

## **Jerome Bruner**

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Born October 1st, 1915 in New York City to Polish immigrants, Bruner spent the first years of his life blind from cataracts. At the age of three he underwent surgery, which repaired his sense of sight. When reflecting on his career in his later years, Bruner credited this experience as a catalyst for his belief in constructivism, wherein the mind gives structure and meaning to experiences rather than passively taking them in, as well as fostering a continuing interest in the new and unexplored.

Bruner received his bachelor's degree of psychology from Duke in 1937. He next attended Harvard, earning his master's degree in 1939 and his doctorate in psychology in 1941. Following a position with the U.S. Army regarding psychological warfare in World War II, Bruner returned to Harvard in 1945. His early work as a professor was in the realm of cognitive psychology. One of Bruner's first notable studies was published in 1947. The article, "Entitled Value and Need as Organizing Factors in Perception", found that children from poor and rich socioeconomic backgrounds perceived the size of coins differently, with poorer children overestimating coin sizes. Bruner believed the difference in perception was due to the difference in valuation between the two groups. Towards the end of the 1950s Bruner's focus shifted into the realm of developmental psychology. Still intrigued by perception, Bruner studied how children interpret the world, as well as language development.

In 1960, Bruner published a book entitled "The Process of Education". One of the basic tenets was that any child could, at any stage of development, learn any subject so long as it was

presented properly. In later works, he described this process through three modes of representation, or how information is stored. In the first stage, entitled enactive, action-based information is stored in memory. Iconic, the second, sees information stored visually. Finally, in the symbolic stage, information is encoded as a symbol or code, such as language.

Like Vygotsky, Bruner believed education was much a social process, and that adults hold important roles in facilitating learning. According to Bruner, when a child first starts learning a task, they need adults to take an active role in guiding them through the process. As the child progresses in their competency and understanding the adult's role diminishes, like a scaffold slowly being dismantled as a building is completed. Thus, Bruner termed this process 'scaffolding'. Bruner also proposed the spiral curriculum, wherein knowledge learned in previous years is expanded upon in increasing complexity as a student progresses through their education.

Bruner continued to push for educational reform for many years. He served on educational committees for Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, published more books on education, and had a role in helping to create the Head Start program. Bruner served as a professor at Oxford University from 1972-80, wherein his interests shifted more towards language development. Following his return to the United States and posts at the New School for Social Research, New York (1981-88) and New York University (1988-96), Bruner's work again shifted, this time towards understanding culture as well as legal psychology. He passed away June 5th, 2016, at the age of one hundred. The APA lists Bruner as 28 on their list of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century.