

Running Head: BRUNER'S WAY OF KNOWING

Bruner's Way of Knowing as Compared to Descartes

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Jerome Bruner contends that knowledge is gained through the practice of self-discovery in the world as influenced by culture, prior experience, and the understanding of other people's minds. This fits with Cartesian philosophy in that self-discovery occurs through intuition and deduction based on prior knowledge. A person approaches the world with the knowledge they have gained from prior experience and creates rules, generalizations, and predictions, based on those experiences. Those rules, generalizations, and predictions are tested through interaction with the world and are considered to be truth as long as there is no contradictory evidence. The model encourages metacognition in that a person will consider the thought processes involved in making a deduction to ensure their reasoning is sound. Descartes put forth a formal process through which this can occur to help with the accuracy of deductions. Understanding becomes the result of organizing incomplete ideas that cannot be tested in a structured format.

Bruner takes this Cartesian model to a different level in the addition of the educational approach, the interactional model, and applying cultural concepts. The educational approach that is put forth is that the role of the teacher is to provide a toolkit for students to discover things on their own which is to essentially teach them deductive reasoning. The teacher guides the discovery through teaching the student ways to relate information to what is already known and through having students take control of their own thought processes. Once they have discovered something, they can collaborate with others to determine if it is true based on the evidence that each person is able to produce. It is possible for knowledge or truth to be created by a group of students with each person only contributing a portion of the truth to the discussion. As the discussion continues, the group is able to construct the truth in question and provide evidence that supports it. They are also able to test the truth they have constructed to determine if it needs any adaptation. Within the context of a culture, each person brings a unique perspective to the

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discussion and has been influenced by their culture in a manner that will provide a unique insight to the truth being constructed. According to Bruner, we come to know through the product of construction, evidence, and argument rather than being dictated by an authority. However, each person will also have their own interpretation of the final product based on the unique experiences they have had, which creates a subjective experience in which no absolute truth can exist.

The culture of education has a direct relationship with the culture at large. The lessons taught in the educational system emulate the values and beliefs of the mainstream culture in which it exists. This produces students with values that they apply to the world outside of school. As the values of a society change, the values taught in the educational system change as well. However, as the culture at large consists of people of varying culture and experiential backgrounds, the educational system must be broad enough to accommodate this variety. Each culture influences the individual's experience through the practices, lifestyle, and rituals. These experiences accumulate to become the overall perspective of the individual through which they view the world. As the individual engages in dialogue about their perspective with other individuals who have different perspectives, they are able to share the processes through which they drew their conclusions to construct a truth on which they can all agree. Bruner's educational model helps facilitate this process by encouraging a constructivist way of knowing through collaborative dialogue amongst students by developing skills to understand the minds of other people. We come to know by engaging in this practice of testing our own personal reality against the personal reality of others to find the universal facts that can be extracted as truth. While we each have a unique perspective on the world, we are able to create a collective truth by putting all of those perspectives together and accounting for any contradictions. This way of

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References

Bruner, J. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.