Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Second Language Learning (SLL)/Applied Linguistics (AL) Meetings

Guidelines for Engaging Participation

"Every basically new approach to scientific problems leads inevitably to new methods and ways of research"
(Vygotsky, 1997).

SCT and SLL/AL meetings are inspiring and provide participants with a unique environment for collective thinking. The evolution of the SCT and SLL/AL group, dealing now with quite sophisticated topics, is requiring that we establish guidelines for engaging participation and maximizing quality feedback from audience to presenters.

Accepting proposals for SCT meetings (14-18 presentations)

(1) Have a balance of presentations from graduate students and more experienced researchers working with Sociocultural Theory.

(2) Make sure that presenters are working with SCT tenets and not with a loose understanding of social and cultural approaches to education.

A return to our original approach to meetings

The quality & content of SCT presentations are solid. The level of sophistication applying SCT concepts to SLL/AL has also increased in the last few years. This collective development has led to needing more and more time for presenting each session. Consequently, time used for presentations has tended to get longer and longer (generally 50-55 minutes). This has taken away time from interaction and quality of feedback from participants to presenters. For this reason, we are suggesting some guidelines to keep in mind for our future meetings.

Orientation guidelines to maximize interaction and quality of feedback and discussion

(1) Length of presentation
(1.1) 30 minutes maximum for presentation + 30 minutes discussion. Chair sessions will be strict about time. 5 minutes breaks will be scheduled between sessions.
(1.2) Power point slides: presenters should limit their power point slides to a maximum of 20. It is hard to present more than 20 slides in less than 30 minutes. Furthermore, slides should be used to compliment the talk rather than duplicate it.
(1.3) If a handout is circulated before the meeting by a presenter(s), participants should print it, and read it before the session.

(2) Focused topic
  (2.1) If appropriate, presenters should focus their topic on **one central issue to receive feedback**. The issue should be relevant to advance work on SCT and SLL/AL. Presenters are encouraged to make explicit why this issue is relevant

for SCT work considering the field of SLL/AL. The issue should be relevant to advance work on SCT and SLL/AL.

(2.2)   Presentations should **go straight to the point**. Begin and end the presentation with your question for feedback, so audience is focused. Present the burning question issue/question that we are trying to answer **first (first five minutes of presentation).** Forego literature review unless the presentation is about what others have written on a particular topic that you do not agree with or that you think requires reconsideration. Avoid giving definitions of well known concepts in SCT, e.g., ZPD, mediation, internalization, higher mental functions, etc. End 30 minute presentation **reiterating the focused** question.

(2.3)   Presenters should bring **one question and one question only** for which they want feedback. This question should be well thought-out, **elaborated and concrete**. To phrase this question, think how the group can help you in your research exactly. Presenters should spend considerable time in framing and reframing this question for discussion.

For example:

Questions for which it is hard to give focused and quality feedback:
- Do you think there is learning going on?
- What do you think about this?

More focused questions (these are only two quick examples):
- If L2 development is a conceptual process, how can I make sense of these data considering that I am using Vygotsky (1986) definition of development (conscious awareness of semiotic means that leads to development)?
- Which published works in SCT/SLL/AL can I use as models to conduct my research on Dynamic Assessment, and what construct and data analysis procedures are appropriate to make sense of these data?

(2.4)   The presentation can also focus on a set of data that you would like help in analyzing.

(2.5)   When necessary, and before the presentation, researchers should provide attendees with references to sources or reading material to be discussed or referred to during the presentation. Reading pertinent material ahead of the presentations gives attendees the opportunity to reflect more on the topics and to think about possible feedback. This procedure also helps presenters cut time from "reviewing the literature" and focus more on their question.

(3) Relevance

All presentations should make explicit how the presentation is advancing SCT and SLL/AL research and praxis. Why is this topic relevant for SCT and SLL/AL now?

(4) Feedback from audience to presenters

General commentary from audience that elaborates on topics tangentially related to focused question is not helpful to presenters. Anecdotes based on personal experience which illustrates well-established notions of SCT are interesting but do not tend to help presenters with their specific question.

All participants should be very aware that the point of each session is to provide **focused feedback that helps presenters to advance their research agenda.** See worksheet below.

Participants should attempt to provide feedback on issues such as:
- Relevant work and references that may help with information to answer questions
- Research publications that may serve as models for research
- Data analysis procedures that may be used with data
- Make an explicit link to and between concepts that can help the presenter be more coherent in building theory/practice.
- Point out relevant lines of research that should be pursued by presenters

(5) Four basic types of sessions

- **Theoretical**: challenges that connect SCT and SLL/AL. Presenters should choose one concrete topic.
- **Data Analysis:** data will be presented and explored. Some preliminary analysis should be conducted. Data should be made available to all participants before hand. Bring specific question.
- **Praxis:** based on pedagogical and practical applications (curriculum design and course development, pedagogy and methodology, teacher cognition, technology-enhanced language learning, etc.) inspired by principles based on the SCT. Focus on one pedagogical technique.
- **Research methodology:** issues related to how to conduct research from a sociocultural perspective.

WORKSHEET FOR FEEDBACK IN SCT MEETINGS

TOPIC

FOCUSED QUESTION

FEEDBACK

Relevant published work and references that may help with information to answer question

Research publications that may serve as models for research

Data analysis procedures that may be used with data

Inconsistencies in connecting theoretical positions which are not philosophically compatible with SCT

Relevant lines of research that should/could be pursued by presenter/s

Other