

RECIPROCITY

Why read this text..

In its broadest sense, the term reciprocity refers to reciprocity - it is a basic human dynamic of mutual exchange. However, as you may know, reciprocity is not only about the exchange of goods, gifts and knowledge, but it can also refer to services or deeds. Such forms of exchange are commonly idealised as "voluntary", but if you look at it more closely, you can see that giving also involves socio-moral pressure. Namely, that one can expect social sanctions if one does not return a gift, which (in the worst case) can lead to the end of a social relationship. Mutuality is thus characterized by the fact that it is both free and obligatory. The reciprocation does not have to take place immediately after the first gift. The return of a gift may take some time (Mauss 1997). Using a simple example from the education sector, a reciprocal action could look like this: A pupil helps another pupil with his maths homework. She passes on her knowledge. She expects him to support her when she needs help with learning. If he refuses, this leads to a bad mood between the two or even to the end of a friendship.

Historical Context

One of the first scholars to explore the principle of reciprocity was Bronislaw Malinowski in the early 20th century on the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea. There he discovered a barter system, which was referred to by the inhabitants as "Kula". In the Kula ring (a ring of islands) necklaces circulate in one direction and bracelets in the other. If a necklace was given as a gift, it must have been returned with a bracelet. It is important that these pieces of jewellery are not allowed to be kept, but always to be passed on. The more you give away, the greater the honour and prestige. The time between giving and giving back can vary between minutes or years. However, it is forbidden to return something immediately, as this would be equivalent to a trade relationship, which is not the case here. It is a gift that is "total" (Mauss 1997), as it encompasses not only economic but also political, social and religious-symbolic dimensions and guarantees the interdependence of the parties involved.

Max Weber also dealt with the concept of reciprocity – but more indirectly in developing the concept of "social action". His focus was not on mutual action, but on mutual expectations. Similar to that Georg Simmel was the first to write about gift and return in his work. He stated that every interaction between people is shaped by a balance between giving and taking. Marcel Mauss also wrote in 1925 about a phenomenon that he called "the gift". He uses the Kula system from the Trobriand Islands as a model to create his theory of gift exchange. Mauss also examined a north-american system called "potlach". The core of this exchange system is that everyone gives away as much as possible. The more one gives, the higher is one's reputation. If something is given to a person, it is just as

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required to give something back. It is not about the gift itself, but about the process of giving and in the case of the Potlatch even outdoing each other (Mauss 1997).

a) Discussion

Reciprocity refers to the mutual compensation of "obligation". It is not superficially about the exchange of gifts or material goods. It is not the gift itself that is in the foreground, but the relationships that arise in the process of reciprocity. The system of reciprocity has long been considered part of human behavior. As mentioned above, Georg Simmel assumes that every interaction between people involves a system of giving and taking. The relationships that arise are often of longer duration. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that a certain amount of time may pass between giving a gift and returning it. It is often even enshrined in the norms of a society that a gift may not be returned immediately because otherwise it would be a one-time trade relationship. Rather, it is about an exchange relationship that exists over a longer period of time. The German sociologist Stegbauer (2011) distinguishes four main forms of reciprocity: direct, generalized, reciprocity of positions and the reciprocity of perspectives (ibid.).

Direct reciprocity is about a direct exchange between two or more people. The exchanged gifts must be equivalent to settle the respective debt with the other. Similarly, Mauss identified the basic dynamic within the exchange of gifts: First, a person donates an opening gift. This is followed by the acceptance of this gift. This is mandatory and standards and rules often apply. At the end, a return gift must be made (Mauss 1997).

Especially in the field of education and thus the exchange of knowledge, reciprocity in the classroom could be applied to involve everyone part of the pedagogical/schooling relation. However, according to the educational anthropologist Wolcott, reciprocity is seen as something negative ("negative reciprocity") in this area because few teachers can imagine what students can teach them (Wolcott 1977).

Generalized reciprocity means, on the one hand, generalization over a period of time and, on the other hand, generalization about a group to which one feels one belongs. With a generalization over a period, one means accomplished achievements, which one can no longer assign well to a previous achievement. An example would be intergenerational reciprocity, considering the parent-child relationship. Children need a lot of help from their parents in their early years. But they cannot give anything back at that time. This is called a postponement of return service.

The reciprocity of roles refers to the relationship between two persons. The roles that these two people take are on the one hand attributed to them by their environment, but they are also acting independently. Reciprocity arises from the fact that one role produces the other. The expectation of one person creates a mutual expectation in the other person. An example of this would be the classic teacher-student relationship. The students expect the teacher to teach them something while the teacher expects the students to be attentive and focused.

The reciprocity of perspectives is linked to the reciprocity of roles. It means the ability of one person to empathize with another. According to the reciprocity of roles, students have teaching expectations on their teachers, but would be able to put themselves in the

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teacher's perspective and try to understand their views.

b) Practical Example

Ruth Paradise and Mariette De Haan did their research with children and youth at the Mazahua, an indigenous group in central Mexico. Many of them speak Spanish as their parents send them to public schools, where only Spanish is taught and where there is often a lack of interest in bilingual or intercultural education. However, the children learn from their parents to switch between two roles. Once they are "knowledge providers" and then again "observing helpers". The system behind this is that everyone in a community can be of help and provide that in certain situations, in other moments s(he) has to watch and learn from other people. This mutual exchange of knowledge already begins in childhood, and is later continued in schools. In a research at a Mazahua indigenous school, this system of reciprocal knowledge exchange was observed among students, as well as between teachers and students. The students were sitting together in classrooms in groups between two and six people. They did their own tasks, but kept looking at what the others were doing, automatically correcting the mistakes and helping each other. At the same time, none of the pupils actively asked for help - but offered it. If a teacher explained something, he was sometimes interrupted by students who wanted to know something more or questioned what had been said. The students contributed their knowledge and actively participated in the class.

This system is also partially used by students in public schools. After class, groups are formed that learn together and help each other. During the lessons, however, the teachers are in control. In an attempt to introduce the Mazahua system to a public school, teachers felt loss of control over teaching as well as loss of hierarchy and authority. "It would have been embarrassing and unpleasant," explained one of the participating teachers. In order to be able to use this system also in public schools, there would have to be a change of the classical "teacher-student relationship". Not only teachers can pass on knowledge, even students already have their own specific knowledge and not only students, but also teachers can learn. (Paradise & De Haan 2009)

This is the prerequisite for the development of reciprocal relationships in which all participants feel seen and included. There are many examples of such design measures around the globe: as a conclusion, we would like to refer to the New Zealand case where the current national curriculum was developed nationally in the 2000s with the involvement of more than 15,000 people - including students, teachers and Maori representatives - and is generally based on the basic idea of "ako", a Maori word describing a reciprocal learning relationship in which all participants learn from each other (see Eley & Berryman 2019).

Thinking further:

- Which practices and/or systems of reciprocity can I identify in my field of work? Are these voluntary and who are its prime initiators and agents?
- What possibilities of reciprocal exchange could there be between me and the learners?



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- What can I do to promote reciprocity between my students?
- What expectations do I have in the reciprocity between myself and the learners? Are they always justified?
- How do I deal with the frustrations of not receiving the amount of cooperation I am expecting and how does it influence my teaching and my treatment of the learners?

KEY-WORDS/ CROSS-REFERENCES

Reflexivity, Doing School,

Sources

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