

# Cultural Psychology of Education

Volume 2

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Giuseppina Marsico  
Editor

# Jerome S. Bruner beyond 100

Cultivating Possibilities

 Springer

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# Preface of the Series Editor

## Jerome Bruner: The Psychology in Its Making

It was a sunny early afternoon of June in 2011. Jerry Bruner and I were sitting in a nice restaurant in front of the sea in Salerno (Italy). During our endless conversation after lunch we started entertain a project: to write something in the same vein of the *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* written by Italo Calvino (1988) (original Italian title: *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*): a kind of book based on the series of Bruner's lectures in Italy. That idea keep stayed at the periphery of our minds for a long time and sometimes resurfaced in our later meetings.

But life is nothing then a constant effort in cultivating new possibilities and that idea, which has flown over our heads for years, has been elaborated and now become a tangible book placed in the Springer Books Series *Cultural Psychology of Education* that I'm editing.

After the inaugural book (Marsico et al. 2015) that was devoted to rethink the relationship between actors, practices, and borders within the educational contexts, this second book gives a substantial contribution to the recent advances in cultural psychology by looking at the extraordinary scientific production of Jerome Bruner in the special occasion of his centennial.

This book, in fact, is meant to celebrate the 100th birthday of Jerome Bruner, one of the most relevant scholars in contemporary psychology. Though his contribution to psychology, education, and law has been massive, Bruner oeuvre has still a lot to say in terms of unexplored possibilities. The book "Jerome S. Bruner beyond 100: Cultivating Possibilities" is collecting contribution from Bruner's students and colleagues worldwide that will try to use his legacy to look forward to the future of psychology, exactly in the spirit that Bruner himself is still interpreting. Thus, no celebration but a "genuine interest for the emergence of the novelty" and the potentialities that Bruner's work in cultural psychology can still develop, with concepts such as ambivalence, intersubjectivity, purpose, possibilities, wonderment. The book shares the interdisciplinary perspectives of scholars coming

from the different world areas—USA, Italy, Brazil, France, Denmark, UK—and different fields—psychology, education, law, philosophy, computing sciences—who provide the tale of Bruner’s academic and personal life and what is still to be done on the basis of his scientific production. The volume contains also an interview to Jerry Bruner and an almost inedited work of him.

This book is unique in its nature and is the only one published in this special occasion. As it would be clear in the next pages, the aim of the book is not only to celebrate Jerry’s extraordinary career, but mostly his natural tendency to think about lives developmentally. This idea permeates the whole volume and it is announced already in the book’s title: *Jerome S. Bruner’s beyond 100: Cultivating Possibilities*.

Salerno, Italy  
August 2015

Giuseppina Marsico

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# Introduction

*I don't honor my students for echoing me back.  
I want to find out where they're going to take the idea next*  
(Jerome Bruner)

## ***Living to Tell the Tale of Psychology: Jerome Bruner the Giant***

**Abstract** Jerome Bruner is undoubtedly one of the scholars who has chiefly contributed to the advancement of psychology. He passed through almost all the psychological paradigms helping to illuminate the relationship between mind and culture, between human beings and contexts in which they operate and in which the process of sense making takes place (just for mentioning something of his vast intellectual program). He has built and renewal psychology and other sisters discipline from inside, but people who directly know him are fascinated by his capability to tell this incredible professional trajectory as an amazing adventure. The fine novel *Living to Tell the Tale* by Gabriel García Márquez is the most appropriate for describing the extraordinary convergence of living, creating, and telling psychology as in the Jerry's case. Jerry Bruner always had and still has a genuine interest for the emergence of the novelty and this book underlies exactly the innovative action Jerry made along the history of contemporary psychology which is still actively persisting. The book focused on the analysis of Jerry work in cultural psychology at the intersection with other field such as education, philosophy, computational science, and law.

**Keywords** Bruner, 100th, Giant, Interdisciplinary, Innovation

The academic world is basically divided in two groups of people: who construct new knowledge and who recall, even elegantly, what others are built up. Then, aside of these, there are few who show superlative scholarly qualities. Yet Jerome



Bruner (Jerry) is not among them. He is far beyond this rough partition walking a span over the others' heads. Jerry Bruner is definitively a giant making the history of psychology while fertilizing other social sciences with his ideas over the last seventy years. Bruner is undoubtedly one of the scholars who have chiefly contributed to the advancement of psychology. He passed through almost all the psychological paradigms helping to illuminate the relationship between mind and culture, between human beings and contexts in which they operate and in which the process of sense making takes place (just for mentioning something of his vast intellectual program).

He has built and renewed psychology and other sisters disciplines from inside, but people who directly know him are fascinated by his capability to tell this incredible professional trajectory as an amazing adventure. The fine novel *Living to Tell the Tale* by Gabriel García Márquez (original Spanish title: *Vivir Para Contarla*) is the most appropriate for describing the extraordinary convergence (or the total overlapping) of living, creating, and telling psychology as in the Jerry's case.

With his 100 years old, Jerry, the smiling giant, is here for telling us the tale of psychology keeping questioning who we are as humans. On the top of his centennial, Jerry is still interested in going beyond the given information, cultivating possibility, and new possible worlds.

This book is exactly in this spirit. My aim was in fact, since the beginning, do not just celebrate the Jerry's remarkable biological achievement. As all the contributors to this volume I have had the fortune to meet Jerry and this had greatly impacted my intellectual life. Yet, I always find very trivial jumping on the giant's shoulders which is, unfortunately, the most common nowadays academic sport. The proliferation of publications in which the authors state they are "Piagetian," "Vygotskian," and "Brunerian" as if this give them a sort of scientific authority *per se*, without moving any step further, produces the death by asphyxiation of those theoretical perspectives (Valsiner 2014). The extraordinary liveliness of Jerry, his restless curiosity, and his love for challenging intellectual conversations deserve a different form of celebration. Thus, the book's goal is not to commemorate the past, but to look toward the future of the discipline. Jerry always had and still has a genuine interest for the emergence of the novelty and, in my opinion, this volume underlies exactly the innovative action Jerry made along the history of contemporary psychology which is still actively persisting. The volume focused on the analysis of Jerry work in cultural psychology at the intersection with other field such as education, philosophy, computational science, and law. This is a collective and interdisciplinary book based on contributors of distinguished scholars, mainly former students and colleagues of Jerry, who provide, from different angles, the tale of Jerry's academic (and not only) life and what is still to be done on the basis of his scientific production. So it is not a Festschrift nor an official biography. Even the interview with Jerry, here presented, is not about his chronological story line, but is more about reminiscing something from the past in serving the future. It ended up in a very warm and intimate conversation, as Jerry loves, in which he showed his fascinating "ability to tell a tale and teach you something at the same time" (Garland, this volume). After all, I gave up from the very beginning to the impossible task of summing up the enormous production of Jerry's along his brilliant career. I rely in the capability of the authors of this book to offer a detailed

and colored pictures of Jerry from which the reader will reconstruct the whole portrait of this smiling giant over the big three periods of his academic trajectory (Harvard, Oxford, New York). In line with Jerry's statement in epigraph, I think the best gift for his 100th birthday is to see how deeply his ideas have fertilized other minds and how many different research programs have been promoted.

## Talking with Bruner

Talking with Jerome Bruner is almost like a Mozart symphony. He has an impressive ability *to keep the conversation going* and a genuine interest for his interlocutors. In our endless conversations we touched upon a notable variety of topics. What sets the stage of such a kind of challenging conversations is the Jerry's 6.30 p.m. whisky single malt and my espresso sipped in front of the seaside in Salerno (Italy) or in his apartment in New York. Spending hours talking with Jerry represents the most adventurous trip I have never made in my life. Our starting differences in almost everything (age, gender, social milieu, academic role, and even our usual drink) turned in an adamant synthesis of our curiosity for the life. So, very often our conversation ended with more questions than answers, but I have never felt stupid on Jerry's side. Maybe astonished by his incredible life, but never stupid despite my blatant lack of preparation in more than half of the issues discussed. This is just because "Jerry's capacity to find fascination in everything" (Amsterdam, this volume) even in my impossible questions.

## Let Me Tell You a Story!

Jerry Bruner often starts talking with people saying: "*Let me tell you a story!*" I would do the same. I was just graduated when my supervisor put in my hands *Acts of meaning* (1990) and *The culture of education* (1996). This was the starting point of my exploration of cultural psychology field. In 2007, after my doctorate, I had the fortune to personally meet Jerry who went in Salerno, an already well-known place for him because the *Lauream Honoris Causa in Education* in 2002 and a previous scientific relationship with other colleagues.

I clearly remember when I met Jerry the first time. It was an extremely hot afternoon in June and I walked along the platform with my trembling legs on the high-heeled sandals. I was going to welcome Jerome Seymour Bruner "the giant" who immediately and generously smiled at me asking with curiosity who I were. From then, the things went magically smoothly ahead and some years later Jerry started planning his regular visit to me in Salerno that typically happened after his yearly stay in Reggio Emilia and before going to Madrid.

Those days in Salerno were usually dedicated to informal, but very inspiring meetings and some academic events. In one of this formal occasion (June 29,

2011, at University of Salerno), we topically discussed the always intriguing issue of the relation between psychology, culture, and education.

In my short introduction I played a little with McLuhan's motto: "I don't know who discovered water but it wasn't a fish!" that means "*we are the fish and the water is our beliefs/assumptions, most of which have been with us so pervasively as to have disappeared from view*" (Kay, this volume), so I asked Jerry to answer the question: Did fish happen to discover water? Jerry's speech was rigorous, provocative, and elegant.

As fishes in the water, we are totally immersed into the culture, we breath culture, and we notice how much pervasive it is only when we come out for a while from the sea in which we are swimming and exploring other waters. In this new position we can see the cultural environment in which we are grew up from a different perspective. Bruner stated, in fact, that the psychological processes have a sociocultural origin and are influenced by the culture through its symbols and artifacts and by the context in which they take place.

In Bruner's perspective, for understanding the way in which we become humans, we need to see how the individual's actions develop by participating to the culture and by sharing its symbolic systems.

Bruner underlined the formative role of culture as the main factor in shaping the mind. In other words education is conceived in strict interaction with the culture in which it takes form. This connection implies a special attention to the contextual resources (in term of formal and informal education) available to the persons.

Bruner claimed that we just enter the culture, we do not learn it (Bruner and Feldam 1993). Besides, individual participates to the complex system of meanings at the point that it becomes a constitutive dimension of him/her own identity. At the same time individual, trough his hermeneutic intervention, contributes to the progressive, never-ending re-modulation of the culture. The complexity of the connection between psychology, culture, and education appears here in all its evidence.

This was and still is one of the threads of the rich Jerry's scientific plot that most captured my attention over the years. Of course it is strictly interwoven with many others as it will be possible to see in the next pages.

My short story ends here for leaving space to Jerry himself and, then, to other companions who will help the reader in diving in the vast sea of Jerry's ideas.

## A Look at the Contributions

The book is organized in two parts. The first one "Bruner's Century" is composed by the interview with Jerry Bruner that was realized at Jerry's home in New York on January 26, 2015. This interview is not exactly a well prearranged and quick repartee, but it is more like a slow conversation where the *emotions are in motion*, our common memories are evoked into the dialogue, and our friendship is the ground for academic discourses. The result is a warm and shaded *watercolor* where personal and professional are interwoven. The interview has been afterward

complemented with a dedicated correspondence with Jerry which illuminates some points in his early academic stages left outside from the interview.

Some of the crucial issues such as, *ambivalence*, *human dilemmas*, *intersubjectivity*, Jerry touched upon during our colloquium have been, then, discussed by two invited commentators (Luca Tateo and Waldomiro J. Silva Filho) who topically provide further epistemological foundations to Jerry's theorization. This part is enriched by the presence of an almost inedited Bruner's writing. This is a priceless document. It is the lecture that Jerome Bruner gave at Clark University (USA) in 1968 just after von Bertalanffy (1966) and Piaget (1967) and included in the prestigious Heinz Werner Lecture Series. From 2007 to 2013 I have regularly visited the Department of Psychology at Clark University working with Jaan Valsiner and his scientific group that now has established the first international center for cultural psychology at Aalborg University (Denmark). Clark University was and still is one of the historically major scholarly institutions in USA. Nevertheless, few copies of the Bruner's Lecture are still at the Department of Psychology and Clark University Press, who printed the lectures series, disappeared long time ago. I brought one of those left copies to Jerry who wrote a dedication on it. Now, after getting all the permission, this manuscript come again to the light showing all its relevance. It should be read exactly "in light" of the advanced of the Brunerian theories for tracing back the process of knowledge construction in this specific field over the years.

The second part of the book "Navigating the Bruner's Ocean" is based on the effort made by a group of eminent scholars to provide the coordinate for swimming in the water of Bruner's work. All of them have had, for different reasons, a special relationship with Jerry Bruner. I asked them to selectively choose a topic of interest and showing not only what has already been done, but also what is the possible step ahead on the basis of Jerry's legacy.

This part of the book clearly shows how many routes Jerry, as an excellent sailor, has explored along his life and how all of them are still vivid and promising.

As Valsiner (this volume) points out in his chapter, since his "Duke years" Bruner was at the forefront of the scientific investigation working with William McDougall around the idea of the purposefulness of the human actions. In continuity with this point, Harré (this volume) shows how Bruner started developing the idea of intentionality in the meaning making process and in the human conduct already in the 1970s, foreseeing, in such a way, a future that is not yet totally achieved. The following five chapters (Linaza, Delval, Esteban-Guitart, Ruiz Pérez & Linaza, Gómez, this volume) refer mostly to the Oxford period and to the penetration of Jerry's ideas in Spain. While Alan Kay (this volume) highlights the "hidden arts" inspired by Jerry's perspectives, Colette Daiute (this volume) discusses the notion of "relational narrating" as a process to foster the development of individual-society interactions. The next two contributions present the impact of Bruner's theory in the field of education. Barth (this volume) and Pauffer & Amrein-Beardsley (this volume) show how the cognitive revolution and the cultural revolution have paved the way for significant advances in education launching new and complex challenges for the teachers, for the students and for the

educational policy at large. The intersection between psychology and law, which characterized the last period of Jerry's academic trajectory in New York, is well illustrated in the last five chapters (Fox, Garland, Davis, Chase, and Amsterdam this volume). Given the particular nature of these contributions among which there is the Amsterdam's masterpiece, they are introduced by a chapter written by Eleanor Fox who gives us not only the measure of the enormous impact of Jerry's ideas on the legal academy, but also concrete examples of Jerry's commitment against death penalty and prisons (especially in case on young people), poverty, and inequality.

All these chapters are preceded by a short and very personal homage to Jerry written by his beloved former student and close friend Howard Gardner. It is the only one contribution of such a kind, but those words well express all our deepest love for Jerry and seem to me a fitting tribute to a most remarkable man.

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