

Instruction as pedagogic activity based on “Wide understanding of learning”

Gabriela C. Cristea ^(*)

„Spiru Haret” University, Bucharest [Romania]

Abstract

The psychological theories of learning, with descriptive character, must be interpreted pedagogically in models of instruction, normative and prescriptive (J.S.Bruner). This thesis, sustained by the great American psycho-pedagogue Bruner, has value of axiom, valuable also in the postmodern era, in the case of the „contemporary theories of learning” (Knud Illeris).

The analysis of a psychological theory, which aims a „wide understanding of the human learning”, imply: the basis of learning; the conditions of learning (internal and external); learning as fundamental psychic activity; the applications of learning in pedagogy, in the area of the educational system and of the educational process. Thus model of analysis may serve as methodological landmark for the identification and evaluation of the existing pedagogical resources inside the psychological theories of learning.

The psychological theory of „wide understanding of learning” may be transformed into a model of efficient instruction in the measure in which we operate with a pedagogical “conceptual sketch”, ample and opened, which fixate and articulate effectively: a) the basis of learning, sustained not only at the level of psychology or biology, but, first of all, at the level of two fundamental sciences of education: theory and methodology of instruction / general didactics and theory and methodology of curriculum; b) internal and external conditions of learning, identified, appreciated and valorized at the level of the chart for the observation and characterization of pupil and of school class, adopted and institutionalized on national plan, territorial and local; c) learning, approached pedagogically as action, subordinated to the activity of

^(*) Assoc. Prof., Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania. Email: gabi_cristea2007@yahoo.com

instruction, its general and specific objectives, in tight interdependence and collaboration with teaching and evaluation; d) the applications of the psychological theories, interpreted as model of instruction, oriented especially in the area of the educational process, but also in that of school politics, referring to the construction of school curriculum, to the adoption of efficient methods and techniques of teaching-learning-evaluation, to the accomplishment of a differentiated, individualized instruction etc.

Key words: *learning, models of instruction, the conditions of learning, curriculum*

Introduction

The psychological theories of learning can offer special pedagogical premises for the projection of an efficient instruction. For this purpose, they must be transformed from psychological descriptive theories into pedagogical models of instruction, with normative and prescriptive character. This thesis, sustained with solid scientific arguments by one of the greatest theoreticians of learning in U.S.A. and in the world, Jerome S. Bruner, imposes: a) the interpretation on any psychological theory of learning from pedagogic perspective; b) the reconstruction of the psychological theories, pedagogically significant, at the level of efficient models of instruction, in different contexts specific to the educational process (see J.S. Bruner, trad. 1970)

Bruner's thesis has value of axiom or of general principle which must be respected in the psychological foundation of any curricular project which appeals to different psychological theories, older or more modern, classical or postmodern. In this sense, the theory and practice of the curricular projection had valorized, in time, several famous psychological theories of learning, which proved to be useful due to pedagogical processing, by their „conversion” in potential models of efficient instruction. Among other significant examples we mention the psychological theories of learning elaborated by Vîgotski, Galperin, Gagne, Bruner, Gardner, Goleman etc., valorized largely in school as efficient instruction models in certain didactic and extra-didactic contexts (see Ioan

Neacșu, 1999; Gabriela Cristea, 2003; Sorin Cristea, 2005; Ion Negreț_Dobridor; Ion-Ovidiu Pânișoară, 2005).

The newer theories of learning, presented as *postmodern theories* or as „*contemporary theories of learning*”, can test the pedagogical efficiency in the same normative frame, rigorously delimited by J.S. Bruner, decades ago (see Knud Illeris, coord., 2014).

The new „contemporary theories of learning” propose to reach a „wide understanding of the human learning” approached at the level of a *structure* which articulates several „principal fields”:

- 1) *Basics of learning* (Biology, Psychology, Socio-Humanist Sciences);
- 2) *The internal conditions of learning* (affective states, age, subjective situation);
- 3) *Learning as fundamental psychic activity* (Functions, Structures, Types of learning, Obstacles);
- 4) *External conditions of learning* (Learning space, Society, Subjective situation);
- 5) *Applications* at the level process and educational system (Pedagogy, Educational Politics) (ibidem, p.23)

The presented *model*, constructed by the author from *psychological* perspective, has in its center *learning*, as fundamental psychical activity, general-human, determined by its bio-psycho-cultural basics (studied by the biologic sciences, psychological sciences, by certain socio-humanist sciences). *Learning* is determined and depends, at its turn, on the *internal conditions* (psychological, anatomic-physiological) and *external* (social, pedagogic) of *learning*. On this fundal intervene, act, interact, evolve (either independent, interdependent, hierarchical) several *types of learning*, conditioned by the psychological age of the one who learns and by his life and school experience: a) *cumulative learning*; b) *learning by assimilation*; c) *learning by accomodation*; d) „*transformative*” *learning*. The effective accomplishment of these four *types of learning* in an institutional environment, organized *formal*

(school) and *nonformal* (extra-school), depends on the way in which „the model of learning”, *psychologically* elaborated, is applied *pedagogically* at *macro structural* level (by the „educational politics” reflected in the organization of the educational system) and *microstructural*, through the quality of the concrete didactic / pedagogic activities (lessons etc.) projected in the context of the educational process.

The conversion process of a *descriptive psychological theory* into *normative* and *prescriptive pedagogic models* is a complex, difficult process, which demands a *superior scientific creativity*, of *inventive* and even *innovatory* type. It requires a consistent, substantial effort, of *pedagogical interpretation of the psychological theory of learning*, adopted as *potential model of efficient instruction*. Such an effort of *pedagogical interpretation* is necessary in the case of any *psychological theory* of learning, no matter of its historical label, *modern* or *postmodern* etc.

In the case of the *psychological theory* previously presented, elaborated by K. Illeris, having as purpose „a wide understanding of human learning”, the pedagogical reading of the psychological text allows a set of interpretations and even re-conceptualizations necessary in order to be able to elaborate a certain profile of *model of efficient instruction* in didactic conditions specific to the educational process. The *conceptual sketch* of this *model of efficient instruction based on „wide understanding of learning”* includes:

1) The basics of *learning*. They are pedagogically re-conceptualized, starting from the approach of learning as *action* subordinated to the *instruction activity*. They are assured and sustained at the level of *pedagogical / fundamental education sciences (the general theory of instruction / general didactics and theory of curriculum)* and of pedagogic / education sciences of *interdisciplinary* type (*psychology of education, management of education, school class management*).

2) *Internal conditions of learning*. They are reported at the pedagogical information accumulated transformed into objectives *longitudinal* and

transversal, at the level of the *school charts of observation and characterization of the pupil and of school class*, which include *essential data* referring to: a) physical development and the health condition; b) psychical development at cognitive level (sensitive, rational) and non-cognitive (affective, motivational, volitional).

3) *External conditions of learning*. Are reported to the pedagogical information, accumulated and transformed into objectives, longitudinal and transversal, at the level of the *school charts of observation and characterization of the pupil and of school class*, which include *essential data* referring to: a) the socio-educational environment (family, local community etc.); b) pedagogic environment (school and extra-scholar).

4) *The action of learning*. Is integrated in the instruction activity, in a perspective specific to the paradigm of *curriculum* which puts the accent on the necessary *interdependence* between the *pedagogic / didactic actions of teaching-learning-evaluation*. *Learning* as action subordinated to *instruction*, is projected and accomplished in accordance with: a) its *scientific* basics, approached from the perspective of some *pedagogic / fundamental education sciences* and of *pedagogic / education sciences interdisciplinary constructed*; b) *internal and external conditions*, known and valorized at the level of *concrete situations*, in multiple pedagogic contexts.

5) *Applications of the action of learning*. Valorizes, from *pedagogic* perspective, the two *basic processes* and the *three dimensions of learning*, presented at *psychological* level:

A) *Basic processes of learning*. Are present at intern and extern level.

a) „The process of external interaction” intervenes between *the one who learns* and *his social, cultural or material environment* (natural, economic etc.) which offers different *formative advantages or disadvantages*, different *premises of formation and development*, positive or negative, favorable or unfavorable etc.

b), „The internal psychological process of elaboration and acquisition” of *information* aims those *information* which we define „*subjective as knowledge, meanings, attitudes or relevant reactions*” (ibidem, p.30).

B) *Dimensions of learning*. Reflect, at particular, specific level, *the structure of the activity of instruction*, interpreted from the perspective of the paradigm of *curriculum*, based on the interdependence which is permanently necessary between *the actions of teaching-learning- evaluation*. It involves three *component parts* which must be developed in *interaction*.

a) „*Part of contents*”. Considers the „learned material” or which must be learned, according to the objectives of the activity of instruction, specifically transposed at the level of the action of learning. It refers to *knowledge, abilities of understanding, skills* (intellectual and psychomotric), *cognitive strategies* (of solving *problems* or / and of *situations-problem*).

b) „The stimulating part”. It is the one which produces and directs the *mental energy necessary for the learning process to take place*. It is generated by: mental and corporal equilibrium; the degree of receptiveness, type of motivation, affectivity, will; the manner of relating with the world and with the self / see the *characterial attitude*). It assumes *attitudes* or „relevant reactions” toward learning, engaged (cognitive, but also affective, motivational, characterial) for the *value* orientation „of the learnt material”;

c) *The integration part*. Is the „interaction part” between the contents of *learning and the stimulation of learning*. It may be accomplished by different *forms* of: perception / representation; communication (transmission / construction / reception / interiorization / valorization of *didactic messages*); organization of learning inside the instruction activity (formal, nonformal; frontal, on groups, individual; lesson etc.); participation, cooperation etc. „It serves at the pupil’s personal integration” in the community of class, school etc. „constructing *the sociability* of the one who learns”. It can be accomplished and perfected also at the level of „*edification* which must pass through the other two dimensions” – the dimension of the contents of learning and the dimension of

stimulating integrated learning inside the *activities of instruction*, conceived *curricular* as activity of *teaching – learning – evaluation* (ibidem, see pp.24-27).

The valorization of this *instruction model* based on the „*wide understanding of learning*”, from the perspective of the paradigm of *curriculum*, involves the solving of the following *psychological problems, interpretable pedagogically*:

a) *the assurance of the optimal connection between teaching and learning*, between what „pupils are taught and what they should know already”;

b) *the observation of the causes which perturb the interaction between teaching and learning*, between *teacher and pupil*, depending on the teacher („explanations which are not good enough or coherent” or are „partially or incorrectly understood” by pupils), or by pupil („focusing deficiency”; „errors or lacks in the previous learning which affects the capacity to understand the new contents”);

c) *the optimal attitudinal involving of pupils*, but also of the *teacher*, reported to all the „three parts of learning”: the contents of learning – stimulation of learning – integration of contents and of the factors which stimulate learning at the level of internal motivation and superior characterial attitude, demonstrated in the reports with the world and with the self;

d) *the treating of the acquisitions of learning (knowledge, skills, cognitive strategies, values)* „not only at cognitive level”, but also *noncognitive*, which impose the formation and development of some *superior attitudes towards learning*, supported affectively (positive feelings for learning), motivational (internal motivation to learning), volitional (constant voluntary effort, adaptable to the context of instruction), characterial (correct report to the existing *objective and subjective reality* / constructed in the context of the action of learning inside the instruction activity);

e) *permanent report of the teacher* (but also of the school manager etc.) at „*the process of interaction between the one who learns and his social*,

relational, cultural and material environment” which conditions, in different degrees, positive or negative, both the content and the stimulation of learning (ibidem, see pp.28, 29);

f) *the optimal utilization of the „four types of learning*” by means of which the pupil, „the one who learns, constructs actively his own mental structures for learning”, dependent upon the psychological age and the previous cognitive and noncognitive experience, acquired both objectively and subjectively; this implies the understanding of the fact that:

- „*cumulative or mechanical learning* takes place most frequently in the first years of life, and later on appears only in special situations” (automatized learning, conditioned by punctual tasks etc.);

- „*learning by assimilation*, by far the most often encountered type of learning”, takes places by a „connection between the new element and a pre-established scheme or pattern”, being perfected especially in school;

- „*learning by accommodation* or transcending supposes the breaking (of some parts) from an existing scheme and its transformation so that a new situation to be attached to it”; it has the main characteristic that „it can be reactivated and applied in several different contexts”, in the school environment, but also the extra-scholar one;

- „*transformative learning*” intervenes in special situations which impose „the simultaneous restructuring of an entire group of schemes or patterns inside the three dimensions of learning” (contents – stimulation – integration of content and stimulation); implies that *the one who learns* „to change in order to be able to advance” (ibidem, pp. 29-33);

g) *surpassing the obstacles* which appear in the path of learning, generated by causes: *social* / („some social conditions (n.n. negative) created by the modern society”) and *psychological* („of *defense*” or „of *resistance*”); at psychological level it must be observed the existing difference between the causes dependent on „*defense*” or on „*resistance*”; they must be known and treated differently from pedagogical perspective; thus, „while the mechanisms

of *defense* are pre-existent to the situation of learning and function in a reactive manner, *the resistance* is caused by the situation of learning *per se* and is an active answer”; consequently, the teacher must construct *situations of learning* for pupil, controlling, in a positive manner, the pupil’s resources depending on his *defense mechanisms* functional in the context of any activity of instruction;

h) *the correct appreciation*, from *pedagogic* perspective, of the *internal and external conditions of learning* at the limit of their *objective* character or / and *subjective*; in the case of the *internal conditions* – see the importance of *intelligence*, approached from the perspective of the *multiple intelligences theory* (Gardner) but also from the managerial perspective of *learning and learning styles management*; in the case of the *external conditions* – see the importance of the community environment (family, local community) and scholar etc. (ibidem, pp.34-39).

In **conclusion**, *the model of instruction based on the wide understanding of learning*, valorizes *pedagogically the psychological processes and dimensions of the action of learning* in the specific context of the *instruction activity*, conceived, in the perspective of the paradigm of *curriculum*, as *teaching – learning – evaluation activity*.

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