



THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF JEROME BRUNER'S CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the contributions of Jerome Bruner's constructivist approach to education. The paper outlined the brief biography of Jerome Bruner. And Bruner's constructivist approach (principles of readiness, spiral organisation, and going beyond the information given). It also outlined Bruner's three stages in method of teaching (enactive, iconic, and symbolic), ideas and influences associated with Bruner (such as Piaget's concept of stages of development and Vygotsky's ideas on zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding), and educational implications of Bruner's constructivist approach.

KEYWORDS

Constructivist approach, Education, Scaffolding.

Introduction

Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, created a theory of development based upon the idea that the goal of education should be intellectual development. Bruner agreed on several components of learning, including the fact that children are born as ready active learners.

Bruner's education and early life

Bruner was born blind on October 1st, 1915 in New York City, to Herman and Rose Bruner, who were polish Jewish immigrants. He received a bachelor's degree in psychology, in 1937 from Duke, and went on to earn a masters degree in psychology in 1941 from Harvard. In 1939, Bruner published his first psychological article on the effect of thymus extract on the sexual behaviour of the female rat. During World War 2, Bruner served on the psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force committee.

Bruner's constructivist approach

Constructivist theory maintains that learning is an active process in which the learners construct new ideas or concept based upon their current/past experience or knowledge. Here, the instructor or teacher act as a facilitator who guide and encourage the students to discover principles by themselves. Therefore, the instructor or teacher and the students should engage in an active dialogue.

Principles

1. Instruction must be concerned with the experiences and contexts that make the student willing and able to learn (readiness).
2. Instruction must be structured so that it can be easily grasped by the student (spiral organisation).
3. Instruction should be designed to facilitate extrapolation and or fill in the gaps (going beyond the information given).

Methods of teaching

Bruner's approach was characterised by three stages which are:

1. Enactive mode: When dealing with the enactive mode, one is using some known aspects of reality without using words or imagination. Therefore, it involves representing the past events through making motor responses. It involves mainly in knowing how to do something, it involves series of actions that are right for achieving some result. For example, driving a car, tying a knot, etc.
2. Iconic mode: This mode deals with the internal imagery, where the knowledge is characterised by a set of images that stand for the concept. The iconic representation depends on visual or other sensory association and is principally defined by perceptual organisation and techniques for economically transforming perceptions into meaning for the individual.

3. Symbolic mode: Through life one is always adding to the resources to the symbolic mode of representation of thought. This representation is based upon an abstract, discretionary and flexible thought. It allows one to deal with what might be and might not, and is a major tool in reflective thinking. This mode is illustrative of a person's competence to consider propositions rather than objects, to give ideas a hierarchical structure and to consider alternative possibilities in a combinatorial fashion, (Spencer. K.,1991,p. 185-187).

Ideas and influences associated with Bruner

The piaget's idea which builds on the concept of stages of development. The environment has bigger role in learning development. But Bruner argued that social factor like language is important for cognitive growth.

The Vygotsky's ideas on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding (concept that relates to the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner) came to be increasingly influential to Bruner's research (Smith, 2002).

Educational implications of Bruner's constructivist approach

- Teachings according to the age and development of the students.
- New knowledge should be based on previous knowledge.
- Learning by doing bring activeness in class.
- Representation of abstract things by symbols.
- Reinforcement enhances learning.
- Learning by heuristic methods.
- Using new learning skills in class.
- Learning based on experience.
- Emphasis on creativity of child.
- Symbolic develop of language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jerome Bruner's constructivist approach lead the students to understand lesson more better through concept framing, increase their ability of learning, foster interest in learning, develop students' ability to solve problem systematically, and aid memory to recover easily materials learned.

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