith in, and supporting others to excel (Arber & Gallagher, 2009; Kupfer, 1998).

Generous heartedness is focused on the emotional needs and feelings of others (Arber & Gallagher, 2009; Kupfer, 1998). It involves being responsive and attentive to others (Barnett & Land, 2007). This focus is reinforced through a humble and ego-less stance that emphasises building trust, sharing struggles or vulnerabilities, and expressing gratitude (Russell, 2006, 2016). Generous scholars and generous scholarly communities adopt nurturing and affirmative approaches that emphasise compassion, emotional giving, kindness, forgiveness, and good will toward others (Knowles, 2017). They try to understand and remain attentive to other peoples' positions and needs. Generous heartedness is evident in the time devoted toward careful listening, thoughtful and respectful engagement, and non-antagonist and non-adversarial comments (Russell, 2006).

Having a sense of *agency* means consciously practising generous scholarship by embracing, embodying, and modelling each of the principles. Generous scholarship involves deliberate choice and commitment (Diprose, 2002; Hall, 2002; Roberts & Wood, 2007). This commitment to generous scholarship is both intentional and motivational, resulting in taking action to contribute to the scholarly community, the field, and society (Russell, 2006, 2016). It takes courage to practise generous scholarship (Fowl, 2001; Russell, 2006; Taylor, 2018) and to challenge the competitive, individualistic, and managerial culture of the academy (Craig, 2020; Knowles, 2017; Sutherland, 2018). Generous scholars act because they *want to* rather than because they *have to* (Nagy, 2014), which defines this type of agency as epistemic (Elgin, 2013). There is intentionality in the actions of generous scholars and their scholarly communities. They take responsibility for contributing to knowledge building and scholarly development as a matter of professional integrity (Banks, 2010).

Discussion and conclusion

Our approach in embarking on this study was initially informed by the scant literature on generous scholarship. We became aware of this concept through our participation in and writing about residential writing retreats. Initially, we knew only two sources (Knowles, 2017; Russell, 2006) that used the term. Extensive literature searches led us to three others (Craig, 2020; Macleod, 2020; Russell, 2016). Nevertheless, we were intrigued by the apparent connections between the brief explanations of generous scholarship in these texts and themes emerging from our residential writing retreat data (see Ratković et al., 2019). Our process of meaning making included exploration of the features of generous scholarship and similar constructs through the academic literature across multiple disciplines. To ground our understanding of the phenomenon, we also used our experiences as academics, facilitators of academic writing retreats and learning activities, and mentors. A descriptive theory-generating research design (Fawcett & Downs, 1986) guided us in answering the research questions (What is generous scholarship? What are its actions? What are its implications for scholarly life and the academy?).

Generous scholarship is enacted through social praxis, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, reciprocity, and agency. These principles of generous scholarship align with the enablers for praxis that Mahon, Heikkinen, and Huttunen (2019) identified. Commonly, this praxis takes form as a collegial and communal approach to scholarship. One of the potential outcomes of practising generous scholarship is "intellectual (and spiritual) replenishment" (Knowles, 2017, p. 78).

Generous scholars are generous with their time (e.g. committed to mentoring, peer review, and engaged conversations), which may prompt some scholars to fear that engaging in such scholarship could deplete their personal reserves and undermine assessments of their work and career progress according to traditional measures of scholarly merit. Practising generous scholarship at a neoliberal, competitive academic institution may be perceived as a risk for academics, especially those in early career. For some, there is a fear that giving time and attention to others and promoting their work could undermine available time, attention, and credit for one's own work (Caddell & Wilder, 2018). However, this is not the way generous scholarship works. Instead, generous scholarship has the potential to foster positive outcomes that arise through practising reciprocity, nurturing collegiality, and building community. Resulting opportunities for shared knowledge building, collaboration, co-authorship, friendly relations, and well-being enhance scholarly quality and productivity.

Some scholars might prefer individual, solitary work over collaboration and social praxis. Recognising the value of such scholarship, we are also aware that the most praised words in academia today are collaboration, partnership, engagement, and openness (including open-access publishing, open education resources, open data, open science, and citizen science, among others; see Fecher & Friesike, 2014; Vicente-Sáez & Martínez-Fuentes, 2018). This trend is evident in the strategic priorities of universities and research funding agencies around the globe. Academia is emerging as an agent of collaboration, research partnerships, and

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openness. In this landscape, the principles of social praxis, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, reciprocity, and agency have potential to advance and transform scholarly praxis, postsecondary institutions, and society.

The texts analysed and our professional experience suggest that a collegial, giving approach to scholarship helps to mitigate the sense of isolation and depletion of energy that may result from the managerial, production-oriented focus that is prevalent in academia and especially in the current COVID-19 context. Generosity is an important countermeasure against competition, fragmentation, and managerialism (Craig, 2020; Morris, 2020; Sutherland, 2018). However, individual generosity “alone can never be enough” (Back, 2018, p. 123); it takes a community, and it takes time. Generous scholars contribute to each other’s growth and scholarly productivity, and they inspire others to behave similarly. As a critical mass of individuals and institutions endorse generous scholarship, there is potential to shape a vibrant cadre of academics, replenished in mind and spirit.

Contribution to theory

Our contribution to theory is in developing the principles of generous scholarship and the associated conceptual framework. Qualitative researchers often explore understudied areas and search for emergent theory (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In such a context, a conceptual framework is important for defining the main ideas and their relationships (Becker, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) define conceptual framework as a visual or written product, one that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts or variables—and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). Using a descriptive theory approach was appropriate in a situation when very little was known about the phenomenon. Our work resulted in a theory that is simple, consistent, and clearly described through its five principles. Triangulating the textual analysis with evidence from our academic lives generated insights that support this theory.

Conceptual frameworks guide research, providing interpretation and understanding rather than explanation and prediction (Jabareen, 2009). As such, our conceptual framework for generous scholarship helps to “better understand [a] phenomenon linked to multiple bodies of knowledge situated in multiple disciplines” (Jabareen, 2009, p. 57). The five generous scholarship principles present categories with fluid boundaries and, although we attempted to visualise their fit, the aim of developing descriptive theory was not to establish research-based relationships among its elements. We invite scholars to consider, test, and refine this framework when building and reflecting on their scholarship and their scholarly identities.

Contribution to practice

This article will inform academics, university administrators, and higher education policy-makers on how to address or resist the pressures in the current academic context and carve a space for generous scholarship. By following the principles of social praxis, generous heartedness, generous mindedness, reciprocity, and agency, different stakeholders can support and sustain collegiality. As practitioners of generous scholarship, they can enrich and replenish their intellectual and spiritual selves, which will in turn inspire further commitment and action. This approach could transform academia and renew society, thereby fulfilling Boyer’s (1990) vision of scholarship. The core principles of generous scholarship align well with the guiding ideas of ethical and responsible citizenry. We note that generosity within this framework must not be misinterpreted as an excuse for violating conflict-of-interest policies, intellectual property rights, or authorship conventions. Generous scholarship demands active and responsible engagement from all scholars.

Conclusion

Based upon literature from multiple disciplines and our personal experiences as academics, we identified the five principles of generous scholarship and created a generous scholarship conceptual framework. Given that the concept of generous scholarship already existed, but its theory was underdeveloped, this article advances understanding incrementally, presenting a practical theoretical contribution. It “focus[es] on prescriptions for structuring and organising around a phenomenon and less on how science can further delineate or understand the phenomenon” (Corley & Gioia, 2011, p. 18).

Although generous scholarship does not necessarily require developing deep relationships among scholars (e.g. when peer reviewing journal articles or publishing in open-access journals), we are convinced that developing caring, generous, and long-lasting relationships among colleagues has potential to nurture the intellectual, emotional, social, and well-being needs of all scholars. We take great solace in the knowledge that we are not the only ones working to “shape the academe we want rather than the academe we have” (Netolicky, Barnes, & Heffernan, 2018, p. 180).

Through our collaboration in developing this conceptual framework and writing this article, our professional relations became warmer; we are colleagues who became friends. In the discussions, we recognised different areas in which generous scholarship principles could help us become better researchers, teachers, mentors, role models, and colleagues. For us, the implications are that one can be simultaneously a generous scholar and an exemplary academic, and that academia, by espousing generous scholarship, may become not less effective, but instead, a more effective and caring, happier and healthier working environment.

Generous scholarship can assist scholars in resisting the pressures in the current context and carving a space for an academic world of social praxis, generous mindedness, generous heartedness, reciprocity, and agency. Building on Thorne’s (2013) intellectual

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generosity, we call on academics to keep discovering and promoting ways to bring generous scholarship out of the shadows and to celebrate its potential to transform academia.

Authors' note

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