

Bruner's Educational Theory since Structure of Knowledge: Narrative Turn

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Abstract: This article investigates the meaning and the value of Bruner's new educational theory since the theory of structure of knowledge. Culturalism theory based on narrative mode of thought is highly acclaimed as a model of new schooling. In this article, the meaning of narrative and the commonplaces of curriculum are analyzed in terms of teaching and learning.

Keywords: narrative mode of thought, culturalism theory, cultural psychology, story making, narrative, curriculum theory

1 Significance of Narrative Mode of Thought

Though Bruner hasn't specifically defined the concept of narrative mode of thought, he explains its characteristics in comparison with paradigmatic mode of thought. Narrative is a story or account of event in the stream of time. Narrative is composed of a series of events and is sequenced by affiliation. Thus, narrative is featured by both the sequence of events and the story that those series of events produce. One notable thing is that stories could be interpreted in numeral ways unless they are explained. Unlike verified scientific theory or argumentation, stories are proved to be appropriate by 'likelihood'. Those stories focus on the intentional actions performed by human 'agents' rather than on physical world. Since those human actions are hard to predict, it is impossible to make a specific explanation on the intention behind those actions. The vagueness is one of the main features of narrative (Kang, 1998: 117).

Bruner premises two sets of thought mode while preaching on narrative mode of thought; paradigmatic mode of thought and narrative mode of thought. The mode of thought is not only cognitive function, but a method to construct human experiences or phenomenon. The former, structured as logical statements, is scientific knowledge with a causal relationship. Whereas the latter, structured as story, is arbitrary and illogical. Humans have differently developed their experiences with their surroundings within different cultural bases. The former deals with an absolute and physical world which has nothing to do with human intentions. That is, it deals with the world of existence and cause and effect. On the other hand, the latter aims to understand differently perceived human world and reflects the requests of living. The

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former mode aims for explanation. The latter pursues interpretation, which requires understanding. Explanation premises causal existence and can physically be verified. As for the narrative mode of thought, however, seemingly existing meanings are judged by circumstantial relevance or probability. In this context, narrative should be understood as process of searching for genuine hypothesis that corresponds with wide and deep human imagination, rather than explained as a curriculum where scientists pursue verifiability. The hypotheses in the narrative mode of thought pursue relevance illuminated from numerous perspectives held by human creatures.

It is intention that distinguishes human actions from the rest. There are a multitude of narrative modes of thought. They aim to grasp meanings of human living and disregard any causal existence. This mode of thought varies as much as the number of each individual's perspectives. As you can see, most of us live in the world, composed with rules and devices of narrative. The existence can be constructed with narrative. Human mind is the composer to make us create meanings. The narrative mode of thought as a story telling requires interpretation and thus lays the foundation for story-making. The intention behind an action, hermeneutical composition and possibility of inner mutual compromise, the three pillars in Bruner's argument, are key elements to compose reality with narratives (1996: 133-147). Human action provides intention and motive behind the action. A multitude of narratives leads to a story through an interpretative circle. Anyone can share their own perspectives on a story and those contested stories are easily accommodated based on one's viewpoints. This interpretation of curriculum from the narrative mode of thought is named 'the theory of culturalism' (Bruner, 1996).

3 Culturalism and New Curriculum

Culturalism theory has three main aspects to consider: 1. how human development and mind composition have developed in any given culture? 2. How meaning has built up through narrative mode of thought? 3. How reality has built up with narrative mode of thought? These aspects will reveal new ways to construct human experiences (Kang, 1998:109). The theory is based upon cultural psychology, which consists of human development, mind organization, interpretative and constructive epistemology and narrative mode of thought. Cultural psychology is not a psychology subtype but a new prospect signifying an adequate code for human study or curriculum study and is a new type of research. That is, existing approach, which is to investigate the inside world of human mind and universal structure of mind using psychological approach, gets to be criticized. In this context, Bruner suggests cultural psychology. It denies presumption, which regards mind as fixed, universal, abstract and internal entity, and assumes it being intentional and controlled by psychological rules. Mind refers to human with intention. Culture refers to intentional world. That is, reality composed with culture (intentional world) and mind comprising reality (intentional human) continuously interact and condition each other's existence penetrating mutual identity. In the vein, culture and mind mutually help construct each other (Shweder, 1991: 98106).

Therefore, to grasp the nature of cultural psychology, it is necessary to gain a new insight to understand human development and the mechanism of mind and ego

composition. Comprehension tools are knowledge construction and narrative mode of thought. At the present moment our concern is on narrative inquiry as the main methodology of curriculum research, thus it is noteworthy to understand the dynamics of these correlated aspects. Therefore qualitative research on curriculum should be based on cultural psychology. Curriculum research highly considers cultural context in human development and perceives culture as a composition of mind

The aspect of curriculum research can be differently explained when human mind is approached from epistemic perspective rather than that of ontology, which emphasizes causal relationships. That is because the nature of human mind derives from narrative mode of thought, which premises meaning construction.

4 Implications for Curriculum Research

'Narrative inquiry' as qualitative research method in curriculum research has been spearheaded by Clandinin and Connelly (1987; 1998; 2000). In this method, teachers exist at a certain situation, space and time. They construct and reconstruct narrative based on their personal experiences, mind, body and intention. Narrative inquiry as qualitative research is to understand experiences that have been built through living verbal story. Unlike traditional method, narrative inquiry heavily focuses on human dimension that is hardly quantified as atomic facts and numeral data. 'Narrative' in qualitative research is valid to be seen as story making process, the cognitive schema of a story and the result from those processes combined (Polkinghorne, 1988: 13-15). The language of thought for narrative inquiry is closely connected to Dewey's definition of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 49-50). As humans comprise experiences in relationships with various people, place and space, personal experiences should be understood from broader perspective. Adopting the metaphor of 'landscape' to highlight wide context for one's experience, he emphasizes that a teacher's experience should be understood in the context of 'landscape'.

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