

Placing Cognition in a Developmental Context

Jerome Bruner and Helen Haste (Eds.)
**Making Sense: The Child's
Construction of the World**

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Jerome Bruner, visiting scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation and research professor of psychology at New York University (New York City), is the recipient of the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Award and author of Actual Minds, Possible Worlds. ■ Helen Haste, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Bath (England), is coauthor, with D. Locke, of Morality in the Making: Judgement, Action and Social Context. ■ Sandra R. Waxman is assistant professor of psychology at Harvard University.

In *Making Sense*, Bruner and Haste bring together a host of internationally recognized psychologists to advance a synthesis in the study of human development. They argue that cognitive development is not an isolated achievement but, rather, is deeply embedded in the social and cultural context in which it unfolds. Bruner, like Vygotsky, has long been acknowledged for his insistence on the importance of language and social context as vehicles of development. In the present volume, he and Haste seek to create a developmental psychology that unites cognition with these other domains.

The editors articulate their vision clearly in their introduction, where they challenge the prevailing inclination to treat cognitive, language, and affective development as distinct psychological entities. They argue that this atomized approach will ultimately fail in its description of human development, the essence of which lies in the intricate alliances linking these entities.

The prominent role of cognition in developmental psychology was ushered in with the Piagetian tradition and has been fueled by stunning discoveries regarding the cognitive capacities of young children and infants. Yet it has also become clear

that these early capacities are often elusive; they seem to be exercised inconsistently, under a restricted range of circumstances. Within existing theories of cognitive development, such inconsistencies are taken as evidence of "competence-performance" distinctions—that children in some sense "have" a particular ability but fail to exercise it universally. Appealing to competence-performance distinctions, however, obscures the crucial observation that, often, early abilities are first exercised within the social sphere. In such cases, the vital developmental questions become those concerning the interface between cognition and commerce in the social arena. Bruner and Haste call on each author to weave together these areas.

Because the authors pursued different paths in this endeavor, the chapters are somewhat uneven. Some authors (e.g., Dunn, Light, DeLoache, and Brown) focus primarily on specific research projects. Others (e.g., Bruner), adopting a primarily theoretical stance, elaborate the principles outlined in the introduction. The remaining authors (e.g., Butterworth, Donaldson, Feldman, Lloyd, and Haste) seek a middle ground, closely tying their empirical observations and theoretical dispositions. Each chapter, in its own way, lends substance to the claim that traditional developmental issues (e.g., egocentrism, role taking, empathy, inference) may be reconceptualized within Bruner and Haste's "dialectical" framework.

Making Sense is an intriguing and timely collection. The principal motif—that cognition is not a solitary endeavor but a dialectical process that involves the young child's thought, language, and culture—is asserted persuasively. Numerous arguments are summoned to ground individual development within its social context. Yet, without a unifying theory, there is a risk of continuing to sidestep, rather than transform, the traditional dichotomies that the authors seek to dissolve. One is left wondering precisely how to fuse the constructs in one domain (e.g., cognition) with those in another (e.g., affective development). Nevertheless, with its clear focus on "cognition-in-context," *Making Sense* offers students of cognitive, language, and affective development the elements with which to construct a comprehensive, new approach. ■