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### In Search of Learner's Subjectivity in Bruner's Narrative Curriculum

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**Abstract:** This study uses integrative forms of inquiry to examine the characteristics of the curriculum and narrative, which is a major idea of J. Bruner, who had a significant influence on psychology and pedagogy. This study also discusses the learner's viewpoint inherent in it. In education, the learner is paramount, because the curriculum or teaching changes according to the learner's mind. In particular, this study divides the existing perspective about the learner, or the problem of the mind of the learner, into four categories. It also examines the problem of the learner's subjectivity embedded in the categories. The curriculum emphasized in the existing perspective about the learner is a "delivery and conduit" concept, whereas the curriculum emphasized by Bruner is a curriculum focusing on meaning-making. Understanding the learner's mind and considering the process of constructing meaning are key aspects of the narrative curriculum. Teaching content in this curriculum should consider folk pedagogy. Thus, in this paper, we propose subjectivity and a new teaching method related to the learner's mind, as inherent in Bruner's newly emphasized narrative curriculum.

**Keywords:** Narrative, narrative curriculum, models of mind, folk pedagogy, learner's subjectivity.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In education, the learner is paramount, because the curriculum or teaching changes according to how to look at the learner. In other words, precisely defining the learner provides guidance on how to teach the learner, and how the learner should change through education. In contemporary pedagogy, when discussing advanced teaching and learning, we are interested in how teachers and students exchange meaning, that is, how teachers' minds and students' minds match. These aspects are related to how the mind works, and they are addressed in folk psychology.

Combining the two points above implies that defining the learner's mind is crucial in education. Discussions on this are approached in folk pedagogy in a similar context to folk psychology. Folk pedagogy focuses not only on how the mind works, but also on how children's minds learn and grow.

This study examines the characteristics of curriculum and narrative, major ideas of J. Bruner, who had an important influence on psychology and pedagogy. It also discusses the inherent viewpoints regarding learners.

In particular, this study divides the existing perspective about the learner or the “problem of the mind” into four categories, and examines the inherent problem of the learner’s subjectivity. The existing curriculum emphasizes delivery, whereas Bruner’s curriculum focuses on meaning-making. Understanding the learner’s mind and considering the process of constructing meaning are key aspects of the narrative curriculum. In this curriculum, the teaching of content should consider folk pedagogy.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research method used in this study is an integrative form of inquiry, which was proposed by Short (1991), entailing the collection and integration of different kinds of research results or knowledge. In this study, the data regarding Bruner’s narrative theory, the model of the mind, and folk pedagogy were examined, and previous research was analyzed. The study also employs a conceptual approach using the philosophical analysis style proposed by Short. In sum, this study used an integrative form of inquiry, comprising a literature review, a philosophical analysis of the subject of the research topic, and a concept analysis.

## **3. BRUNER’S IDEAS ON NARRATIVE AND CURRICULUM**

### **Concept and Nature of Narrative**

Narrative is the act of creating a story. These narratives have many implications for education and play an important role in helping students’ learning, especially with regard to teaching methods. In particular, Bruner explained narrative thinking as a form of thinking that can be compared to paradigm thinking, which has educational implications.

A narrative refers to narratology. A narrative is a series of events consisting of a story, or a temporary chain. Examples of narratives include personal and social history, myths, fables, and novels; they all have a “story.” The narrative and logical statements function differently. The logical statement seeks the universal truth; however, the narrative implies a plausible link between the two events. In particular, the described narrative contains logical coherence; however, it also has an illogical randomness that opposes such coherence (Han, 1997; Lee, 2004).

Bruner categorized the cognitive actions of the mind into paradigm thinking and narrative thinking (Bruner, 1990). This distinction clarifies the characteristics of the narrative or narrative thinking. Paradigm thinking and narrative thinking are inherently different, but complementary. The former deals with an immutable world that is unrelated to the subjectivity of humans, but the latter deals with an unpredictable world that changes according to the human perspective. The former implies the verification of the hypothesis, but the latter implies the production of the hypothesis (Han, 1997; Lee, 2005). The core of narrative thinking is the belief that people want to talk about their own information or experience. In other words, people tend to give a narrative interpretation to their own information or experience (So, 2004).

A narrative is a scheme that provides a means by which human beings can make meaning through their momentary experiences and personal actions (Kang, 2016). Narrative meanings give form to our understanding of the purpose of life, and they help integrate everyday acts and events into episodes. The narrative functions primarily by integrating human actions and the events that affect humans, and does not work in relation to inanimate objects. The narrative creates its meaning by paying attention to the contribution of specific performances and events, and thus arranges these parts into an overall episode to form meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988; Han, 2016). The human experience only meaninglessly flows through the narrative in its original state, but a narrative makes human life meaningful.

Thus, a narrative plays an important role in human life. However, the subjects related to the narrative in education, such as songs, plays, and fiction, were regarded as decorative rather than essential. A narrative works to help the human being understand “who I am” in order to form his/her own identity. Stories also play a very important role in understanding a particular culture (Bruner, 1996). Therefore, the techniques of constructing and understanding stories should be recognized as more important than ever before in education.

### **Changes in Conceiving a Curriculum**

Bruner discussed knowledge that provides important insights into education. His early discussion of knowledge is the “structure of knowledge” theory. The structure of knowledge refers to the underlying ideas, fundamental concepts, and principles that inform the discipline. In other words, it is involved in each subject, forming a matrix with the field of study. Furthermore, it is a regular relationship that appears between ideas, concepts, and principles, and must therefore be discovered and learned. Therefore, according to these perspectives, the teacher encourages students to learn and acquire knowledge (Cho & Kang, 2013; Hilao, 2016; Kang, 2009; Lavilles Jr and Robles, 2017; Sadik, 2016). That is, the teachers’ mission was to “explain” knowledge to students, which means teaching the subject effectively through the chosen teaching method.

However, Bruner has extended his claim to the structure of knowledge that existed since the 1980s. According to his extended argument, knowledge is found, but is constructed or created. He also suggested narrative thinking as a basis for the nature of such knowledge. Narrative thinking serves as a framework of perception that interprets human life by considering human attributes and by combining human experience with emotions and intentions, placing them in the appropriate context (Kang, 2009; Cho & Kang, 2013). In other words, human beings reinterpret their experiences through narrative thinking and construct personal or social knowledge. According to this viewpoint, teaching can take place in the form of knowledge formation and continual reconstruction through interaction between the teacher and students. Therefore, not only the process of discovery of knowledge, but also the process of constructing the cultural meaning of knowledge should be treated as important.

### **Significance of Bruner's Idea**

Bruner's discussion above is of considerable importance to the field of education. In Bruner's discussion of knowledge, the key idea is that knowledge can be constructed and discovered (Kang, 2009; Cho & Kang, 2013). In other words, knowledge can be constructed or produced through cultural cross-negotiations about meaning. This discussion extends the problem of education to the cultural dimension, without limiting it to the classroom. Learners can, and should, learn through semantic exchange with teachers or colleagues, as well as learning deterministic knowledge presented in education materials.

In this way, Bruner's extended discussion of knowledge presented new perspectives on the content of education or teaching methods to be used with learners. In conjunction with this discussion, we will look at the model of the learner's mind in the next chapter.

## **4. MODELS OF MIND AND LEARNER'S SUBJECTIVITY**

### **Four Models of Mind**

Bruner (1996) presented four dominant models of learners' minds that have been widely used in current times (Smidt, 2011). Each is a conceptualization of the relationship between mind and culture, and the conceptualization of the mind that determines how to teach and educate. The contents are as follows (Astington, Harris & Olson, 1988; Bruner, 1996; Kang & Lee, 2005).

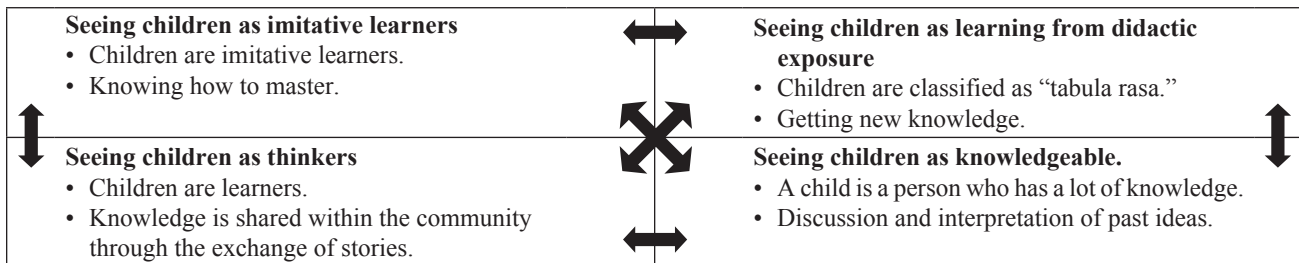
**Seeing children as imitative learners: The acquisition of “know-how” (Bruner, 1996).** In this model, it is assumed that the learner can learn by imitating the demonstration or modeling the instructor. Imitation of a demonstration, or modeling, enables the intergenerational transfer of culture and knowledge. However, complete education is difficult if it is only acquired by imitating certain actions or methods. Human ability consists of talents, functions, and abilities rather than knowledge and understanding. From an imitative point of view, it deals only with developing skills through practical training. Demonstrating how to do something and providing practice make it harder to acquire more flexible functions, as compared to learning in combination with conceptual explanations.

**Seeing children as learning from didactic exposure: The acquisition of propositional knowledge (Bruner, 1996).** This model assumes that teachers should present facts and principles that can be learned, remembered, and applied by students. This helps learners acquire new knowledge through mental abilities rather than knowing how to do something. This assumes the learner’s psychology as a tabula rasa and injects knowledge into their minds. In other words, the child’s mind is regarded as a vessel that eagerly awaits filling passively. At this time, the child does not actively interpret or infer, and the teacher looks at the children outside rather than considering the child’s thinking. This approach is limited, in that it is not interactive and involves one-sided teaching methods.

**Seeing children as thinkers: The development of inter-subjective interchange (Bruner, 1996).** This model assumes that both children and adults have their own views. Therefore, children are not simple tabula rasa, but they can perform logical and sincere thinking and actions with their own strengths. Children have consistent “theories” of the world and of themselves as subjects of thought. This is not through imitation or instructional teaching, but through the exchange of stories and cooperation, in harmony with the theories of parents and teachers. That is why teaching takes the form of sharing knowledge through cooperation and dialogue with teachers or colleagues. In this model, truth is not a product of authoritative education, but of constitution and controversy.

**Seeing children as knowledgeable: The management of “objective” knowledge (Bruner, 1996).** This model argues that teachers should help children understand the differences between personal knowledge and knowledge known by culture. Furthermore, children should understand the basis of their personal knowledge. This view makes it possible for people seeking knowledge to share, whether through actual texts, with the people involved in the knowledge. In other words, the learner interprets the perspective, intention, and the thoughts of the person who dealt with the knowledge previously, and talks with him/her.

The characteristics of the four faculty models and the nature of the learner can be summarized as follows (Bruner, 1996; Kang & Lee, 2005):



**Figure 1: Model of mind and model of teaching**


The model of the mind is classified into four categories as indicated above; however, it is not used separately in the practice of education. These models represent the assumptions and beliefs that teachers routinely prescribe and presume in school. Teachers inevitably choose to teach either of these models.

None of the four models presented above is universal in any situation. The criteria determining the best model can vary from situation to situation. In other words, the teacher should select the appropriate model or

combine the models appropriately for the situation in which he/she is teaching. The criteria for a good model can be considered in various ways. In the next chapter, we will look at four models based on the learner's subjectivity.

### Learner's Subjectivity

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the four models of the mind provide different perspectives on what learners are and how they learn. As a result, the extent to which learners participate actively in learning is different for each of the four models. Learners' subjectivity refers to active thinking or behavior that learners experience in the process of learning. Figure 2 shows the degree of learners' subjectivity according to the model of the mind.

<i>Degree of the learner's subjectivity</i>	<i>Model of mind</i>
Higher	Knowledgeable model
	Thinker's model
	Learning from didactic exposure model
Lower	Imitative learner's model

**Figure 2: The degree of the learner's subjectivity according to the model of the mind**

In the "imitative learner's model," the learner is in a very passive learning position, and merely imitates the teacher's demonstration. In this type of learning, the learner learns only how to do something and cannot experience the conceptual knowledge or the theoretical basis of the method. In other words, the learner cannot think independently in the process of learning; therefore, the learner's subjectivity is the lowest among the four models.

In the "learning from didactic exposure model," the learner is in a somewhat passive position as regards accepting the knowledge presented by the teacher. There are relatively many experiences of thought, as compared to the first model. However, this model assumes that the learner is only provided with the knowledge that the teacher injects, without verifying the basis or background of the knowledge he/she acquires.

Learners in the "thinker's model" take an active part in the process of learning. As the subject of thinking, they exchange their understanding with the teacher's understanding, and construct meaning. In other words, they are not only subjects that learn, but also subjects that interpret what they have learned, present their interpretation to the world, and share it with others.

As in the "knowledgeable model," learners are actively involved in understanding the knowledge and constructing meaning regarding the knowledge acquired. The learner in this model differs from the learner of the "thinker's model" because he/she becomes the perfect subject for learning by exploring the principle and basis of knowledge. This not only eliminates the risk of denying objective knowledge due to inter-subjective interpretation, but also leads to more subjective learning.

The subjectivity afforded to learners plays a very important role in learning. Leading learners can achieve a more rigorous and in-depth understanding of knowledge by doing more sophisticated thinking than passive learners. Such a deep and firmly established understanding also makes it easier to utilize knowledge appropriately in the context in which it is needed. Active learning that grasps the bases and structures of knowledge also facilitates new learning by making it easier to link the specific knowledge to other knowledge. In addition, the ability to manage learners' own knowledge is a more effective learning approach. Therefore, the transfer of subjectivity from teachers to learners in teaching should be considered important.

## **Subjectivity and Folk Pedagogy**

The subjectivity of learners depends on how the mind of the learner is viewed. At this point, the perspective of the learner's mind is the result of inference through general common sense, and not through scientific validation. It is a kind of folk pedagogy that deduces such intuitive thinking or the common sense of everyday life, and suggests a direction for education.

Folk pedagogy means traditional pedagogy in the context of words, but refers to general pedagogy at the level of ordinary and common sense, rather than teaching based on any specific theory or scientific basis (Kang & Lee, 2005; Takaya, 2013). It is a teaching method that has been accepted as common sense in human history, although it is not supported by scientific theories. This was routinely used and taken for granted; therefore, it was not included in professional study. However, it has an enormous impact on the practice of education.

The practice of education is based on daily beliefs about the mind of the learner. Belief in the mind changes beliefs in our ability to transmit thought and action, and the source of knowledge (Kang & Lee, 2005). As with the four models discussed above, how students learn and how teachers teach are contingent upon how teachers think about the learner's mind. In addition, the sharing of the subjective role makes learners learn in accordance with folk pedagogy.

A discussion on the subjectivity that is transferred to learners as folk pedagogy provides guidance on how to deal with the learner, and how to communicate and construct knowledge in the teaching situation. In addition, consideration of subjectivity leads to more desirable types of learners and impacts views regarding how learners should change through education.

## **5. CONCLUSION: MIND AND FOLK PEDAGOGY**

Bruner argues that explaining what learners are doing is not adequate. It is important to know what they are thinking and why. In a cultural approach, learners are not acting in direct relation to the world, but are acting based on their beliefs about the world (Kang & Lee, 2005). Explaining what learners are doing involves looking from the outside of the learner, with a third-person perspective. In this case, it may be assumed that a learner is studying well, after seeing the learner listening to the teacher's lesson, even in situations where the learner is only listening and not fully understanding.

The education that the teacher imparts and the student imbibes is influenced by how knowledge is communicated and composed. This concept not only involves transferring information between the teacher and the student. Rather, it can be achieved when the teacher's mind and the student's mind interact with each other to exchange meaning. That is, the minds of both parties must be in agreement. In order to facilitate and enable this consensus, it is necessary to consider the nature of their minds. Therefore, it is important to analyze what is happening in the background to the learner's external actions, considering the learner's mind.

In this regard, folk pedagogy is helpful in considering the mind of the learner and in providing educational guidance to the mind. It also plays a role in the negotiation of teacher and learner narratives (Kang, 2012). In terms of giving and receiving meaning, the listener's position should always be considered first. Attempting to transfer meaning by considering only the speaker's position is incomplete and inefficient, as compared to considering the audience's position, because it is often the case that learners are the audience. Therefore, the methods through which we understand children's minds are essential to improving future pedagogy.

Based on the conclusions discussed in this paper, the methods of understanding learners in curriculum design and teaching-learning scenes should change. Although previous studies have suggested the problem of curriculum development and learning mainly from the activist position or the cognitive standpoint, this problem

should be viewed in the context of the narrative curriculum in the future. In particular, the results presented in this study emphasize that the method of viewing learners in the new curriculum needs to gradually change from the traditional first and second models, to the third and fourth models. Therefore, this study emphasizes the necessity of understanding the problem of learners' subjectivity in terms of micro and macro aspects of schooling.

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