

Remembering Jerome Bruner

Lembrando Jerome Bruner

Recordando Jerome Bruner

ALEXANDRE ANSELMO GUILHERME
ANDRÉIA MENDES DOS SANTOS



This short memorial draws on reflections by Professor Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. Howard Gardner is the author of the chapter on Bruner in the recently published *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Educational Thinkers*.

On Sunday, June 5, renowned psychologist Jerome S. Bruner passed away at the age of 100. An influential thinker throughout his 70-year career, Bruner's scholarship spanned the realms of education, child development, perception, and problem solving and has had an influence on generations of others across the social sciences.

Bruner was born in New York City in 1915 and his professional life was that of a prolific and versatile psychologist. He was trained at Duke and Harvard Universities and during the Second World War worked as a social psychologist investigating public opinion, propaganda and social attitudes. In the post-war years, he was one of the leading psychologists in the 'cognitive revolution'.

In the 1950s, following the launching of the Sputnik satellite by the USSR, many in the USA felt that there was a need to invest in education, particularly in the so-called nowadays STEM. The National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Foundation invited scholars and scientists to a meeting, with Bruner as chair, in Wood's Hole, Massachusetts in September 1959. Bruner's *The Process of Education* (1960) insightfully encapsulates the chief themes that emerged during the conference. It was commonly thought that students should be learning facts and figures, but many at the conference argued for the importance of learning scientific methods and structures. Another common belief was that the child was an assimilator of information, but conferees defended the view that the child is a problem-solver, trying to make

sense of the world. Finally, the notion that some subjects were appropriate for a young age whilst others should only be taught at later stages was challenged by those at the conference as they advocated that all subjects could be introduced to youngsters and then revisited and developed in increasingly complex ways. Bruner's famous, and controversial, quote encapsulates this: "We begin with the hypothesis that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (BRUNER, 1960, p. 33). Bruner's *The Process of Education* is a seminal text in education and its publication catalysed important educational changes throughout the world. Some years later, Bruner (1983, p. 185) reflected on this and commented that "I think the book's "success" grew from a worldwide need to reassess the functions of education in the light of the knowledge explosion and the new postindustrial technology".

Bruner continued to engage with education throughout his life. Later in the 1960s and early in the 1970s published two books, namely *Toward a Theory of Instruction* (1966) and *The Relevance of Education* (1971), arguing, under the influence of Vygotsky, that children turn their experiences into knowledge, which involves internalising cultural tools, such as language, that have been created over generations by other individuals and groups. In the 1990s, Bruner revisited educational issues in a book, namely *The Culture of Education* (1996), arguing that education is more effective if one understands its connections with the wider-culture and if one's learning occurs through group



interactions, attempting to construct knowledge together. It is interesting to note that during the last twenty years, Bruner, already in his 80s, visited regularly Reggio Emilia, an Italian village highly associated with liberal education. He was an honorary citizen of Reggio Emilia, had an influence on Loris Malaguzzi, who conceived alongside the local community the now famous Reggio Emilia approach to education.

Jerome 'Jerry' Bruner belongs to the intellectual landscape of our times. It can be argued that he is perhaps the most important American thinker on education since John Dewey. His influence on the field of education is still very much felt as new generations of educators come in contact with his inspiring and challenging ideas.

REFERENCES

- BRUNER, J. **The process of education**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- BRUNER, J. **Toward a theory of instruction**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- BRUNER, J. **The relevance of education**. New York: Norton, 1971.
- BRUNER, J. **The culture of education**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- GARDNER, H. "Jerome S. Bruner". In: PALMER COOPER, J.A. (Ed.); COOPER, D.E. (Advisory ed.). **Routledge Encyclopaedia of Educational Thinkers**. Abingdon: Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016.

Submetido em: 24/08/2016

Aprovado em: 24/08/2016