

## Embracing Risk: Education Beyond Market Logics

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In “Generosity Without a Name Tag,” Kanako Ide explores the moral value of anonymous generosity through the Italian tradition of *caffè sospeso*, where individuals anonymously prepay for a coffee to be gifted to someone else.<sup>1</sup> Through three metaphorical cups of coffee, Ide illustrates how anonymous generosity strengthens community bonds and carries unique moral significance beyond market logic. She argues for moral education that sustains this practice, highlighting how market logics can distort ethical practices and reduce genuine generosity to transactional exchange. Ide’s paper also raises critical questions about the limitations of anonymous generosity, such as which forms of generosity necessitate personal connection and which ethical relations depend on mutual recognition.

Echoing Michael Sandel, Ide warns that “moral reasoning and market reasoning are different, and that when the two are collated into the same scale of investment, it actually harms people’s natural sense of morality.” I share this concern and extend it education. I argue that, like anonymous generosity, education must be shielded from market-driven influence to preserve its ethical and transformative dimensions. My response unfolds in three sections: (1) I explore how anonymous generosity avoids market transformation by preventing recognition of the giver, (2) I discuss non-transactional models of pedagogy, such as Gert Biesta’s “gift of teaching,” and (3) I describe why education, like anonymous generosity, must resist market-based reasoning to remain genuinely educational.

### BEYOND “MUTUAL EXCHANGE”

Ide argues that anonymous generosity avoids transforming into a “mutual exchange” because it lacks any expectation of return. With her metaphor of the first cup of coffee, she illustrates a transactional relationship where a businessperson “gifts” a coffee to a potential client, motivated by a “return on investment” rather than genuine generosity. In such cases, reciprocity becomes

compulsory, driven by obligation rather than any ethical reasoning. “Gifts” in this schema are constrained by the terms of an exchange and may create a sense of indebtedness in our relations.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Ide’s second metaphorical cup of coffee, shared with a friend, represents a “gift economy” that fosters friendship, loyalty, and trust. She illustrates this through the “ordinary economy” of first-generation Japanese Americans in Hawaii, who created mutual aid systems to support one another in times of need. While this form of giving can foster strong social connections and express shared commitments, it may still carry expectations of reciprocity, such as gratitude or future favors.

Market values and neoliberal logics increasingly shape various aspects of contemporary life, such as cost-optimizing daily purchases, “investing” in self-care routines, and even optimizing partnerships. Education is no exception to this influence. Accountability-driven policies have increasingly steered teacher-student relationships toward a transactional model. In my previous work on Nel Noddings’ “caring relations,” I explored how such shifts can undermine the affective relationships Noddings championed.<sup>3</sup> Institutional priorities focused on economic outcomes, such as promoting “college and career readiness” even for young students, risk turning pedagogical relationships into transactional, outcome-driven interactions, flattening their dynamic potential into a market-driven exchange.

### PEDAGOGY WITHOUT EXCHANGE

Building on Ide’s examination of *caffè sospeso*, I argue that education must resist being transformed by market-driven logics. Her metaphorical anonymous coffee disrupts transactional norms by removing the opportunity for mutual recognition. Anonymity preserves the integrity of generosity by removing any expectation of return. By removing the obligation of reciprocity, the act remains genuinely generous—a perspective that offers valuable insights for educational practice.

Gert Biesta’s concept of the “gift of teaching” exemplifies such a model, where educators offer something “radically new” to students without any guar-

antee of acceptance—mirroring the essence of anonymous generosity.<sup>4</sup> Here teaching is understood as a dynamic, unpredictable encounter where teachers may offer something in the pedagogical relation, but they cannot compel students to accept it. This inherently risky dynamic safeguards student agency, allowing them to act as “subjects of action and responsibility” and engage critically with their world and others.<sup>5</sup> While market logics are guided by markers of efficiency, productivity, and profit, *educational* relationships are marked by risk, receptivity, and unpredictability. This risk nurtures responsiveness, encourages meaningful engagement, and preserves education’s transformative capacity.

### RESISTING MARKETIZATION

Anonymous generosity flourishes when donors relinquish control, fostering trust and building community ties by rejecting the commodification of human relationships. In contrast, standards-based, accountability-driven education initiatives impose predictable outcomes, restricting opportunities for genuine surprise and growth. Rather than constraining educational outcomes to market goals, I maintain that pedagogical relations should embrace the inherent risks and unpredictability intrinsic to human relationships. As Ide’s first cup of coffee metaphor illustrates, transactional exchanges reshape not only the gift, but the relationship itself. Like anonymous generosity, education must reject market-based reasoning and resist neoliberal influences to safeguard its capacity for authentic, transformative encounters.

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### REFERENCES

1 Kanako Ide, “Generosity Without a Name Tag: Educational Wisdom in the Spirit of *Il Caffè Sospeso*,” *Philosophy of Education* 80, no. 3 (same issue). <https://doi.org/10.47925/80.3.062>

2 For more on “indebtedness” and education, see: Jason Thomas Wozniak, “Towards a Rhythmanalysis of Debt Dressage: Education as Rhythmic Resistance in Everyday Indebted Life,” *Policy Futures in Education* 15, no. 4 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210317715798>

3 Jessica Lussier, “Reciprocity, Exchange, and Indebtedness in Nodding’s

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4 Gert Biesta, “Receiving the Gift of Teaching: From ‘Learning from’ to ‘Being Taught by,’” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32, no. 5 (2013): 449. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9312-9>

5 Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (2013; repr. New York: Routledge, 2016), 64. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315635866>