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## **Pedagogical Explications of Cultural Studies of Jerome Bruner**

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### **Abstract**

The article provides an overview of the pedagogical ideas of Jerome Bruner set out in the work “Culture of Education”. J. Bruner, being a representative of cognitive psychology, considers pedagogical processes from the standpoint of the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky. The pedagogy of J. Bruner is based on the culture of that society in which a child’s thinking is formed. The article highlights three explicative characteristics of J. Bruner's pedagogy. The primary explication is the transition of Bruner’s cognitive psychology into the field of practical pedagogy. The second manifestation of Bruner’s theory explication is the culture concept in pedagogy, forms and methods of practical implementation of this concept. The third manifestation of J. Bruner’s pedagogical explication is the emphases in analysis of the theme of culture and education from the perspective of the relationship between positions of the collective and individual in the system of teaching and upbringing, and mainly the specificity of these relationships according to J. Bruner. In the review, all three manifestations of the pedagogical explication of J. Bruner are concretized in two main elements of J. Bruner’s scientific theory, the first one is the role of culture in the education system in general and in pedagogy in particular. And the second element is the practical reflection of the theme of culture in pedagogical forms and methods, as it is seen by J. Bruner. The article highlights the main idea of J. Bruner that education is ensuring reproduction of the culture on the basis of which it arose. Moreover, not just to reproduce, but to be a conductor of economic, political and cultural goals inherent in a given society. This thesis constitutes the main meaning and spirit of the pedagogical explication of cultural studies of J. Bruner.

**Keywords:** Cultural-historical theory, thinking, cultural studies of pedagogy, culture of education, joint creativity.

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## **Introduction**

The first to speak about the influence of culture on the development of thinking was E. Durkheim. To a large extent, the response of his ideas occurred among psychologists. Here we should mark out the works of the French psychologist Pierre Janet; he was confident that the highest forms of thinking were the result of the specific history of society.

Another scientist, philosopher, anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl believed that the thinking of illiterate people would be different from that of educated people. The primitive thinking, according to the scientist, is devoid of logical judgements and is subject to different rules than the thinking of educated people. Naturally, this theory had its opponents. For example, Rivers insisted that the thinking of people living in primitive conditions is no different from the thinking of educated people. The differences lie in the fact that mental generalizations are expressed in other categories.

The origin of L. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory is also connected with the study of the formation of thinking. For example, the study of nomads of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan gave Vygotsky and Lurii material for certain conclusions related mainly to the role of language and speech as exponents of the character and level of thinking. Language is the most important element in formation of the level of thinking. Thus, Vygotsky, somewhat brings a common denominator to the problems of the human thinking formation, attaching the decisive importance to language and speech.

Vygotsky later noted that illiterate people weakly operated with abstract concepts in solving logical problems and associated the phenomena of argumentation and deduction with their personal practical experience. At one time, Vygotsky emphasized that changes in practical activity, combined with formal education, cause changes in thinking. In addition, a "reconfiguration" of thinking, according to L. Vygotsky, can occur in a relatively short period.

The latter concept, to a large extent, leads to the transition of the problem of thinking formation patterns from the sphere of psychology to the sphere of practical pedagogy, and begins to act as a pedagogical category and becomes the subject of further study.

At the same time, if to talk about the methodological approach, following the position both of J. Bruner and L. Vygotsky, then it will look as follows. The pedagogical sphere is the sphere of the social, i.e. the sphere of culture, culture is the result of historical experience, in a general sense. In a specific sense, these are pedagogical forms and methods of forming or "reconfiguring" of thinking. It is necessary to understand that psychology is the sphere of thinking (internal - intrapsychic), pedagogy is the sphere of behavior (external - interpsychic),

and both spheres are interdependent and mutually determined. But since pedagogy is a culture-dependent phenomenon and performs a formative function, this means that the pedagogical sphere, in our context, is the determining one.

In this sense, we are interested in the pedagogical heritage of J. Bruner, as a supporter of the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky and a representative of the American cognitive psychology. How did the scientist-psychologist see the reflection of his ideas in practical pedagogy, and in this case we will not detail the psychological ideas of J. Bruner as it is impossible to do within one article. Here it is necessary to emphasize that pedagogy is what most psychologists come to one way or another, since it is the field of pedagogy, as the formative sphere of human activity, that is capable of proving the objectivity of the scientific conclusions of psychologists. In turn, pedagogy receives a new scientific component for its activities from the field of psychology and objectively acquires another subject of research. In our case, whereas psychology fixes the situation, indicating the reasons, conditions and options, pedagogy (as a formative factor) is called upon to realize its goals and objectives in practice, taking into account this situation, the reasons and conditions that caused them. From here we will be interested in the question of how the scientific conclusions of J. Bruner, can be used in teaching and upbringing methods according to the scientist himself.

In fact, it is exactly in this question the primary explication of J. Bruner's theory is manifested. Here it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the subject to review will be the pedagogical ideas of J. Bruner outlined in his book "Culture of Education". At the same time, we know that J. Bruner in his scientific work paid considerable attention to the exactly educational psychology (in particular, his brochure "The Learning Process" is devoted to this scientific direction).

Interest in this theme is also stimulated by the fact that "Psychological and pedagogical ideas of J. Bruner, as noted by the researcher E. Astafiev, have been making a huge influence on the theory and practice of education for already more than six decades. Spheres of his main research interests are the cognitive psychology and cognitive learning theory, cultural-historical psychology, child psychology, cross-cultural studies of intelligence, philosophy and cultural studies of education. J. Bruner considered the Soviet psychologist, pedologist and teacher, and creator of the cultural-historical theory of mental development, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934)" [1] one of his teachers.

Interest in Bruner's pedagogical theory is also aroused by the fact that the scientist took an active part in preparing the educational system reform in the United States. As the head of

the research group of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA, he worked on improving the teaching methods for natural and exact sciences. Bruner's book, "The process of education" (1960) [8] is devoted to this process, this work had a great impact on the education system in many countries and was translated into 19 languages [4].

Being a supporter of the cultural-historical theory of L. Vygotsky, J. Bruner puts forward the concepts for applying this theory in pedagogy and in particular in school education.

Considering the theme of bibliography related to the study of the scientific activities of J. Bruner, there emerged a situation that showed that in domestic science the heritage of J. Bruner was studied very modestly.

**The purpose of the article** - to consider the theory of Jerome Bruner's pedagogy from the perspective of his psychological concept of culture, as well as the forms and methods of its implementation, according to the ideas set out in the book "Culture of Education".

In determining the purpose of the article, we can note a secondary manifestation of the pedagogical explication of Bruner's cognitive theory.

**Analysis of the recent research and publications.** It must be emphasized that whereas in the field of cognitive science the theory of J. Bruner received a well-deserved place in psychology, the author's pedagogical views have not been developed in the contemporary domestic scientific literature. It should be noted that not only in the field of development, but even in the field of declaration, the pedagogical ideas of J. Bruner for some reasons did not arouse deep scientific interest, and hereinafter we will try to explain the reasons for this situation.

However, in the scientific community of the USA in the second half of the 20th century. J. Bruner figured prominently. Among foreign researchers of the scientific activity of J. Bruner it is necessary to note the works of J. Gullett, C. Geertz, M. Dafermos, E. Curry, B. Crittenden, P. Setler, S. Shenker, J. Anglin, domestic - N. Vorobyov, B. Wulfson, A. Dzhurinsky, V. Lapchinskaya, Z. Malkova, I. Martsinkovsky, G. Mikaberidze, V. Mitina, N. Nikandrov, V. Pilipovsky, A. Piskunov, V. Razumovsky, O. Miroshnichenko, E. Astafieva.

It is especially necessary to mark out the scientific work of I. Bessarabova in the field of research of the pedagogical heritage of J. Bruner and her dissertation on the theme "The pedagogical views of Jerome Bruner in the context of American education (50s – 90s)" [2].

**Presentation of the main research material.** Since J. Bruner is one of the generally recognized psychologists and pedagogical theorists of the United States of the late 20th and

early 21st centuries, we can see in his ideas and concepts those trends in scientific pedagogy that are still widespread in the United States today.

In our case, in addition to the explications, we will highlight two elements of J. Bruner's scientific thought which are of primary interests for us. The first is the role of culture in the education system in general and in pedagogy in particular. The second is the teaching practice. It is necessary to emphasize the fact that J. Bruner considers psychological and pedagogical processes from the standpoint of the cultural-historical theory of the origin of thinking and represents in his person the cognitive direction in psychology.

The third manifestation of the pedagogical explication of J. Bruner's cultural ideas is the emphases in the analysis of the theme of culture and education. We will place these emphases in the context of the relationship between the positions of collective and individual in the system of teaching and upbringing, and mainly the specifics of these relationships according to J. Bruner.

In our opinion, in the sphere of characteristics of the "culture and education" combination, it is doubtful that Bruner said more than E. Durkheim and certainly than L. Vygotsky or Leontiev. This element in J. Bruner's pedagogical theory rather states the fact of the importance of culture in the educational process than develops a cultural-historical theme. And this statement from J. Bruner manifests itself exclusively within the specifics of the American school education system.

And the second element that we will consider is the practical reflection of the theme of culture in pedagogical forms and methods, as it is seen by J. Bruner.

The first element. J. Bruner, as a psychologist, identified two types of cultural factors that determine the development of higher mental functions: the criterion of significance and language (If to transit this thesis of J. Bruner from the sphere of psychology into the sphere of sociology, it turns out that the criterion of significance is a social value (or a generally accepted social orienting point), and language is speech, as a sign or symbol).

J. Bruner argued that the most important element in the criterion of significance is the individualistic or collectivist orientation of social relations.

Being highlighted by J. Bruner, the theme of collective and individual is very extensive, ambiguous and goes far beyond the scope of psychology or pedagogy. However, this direction in pedagogy remains its relevance up to this day. And this relevance is determined by the valuable meanings of collective and individual in social relations.

This problem originates from culture and is distinguished by the specificity of culture. In the Western culture, an individualistic orientation predominates; in the Orthodox-Slavic culture - a collectivistic one. And the debate about the effectiveness of each of the approaches is meaningless (if we objectively take into account the patterns of cultural development and do not replace these patterns with voluntaristic theories).

In the “Culture of Education” book J. Bruner admitted that his interest in individual psychology in the early stages of his scientific career was not entirely justified. After becoming acquainted with the cultural-historical theory of the origin of thinking by L. Vygotsky [5], his scientific interests, as he writes, “began to shift towards studying the influence of culture” on schoolchildren. And in this sphere, he comes to the notion of “culture” from the position of transpersonal (collective), historical “as the experience of past generations.” One way or another, from the individual in pedagogy, he moves on to the collective and “includes” the individual in culture that, in its essence, has the character of the collective. “... The school, he writes, should not only equip students with knowledge, skills and abilities, but also cultivate them in a sense of belonging to society” [3, p. 100].

Jerome Bruner, like L. Vygotsky, believes that it is the culture that forms the human thinking. It gives us a certain set of means with the help of which each of us constructs not only our own special vision of the world, but also ideas about ourselves and our capabilities. “It is impossible to understand the human thinking without taking into account the cultural environment and the cognitive resources that it contains” [3, p.6-7].

J. Bruner argued that the level of thinking development reflects the degree of internalization of actions with use of tools provided to a person by a given culture. According to him, “freedom from culture” is simply “freedom from intellect.” In other words, let’s say “Freedom from intellect” is “Freedom from culture”, i.e. freedom from history, traditions, norms and rules, those values that have been formed over centuries. A thesis that emphasizes the importance of the theme of culture and its role not only in the education system.

J. Bruner notes: “Education, as an official institution of society, is called upon to educate the younger generation in traditions of the dominant culture” [3, p.29]. At the same time, he notes that the modern world is dynamic, changeable and the processes in it are fleeting. If this is so, then what traditions of the dominant culture are we talking about? What if the dominant culture, due to some temporary changes, at a certain stage represents a social experiment? J. Bruner does not have answers to these questions, although they are mostly known. Without social values expressed in social ideals (established historically), not only pedagogy, but also

society is unable to develop successfully. But this factor is absent in J. Bruner's pedagogical theory and is reduced to the mechanical cognitive science. At the same time J. Bruner ignores the concept of "social value", replacing it with the principle of tolerance [3, p. 29]. It is possible that the scientist's position has a certain meaning and this position is generally accepted in the United States.

An explanation for the situation must also be sought in the fact that American society is multicultural and the functioning of each culture occurs relatively separately. Hence this is the reason why J. Bruner uses the notion of "dominant culture", including a purely American meaning in this notion. American multiculturalism, as a cultural specificity, was unable, due to many historical reasons, to form common, socially unified values of spiritual content; they were only able to form common values of an exclusively material and consumer nature.

Therefore the principle of tolerance is an objective phenomenon, as a necessary way of maintaining social stability. (Tolerance from [lat. tolerantia](#) - "patience, patience, ability to endure").

Culture in pedagogy, by J. Bruner, is a sphere of individual pragmatism, in which an individual considers culture and its tools as a way to understand himself and the world in order to function successfully in it for his own benefit (a purely consumer approach based on which we see the frank pragmatism clearly identified as a social orientation back in beginning of the 20th century by the philosophy and pedagogy of D. Dewey, and even earlier sounded in theory of Y.A. Comensky and very vividly depicted by M. Weber. Here there is no place for emotions, the element of spirituality is secondary and is not a priority of culture, i.e. society). Culture and its knowledge is the sphere of human adaptation to society, its needs, and trends in material development. By J. Bruner it is an example of how the doctrine of the consumer society is formed and supported. Thus, in the field of pedagogy, according to J. Bruner, the cultural approach is implemented indirectly and is expressed in the formal - cognitive sphere.

The second element. Bruner proposes to implement the cultural concept through certain pedagogical forms and methods. In "The Culture of Education" book, J. Bruner points out the main methods: pedagogy of joint creativity and school self-government. Bruner determines the nature of the school of future, and considers the student's activities in a team as an option for the practical implementation of cultural and historical themes in practical pedagogy. The team by J. Bruner is a formative instrument. The team functions according to its own rules and cultivates the human qualities necessary for society, on the one hand and, on the other hand, it develops in an individual the ability to function successfully in a team. Teacher by J. Bruner

is a catalyst, he is the first among equals. There is no hierarchies in the school team of J. Bruner. All members of the team according to J. Bruner has equal rights, there are no seniors and juniors, but everyone is somehow aimed at solving common goals (?!). However, the elementary sociology tells us that a team cannot function successfully without the presence of authority (formal or informal) and the functioning of its active participants, for example, the authority of a teacher. Reasonings of J. Bruner in this context is the author's attempt to go beyond the historically established cultural attitudes of the American society - on the one hand and, on the other, to mirror in pedagogy the phenomena occurring in the society [7].

At the same time, while striving to go beyond the boundaries of cultural tradition, Bruner simultaneously continues to remain within these boundaries.

In this process, some features of the cultural pedagogy of J. Bruner are observed: 1) collectivism of equal subjects based on the joint creative activity; 2) J. Bruner's collectivism is individualistic, it is subordinated to the interests of an individual (it is the very this factor that manifests itself for the purposes of activities of the joint creative team). At the same time, Bruner notes "The uniformity of experience forms the foundation for the exchange of meanings" [3, p.16]. Anyway, J. Bruner recognizes the fact that collective relationships form not so much uniformity of thinking as they provide a common foundation for the "exchange of meanings," i.e. value meanings, but this idea was not developed in the pedagogical concept of J. Bruner. Then J. Bruner notes "Joint activity leads to the development of a certain unity of ideas and assessments" [3, p.38]. Ultimately, he recognizes the unifying factor of the collective activity of schoolchildren, but does not exclude the existence of individual meanings [3, p.16] and the existing danger of infringing on someone's interests [3, p.29]. Which in itself is inevitable in conditions of the collective activity. It is characteristic that as the connecting element of the joint activities of J. Bruner names not social values and ideals (for example, criteria of justice, rules, characteristic traditions, etc.), not the organizing role of a teacher, but the principle of tolerance as one of the socially basic ones. A very strange position for a psychologist, but this is at first glance. It is always necessary to take into account that the interpretation of the notions of "team" and "collective activity" have different meanings in different cultures.

What does the joint creativity and the spirit of joint creativity mean for J. Bruner? "Actually, any collective activity of people should be built precisely on this principle. In relation to school, this means that there is an active exchange of experience, in the classroom there is



always a willingness to help one's friends, a desire to find the optimal division of labor and distribution of roles, friendly criticism and self-criticism (...).

The main goal of school education then becomes awareness of the limitless potential of joint creativity, and knowledge and skills begin to act as means of optimizing this type of activity. The teacher takes on the role of a catalyst, i.e. becomes the first among equals. This is one of the ways to transform the nature of learning at school..." [3, p.11].

It seems that we are reading the "Pedagogical Poem" of A. Makarenko, written in the 30s of the twentieth century. Further J. Bruner notes: "School is not only a place where certain subjects are taught. School is an important social institution. It not only prepares for life, but also teaches how to live. It is important that pupils imagine it this way" [3, p.44]. It is in the last thesis that the essence of D. Dewey's pragmatism pedagogy or Kirschensteiner's labor school, etc. lies. In this sense, and here too, J. Bruner didn't say anything new.

Perhaps this situation is explained by the fact that in "Culture of Education" J. Bruner pays more attention to the issues of upbringing than of teaching. This is a general trend and specific feature of modern American education [8].

However, if according to J. Dewey, the collective activity of schoolchildren (for example, school self-government) is the fixation and copying of the structure of state institutions designed to simulate a system of social relations within an educational institution, thus designed to adapt schoolchildren to adult life, then by J. Bruner, the collective activity appears in a different form. It bears a formative, educational in nature character, comes from both a team and an individual and is aimed at benefiting an individual in the interests of society (society and culture according to J. Bruner, are identical notions in their semantic content; in this case, culture is both the goal and criterion of these processes). However, there is a fundamental problem here. The urge is here to ask the question, what and how needs to be done for such collective activity to be formed, because in this context this is the most important and most difficult thing. Talking about the "new school," he sets out his wishes, but does not define the mechanisms for creating such a team for the implementation of fruitful collective creativity (unlike, for example, the pedagogy of A. Makarenko).

It has long been known that the role of a team in formation of the necessary qualities of pupils was practically substantiated by S. Shatsky, A. Makarenko, I. Ivanov back in the first half of the twentieth century. It must be emphasized that collectivism of both A. Makarenko [6] and J. Bruner was based on the corresponding cultural and historical tradition and has its own senses and meanings. The evidence of this thesis is confirmed by J. Bruner himself: "Thinking

and learning are always culturally determined and depend on the use of cultural resources” [3, p.16]. It must be emphasized that, unlike J. Bruner and S. Shatsky, both A. Makarenko and I. Ivanov showed in practice the educational effectiveness of the collective creative activity.

It's strange that J. Bruner in the field of psychology, was a supporter of the ideas of L. Vygotsky, but in the field of pedagogy he was completely unfamiliar with the activities of A. Makarenko. This is all the more noticeable when in “Culture of Education” he comments on the American pedagogical program of “Sure Start”, aimed at working with difficult teenagers in the USA.

As an illustration, here is a fragment from the book of J. Bruner. The author writes about the crime and massive cultural deprivation in black and Hispanic families. “The culprits,” writes J. Bruner, are, if not mothers, then the culture in which they grew up. It turns out, he continues, that the culture that gave birth to them is somehow defective. The position of mothers was also no less ambiguous: their children spent one part of their time in one cultural environment, and other part in completely different conditions” [3, p.96].

Further in the text, J. Bruner does not develop his idea. However, for our context, such a statement of the author has a very significant meaning. Perhaps the thesis of J. Bruner contains not only the cause of cultural deprivation, but also the deeper processes that require special study. These processes are associated with the structure of formation of a child’s worldview, when different cultural environments operating simultaneously are not able to form the correct value orientations of an individual, but imply certain “options” or “freedom” of choice limited only by group relations.

The author himself, speaking about the role of culture in education, did not notice the deep meaning in his own statement, but only stated his assumption.

We talk a lot about substitution of mental values by the values of another culture. It is not so much the occurrence of the substitution itself, but the appearance of substitution. In other words, the destruction of specific cultural accents. The proclamation of new ideals, as a rule, is intended to destroy old values or declare them insignificant. At the same time, new values among contemporaries are not internalized, but only declared. As a result of such processes, a society receives a loss of spirituality or an inability to be spiritual.

**Conclusions.** Thus, the manifestation of explication in the pedagogical theory of Jerome Bruner is formed as a result of understanding of the primacy of culture as a basic pedagogical sphere. The cultural-educational theory of J. Bruner, as a development of

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, comes from the cognitive psychology. It is the combination of these processes where the scientist's pedagogical ideas are formed.

Here it is necessary to mark out a thesis based on the spirit of Bruner's own ideas - the pedagogical ideas of Jerome Bruner are the ideas of a person of the American culture and cannot be the universal means. The pedagogical views of J. Bruner's can be used in a different cultural environment, however, not as a pedagogical model, but as an approach to organizing the pedagogical process and a method of its implementation.

In other words, whereas J. Bruner talked about the influence of culture on the education, he conducted his research in a certain cultural "field" and studied children of a certain cultural group, then the results of his research would be justified exactly for the corresponding culture.

J. Bruner's main idea in the field of education is as follows: "...Education is designed to ensure reproduction of the culture on the basis of which it arose. Moreover, not just to reproduce, but to be a conductor of economic, political and cultural goals inherent in a given society" [3, p. 88]. This thesis constitutes the main meaning and spirit of the pedagogical explication of the theory of J. Bruner.

The main task of the school, from the point of view of the cultural approach to education, J. Bruner sees in creation of so called "school culture," representing associations of pupils engaged in the collaborative problem solving in which children learn from each other. The school should become a place of practice of "cultural community," writes J. Bruner, confirming the thesis of the "inner cultural circle", which in fact should reproduce the socio-cultural system of a particular society, i.e. a system of specific social values.

And whereas Bruner has generally recognized achievements in the field of cognitive psychology and cognitive theory of learning, in the field of cultural studies of education he was unable to say anything new. A paradoxical situation. Obviously, this is one of the reasons why this theme does not arouse interest for study by modern domestic scientific pedagogical theory.

In addition, it is also attributable to the fact that the theory of pedagogy of J. Bruner is a culturally determined phenomenon.

Academician A.R. Luria, regarding the brochure of J. Bruner's "The Learning Process," translated in the USSR in 1962, in the foreword to the Soviet edition wrote: "Reflecting the current state of American psychology, the book of J. Bruner, naturally, contains, along with provisions to which one should listen carefully, also such provisions that the Soviet reader will perceive critically and which were critically examined in the Soviet

psychological science long ago. (...). Unfortunately, the author remained unaware of the large psychological and pedagogical literature that was published in our country and reflected serious theoretical and practical work on the main issues of a child's mental development and the psychological foundations of learning and knowledge formation. There is no doubt that a careful consideration of this literature would force the author to reconsider some of the provisions he sets out" [9].

More than thirty years have passed since the Luria's statement but nothing has changed in the scientific activity of J. Bruner, this is exactly the picture we see reading the book "Culture of Education". Thus, in the field of pedagogy (education theory), J. Bruner is trying to pass off as new something that is new exclusively for him.

Summarizing the ideas of J. Bruner in the field of pedagogical theory set out in his book "Culture of Education," we are forced to state the fact that American pedagogical theory and practice lags behind the domestic pedagogical thought for more than half a century.

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