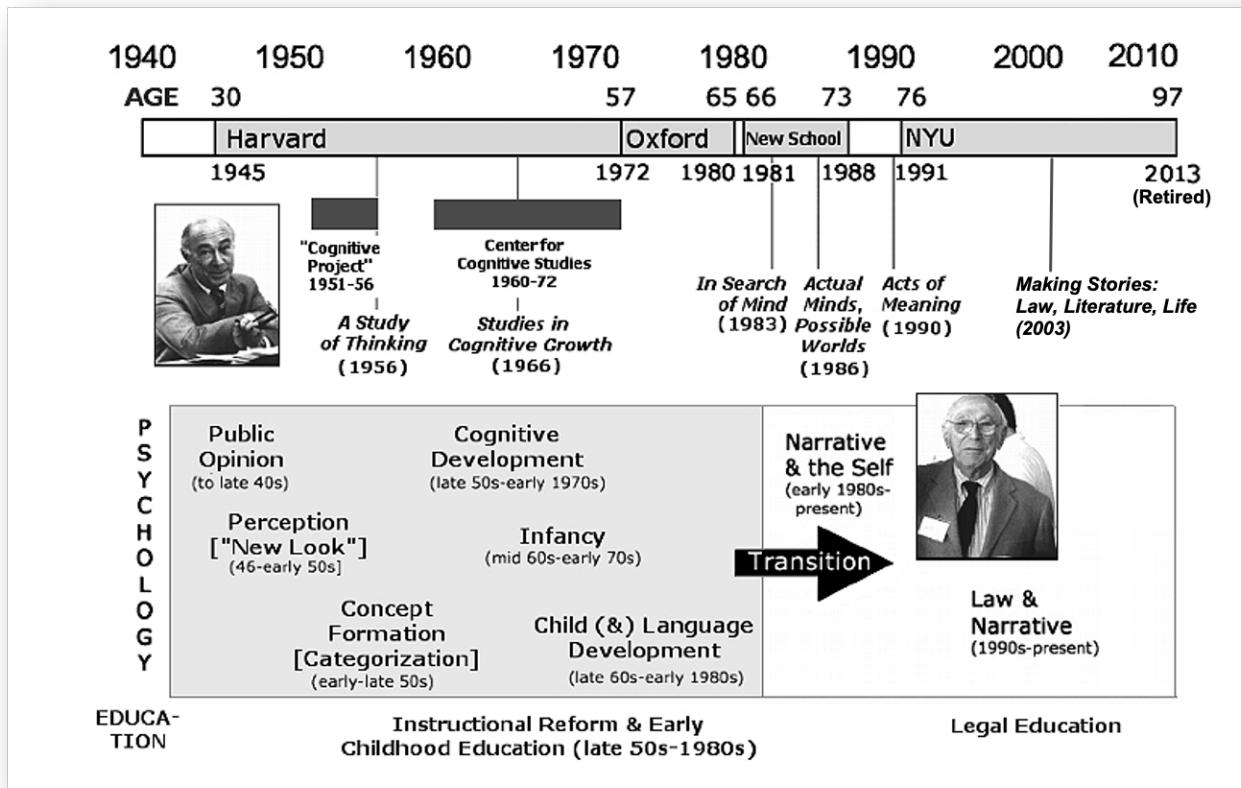
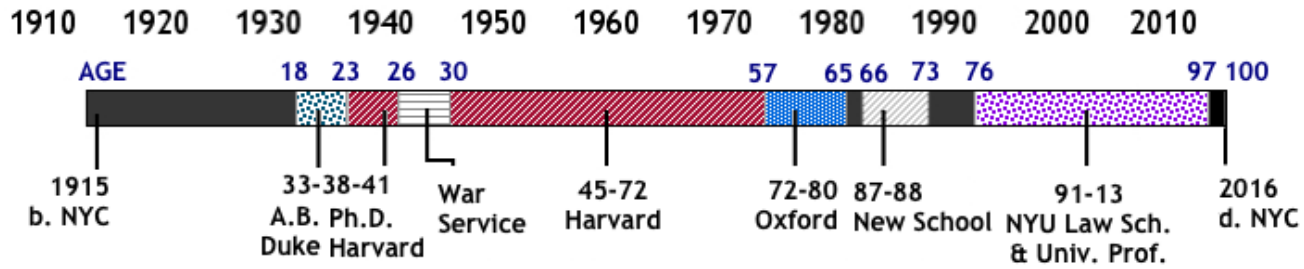


Jerome S. Bruner: Paradigmatic vs. Narrative Thought
 (Prepared for PSY 444 Story & Psychology, revised 2023, summary)
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Jerome S. Bruner (1915-2016): Curriculum Vitae



Education, World War II, & Coming to Harvard as Faculty Member

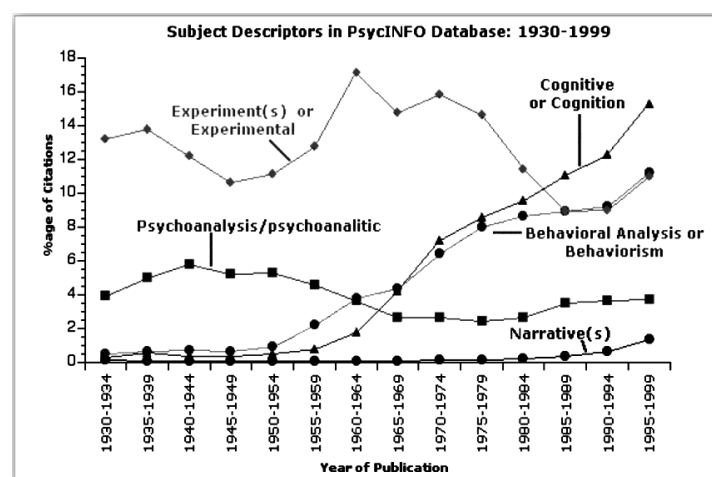
- Duke University (1933-1937) where he did study with German émigré, William Stern. He offered an undergrad seminar contrasting personal phenomenological approaches to space and time with the more abstract formulation of Newton. That the exigencies of life -- the influence of social factors and experiences -- could affect the course of mental development was an implication of Stern's teaching at Duke.
- Harvard University Ph.D. Psychology (1937-1941)
 - Student of & worked with Gordon Allport in his class on understanding the individual life by means of documents & preparing Allport's analysis of 50 years of research trends in support of Allport's APA presidential address.
 - Doctoral thesis on propaganda by Italian fascists using shortwave radio.
- Served the US government in the European theater of operations in WWII
- Appointed to Harvard U. Psychology Dept. in 1945 and worked there to 1972 (27 years).

The "New Look" in Psychology.

- Collaborated with Leo Postman to study the notion that perception was free of influence by mental factors. They found it was not. They examined how errors of estimation in the real world appeared to vary neither constantly nor randomly *across* stimuli, but rather as a function of how valuable the stimulus was in the mind of the evaluator. In Bruner & Goodman (1947) in Bruner & Goodman (1947) both rich and poor children who were asked to estimate the physical size of coins -- 1 cent, 5 cents, 25 cents, 50 cents -- overestimated their size in proportion to the value of the coins themselves. 50 cent pieces were *overestimated* in size while 5 cent pieces were *underestimated*. Further, poorer children overestimated more than rich children did.
- What was launched in these 1940s experiments was the so-called "New Look" in psychology in which cognitive factors would be adduced to explain more comprehensively the phenomena of psychophysics and behaviorism and these studies were direct challenges to behaviorists who denied the importance of internal mental factors.

Cognitive Revolution?

- The "Cognitive Revolution" is the name which has subsequently been applied to the emergence in psychology of the study of internal mental functions and operations during the 1950s and 1960s. contrary to what some have held, it does not appear that the so-called "Cognitive Revolution" came at the expense of behaviorism which continued to receive a great deal of research attention to the end of the 20th century.
- Bruner's work during the 1950s and, particularly, the 1960s lay the foundation for a great deal of this growth in studying cognitive phenomena.



- 1960-1972. The Center for Cognitive Studies at Harvard established with George Miller and him as co-directors.
- In early 1960s, he began reading the work of Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) whose work in the early 1920s emphasized the role of language and culture in fostering the emerging mind of a child. One of Vygotsky's students, Alexander Luria, came to the Center in 1960 and remained until his death in 1977 a close friend of Bruner. Bruner was instrumental in having the works of both Vygotsky and Luria translated into English from Russian and published in the U.S.
- Bruner took his earlier ideas about **modes of representation** in a child's mind – **enactive** (based on action), **iconic** (based on images), and **symbolic** (based on language)--and turned these into a developmental stage theory of his own. The final stage, the acquisition of **symbolic representation** abilities, "provided the means whereby culture and cognitive growth made contact.". Hence, Bruner was able to embrace a more fully contextual approach to cognitive development than Piaget's theory ever contemplated. Bruner was able to embrace a more fully contextual approach to cognitive development than Jean Piaget's theory ever contemplated.



Language and Infancy.

- In the late 1960s and the 1970s, Bruner explored how the infant coped with the world and found that their abilities were "far more competent, more active, more organized than had been thought before" (Bruner, 1983, p. 150).
- Eventually, Bruner notes, "I came to the conclusion that the need to use language fully as an instrument for participating in a complex culture (just as the infant uses it to enter the simple culture of his surround) is what provides the engine for language acquisition. The genetic 'program' for language is only half the story. The support system is the other half" (Bruner, 1983, p. 173). These include families and friends, acquaintances at school and at play, all the many relationships one has during a life provide a rich set of linguistic communities which foster the growth of language and, thus, of mind in every person.

The Turn to Narrative (late 1970s-early 2000s)

- In 1972, Bruner left Harvard to accept a professorship in Educational Psychology at Oxford University in the UK. He remained in Britain until 1980. Bruner returned to the United States in 1980, took a year off, and then, spent 7 years (1981-1988) at the New School for Social Research on 14th St. in Manhattan, NY.
- Bruner's approach to narrative appears to have had its origin in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He had speculated on the *role of consciousness* for many years: why had it developed in the human species? what might be its ultimate function? and so on. Bruner believes that consciousness is a tool which helps people understand the world better. Using this tool, we have come to understand, explain, "demystify" the phenomena of our world. There seem to be, Bruner argues, two ways of going about demystification:
 - One uses the apparatus of explanation, of cause-and-effect, of logical entailment, and in its most refined form, mathematics...It is Vygotsky's 'scientific thinking,' Piaget's 'formal operations,' James Mark Baldwin's 'propositional mode.'

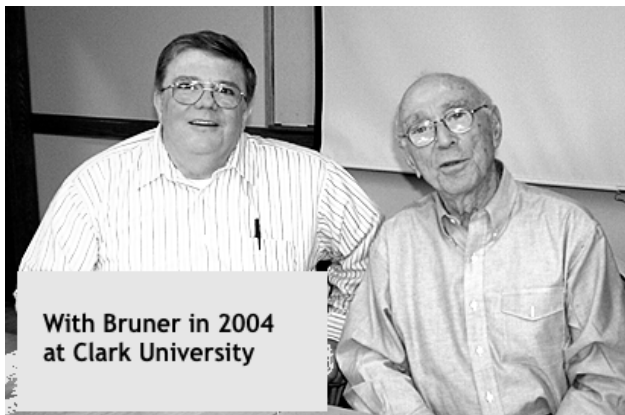
- The other mode tells a story; it is textual rather than logical. It does not deal in paradigms like perfectly round balls rolling down frictionless planes or the strict implication of the logician's 'iff,' his 'if and only if.' It is not that this mode does not have its rules, for the syntax of sentences, the constraints of dialogue and the grammar of stories are all demonstrable...Stories have a craft, even a pure form' (Bruner, 1983, p. 204).
- In 1986, Bruner formalized this idea into the argument that there are two modes of thought, two irreducible ways of making sense of the world.
 - The first is the **paradigmatic** or logico-mathematical approach to explanation. Here are all the rules of logic and scientific evidence. The second mode is **narrative** in which story construction and telling makes sense of the "vicissitudes of human intention".
 - These two modes were mutually exclusive and neither reducible to the other. A primary function of narrative is to open up "possible worlds" by means of imaginative exploration. Rather than human persons finding themselves trapped in the factual reality of the given world, the storied imagination can conjure up alternative ways that reality might be structured. As Bruner is fond of saying, this is thinking "in the subjunctive mood."
- Published ***Acts of Meaning*** (1990) which situated his embrace of narrative within a broad program on behalf of cultural psychology. The first chapter of this text, "The Proper Study of Man," begins with his assessment of the Cognitive Revolution: It failed ultimately to address the fundamental psychological problem of human beings by embracing the mechanical metaphor of the **computer** and the human person as an **information processing** entity. By taking this wrong turn, the social sciences pushed aside the central question of **human intentionality** or **agency**. Human persons use the symbol systems around them, preeminently found in language, to make meaning of their world. And rather than being shaped primarily by genetic inheritance (which do provide constraints), the mind is predominantly constituted by the forces of culture broadly embraced. When interacting in the social world, people use their culture's "folk psychology" or theory of intentionality to interpret the behavior of their social partners and to formulate behaviors in return.
- In the second chapter of his (1990) volume, "Folk Psychology as an Instrument of Culture," Bruner advances the proposition that we can only understand human behavior by (1) **understanding intentional states** and (2) **turning to the symbolic systems of a culture which shape or construct those intentionalities**. Such symbolic systems rest of four general foundations: **language, modes of discourse, forms of logical and narrative explanation, and patterns of mutually-dependent communal life**. The human person within culture must be understood as using a "transactional" rather than "individual" mind, that is, from the moment of conception forward, the human being functions within cultural contexts and can never be divorced from such an environment.
- **He argues that human experience is inherently sequential and, to make sense of temporal sequence, individuals must assemble the elements of experience in some type of overall configuration which we might call a plot.**
- Bruner has consistently dismissed the distinction between stories as "true" and stories



as "fictional creations." Narrative, he holds, is ultimately indifferent to factual reality. Narrative comes into existence or becomes fully energized by some "**departure from the canonical**" in human experience. By this he means that a story is set in motion when the usual situation in human life is somehow disrupted or rendered false.

- Bruner sometimes employs the notion of *peripeteia* from Aristotle's theory of drama. Recall that term means a kind of "reversal" in the fortunes of the central character of the play.
- Bruner also cites the *dramatistic theory of Kenneth Burke* and his notion of dramatic **Pentad**. Burke's theory finds the motivation for a story in the upset of balance among the elements of the Pentad.
- Other important aspects involve the objective or aims of good storytelling which is the achievement of what Bruner describes as *verisimilitude* or a kind of "lifelikeness." The way in which narrative reaches such a true-to-life portrayal very often rests upon the skillful use of **tropes** [figures of speech] such as *metaphor* (X is like Y), *metonymy* (the name stands for the whole reality), and *synecdoche* (part stands for the whole). In contrast, Bruner notes that **logical positivism or experimental science cannot generate explanations which are true-to-life because of their insistence upon context-less analysis.**

Narrative and the Law.



- Originally appointed to the NYU School of Law in 1991 at the age of 76, Bruner served from 1998 until his retirement in 2013 (at age 97!) as University Professor at New York University in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. It was a very convenient location since Jerry lived at 200 Mercer St., a 9-minute walk to the Law School building.
- He and his colleague, Tony Amsterdam, brought their expertise to a narrative understanding of legal procedures and court contests. They helped their students understand the degree to which the struggle in many trials (both criminal and civil) involved which side would tell the more plausible or convincing story.

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