



ISCAR NEWS

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From the President

‘What is ISCAR?’

Dear ISCAR Member,

Next year ISCAR will hold its Second Congress. In preparation for that event I plan to send a series of communications about the organization ‘ISCAR.’ This first communication addresses the question ‘What is ISCAR?’

What is ISCAR?

This question must be answered from several different perspectives.

The material form of ISCAR

The material form of ISCAR is manifested in its website, a presentation of ISCAR (carefully prepared by the Executive Committee, after much discussion), its triennial congress, Executive Committee, newsletter (sometimes), and more recently with sections (organized nationally, regionally or substantively).

While ISCAR’s Articles provide the possibility to be engaged in publication activities (e.g., books and journals), there is no indication at this time that ISCAR will engage in such activities in the near future.

The social form of ISCAR

ISCAR is a remarkable organization when one considers the tremendous diversity of its members’ disciplinary backgrounds. Ok, it is probably true that a large percentage come from psychology and/or education, but among its members one can also find researchers whose primary disciplinary focus is computer science, information systems, work research, knowledge management, organizational studies, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, occupational therapy, criminology,

or social work. Even though I have tried to include all the disciplinary backgrounds found among our members, it is likely that I have (unintentionally) overlooked some — which only underlines the diversity of our membership. In an age where ‘multidisciplinarity’ is praised and promoted, it is perhaps a sign of our true multidisciplinarity that we do not have to proclaim this in our organizational name or materials.

If one has ‘grown’ along with ISCAR (and its historical predecessors), then this multidisciplinarity seems ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. It is only when one starts to think about how many other organizations do (or do not!) have this character that one starts to recognize that ISCAR may be relatively atypical in this respect. While it has never been a goal of ISCAR to be multidisciplinary, it remains, in my view, a strength of the organization. Given that we work with theoretical traditions that emphasize the importance of practice in development, it is fortunate that its members can encounter research (through regional and international events) that span a range from microstudies of dyadic interaction to large-scale studies of organizational development (not that this is meant to imply a simple linear continuum). From experience I know that not all persons see the beauty or good fortune of such an arrangement. But also from my own experience, I have many times had tremendous benefit from listening to computer systems people discuss their problems in designing systems in relation to work practices or sociologically-oriented researchers trying to show connections between historical developments and current psychological processes. ISCAR seems to have this diversity ‘for free’ as it were.

ISCAR has been able to provide room for this diversity of disciplinary interests, without any significant effort to recruit such diversity. There does not seem to be a need to make special efforts in this respect — if my evaluation is wrong, please write to me! — and I hope that ISCAR will continue to recognize, support and sustain this diversity through its concrete practices (e.g., its ways of organizing Congresses).

ISCAR is also marked by a diversity of theoretical interests. The Executive Committee worked hard to find the summary formulation in our Presentation, so I will not try to summarize it again. Rather I will only underline that there is a diversity of interests within ISCAR and that it is unlikely that there will ever be a need or a time for a 'standard' ISCAR theoretical perspective. This is not to say that 'anything goes' but if I may speculate about why our organization has not plagued with 'theory wars,' it is because most researchers are focused on concrete phenomena of analyzing and developing human practices. If there are intellectual debates, they are focused on concrete problems of these practical fields of investigation, and not on formulating the 'right' or 'true' theoretical perspective to use. This substantive focus may also explain, in part, why ISCAR can contain so many different disciplinary perspectives.

The organizational form of ISCAR

This form is perhaps the most important to understand and the most difficult to explain. The usual view of a scientific organization is that there is a central core that provides intellectual and spiritual leadership. One thinks of metaphoric descriptions like 'benevolent parent' or 'defining leader.' By contrast, ISCAR is a flat organization. While there is an Executive Committee, it does not view itself as being the source of centrally-organized and initiated activities. Rather,

and here is the important point, ISCAR is meant to live in the locally-organized activities (where local may refer to a regional event like the Nordic Conference on Cultural and Activity Research or the international CHACDOC section within ISCAR). In other words, in coming to ISCAR, one should not be looking to a central body that is initiating activities, defining intellectual agenda, sanctioning and suppressing accepted and unaccepted theoretical perspectives. Rather the belief is that activities should be initiated from among the membership, with the central organization providing support where it can (e.g., web access, mailing list, communication).

Does this mean that all proposed activities will be accepted uncritically? Probably not. Does this mean that there are a set of rules and regulations — written or unwritten — that must be followed? No (except for a minimal process for initiating a section). And I hope that it will not be necessary to formulate such rules. For now, ISCAR has been a community that has used a dialogical approach — consultation and discussion among persons who want to initiate activities. It seems better to retain that dialogical approach, then to formalize matters with written procedures.

In short, ISCAR is mutually constituted. While it has a central form (as described under 'material form'), it lives primarily in the local activities that are initiated in its name. In some cases, already existing activities have now come within the sphere of ISCAR. In other cases, local activities have been initiated from friendly discussions on my part with individuals in regions.

The exact relation between ISCAR, as a central organization, and these local activities is ambiguous. I hope that it will remain that way. That is, local activities should grow out of the needs and

historical conditions of the community forming the activity — rather than an expression of some central ISCAR agenda or policy (which does not exist anyway). ISCAR lives through these distributed and local activities, while these local activities are able to ‘borrow’ some legitimation from the ideal of ISCAR as an international scientific organization. While ISCAR did not make this interesting and curious ‘dynamic’, it is clear that its members ought to benefit from the fact that it is often easier to persuade both participants and senior management to accept and support a local activity that is perceived to be part of an international organization.

An important implication of this point is that ISCAR members should be oriented to developing local activities — such as a national meeting, a regional meeting, a section with a substantive focus, and so forth. ISCAR, as a central organization, can provide assistance with communications (email, website) and experience (e.g., putting you in touch with others who have done similar things). In principle members of the Executive Committee can and should be helping coordinate in the countries for which they are responsible. At the same time, members should not be waiting for the central organization to be especially active in terms of initiating activities.

The spiritual form of ISCAR

Perhaps it is too bold to try to say something about this form — especially given the discussion about ISCAR’s distributed organizational nature. Nonetheless, I want to offer a few speculations or observations about this form.

The ‘spirit’ of ISCAR is still under development. This letter is part of that development, as we all try to understand its forms. ISCAR is unusual compared to most scientific organizations in that it is not bound together around a common

discipline (e.g., psychology, education, computer science) or common object of investigation. Even its theoretical focus cannot be considered to be unified in any extended manner.

One aspect of ISCAR’s spirit has been its willingness to accept diverse theoretical perspectives. Over the years, there has been some uncertainty from individual members about whether ISCAR will require all its members to work with some specific theoretical concepts or whether it will reject the use of others. I think experience has shown that there has not been any need to make an ‘official’ or ‘authorized’ ISCAR theoretical view, and that its commitment is exactly as stated in Article 3 — ‘to promote and develop multidisciplinary theoretical and empirical research on societal, cultural and historical dimensions of human practices.’ I expect that ISCAR will be able to retain that spirit (which again reflects why we are a multidisciplinary organization), both for our personal benefit of having a strong research community and for benefit of our local spheres of action, whether it is education of students, development of societal institutions and their practices, and so forth.

A second aspect of ISCAR’s spirit is a concern about the societal conditions for human life. While ISCAR does not have an explicit humanist or political focus, many researchers within ISCAR are concerned about the meaning of their research in relation to those conditions — as opposed, for example, to a view that their responsibility is only to describe and explain processes of learning and development, or whatever phenomenon is the object of investigation. Perhaps this feature reflects more about the spirit of ISCAR’s members, than the spirit of the organization as such, but I hope that the organization will continue to allow that spirit to express itself through its diverse activities.

Implications

This description of ISCAR is meant to communicate the idea(l) that ISCAR is an organization that serves (and should serve) a coordinating function among its members around the world. At the same

time, ISCAR is a decentralised organisation that depends on its members to organise specific activities that are needed and useful for scientific communication.

Seth Chaiklin <seth@iscar.org>

Section News

2. CHACDOC (Cultural-historical approaches to children's development and childhood) Section Meeting

The CHACDOC section will hold a meeting on Monday, 8 September 2008, 9.30 am to 4 pm at the University of San Diego — one day before the ISCAR Congress.

The theme of the meeting is: Conceptions and research from cultural-historical approaches on motive and values in children's development, and how to confront the ethical aspects of this problem area in practice.

Each of the following presentations will take this special focus, with time for discussions.

- Professor Anne Edwards, Oxford Centre for Social Activity Theory (OSAT), Oxford University, United Kingdom
- Professor Anna Stetsenko, Graduate Center, City University of New York, USA
- Professor Marilyn Fleeer, Centre for Early Childhood Education, Monash University, Australia

3. New Section in Africa

A new section has been started recently among ISCAR members in Africa, with Mohammed-Aminu Sanda from the University of Ghana Business School taking the lead role in organizing the section. There is an active mailing list, and the

- Professor Mariane Hedegaard, Center for Person, Practice, Development and Culture, Copenhagen University, Denmark

Those who are interested in attending this CHACDOC section meeting should use the Congress registration form. Membership in ISCAR and the CHACDOC section are preconditions for attendance at this section meeting. For membership in the CHACDOC section write to: Mariane.Hedegaard@psy.ku.dk

As announced on the Congress homepage, there will be an extra conference fee, \$30 USD, to cover the cost of lunch and bus transport from the ISCAR Congress site at the University of California, San Diego to the meeting place at the University of San Diego.

<http://www.iscar.org/section/chacdoc/>

section is working on preparing a webpage. If you know researchers in Africa who would be interested to participate in this section, then write to Mohammed: masanda@ug.edu.gh

Announcements

4. *Subjectivity: International Conference in Critical Psychology, Cultural Studies and Social Theory*

27 – 29 June 2008, Cardiff, Wales, UK

Call for papers: Deadline – 31 January 2008

Subjectivity: International Conference in Critical Psychology, Cultural Studies and Social Theory will be held at the Cardiff School of Social Sciences, University of Cardiff, Wales, 27th – 29th June 2008.

Themes are:

- Embodiment, Affect, Materiality
- New Political Subjectivities/New Social Movements
- Redistributing The Psychological

Explanation of conference themes at:

www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/subjectivity/

Please send a 200 word proposal to:

subjectivity@cardiff.ac.uk

by 31 January 2008.

5. *Fifth International Conference on the Dialogical Self*

26 – 29 August 2008, Cambridge, UK

Call for papers: Deadline – 18 January 2008

The *Fifth International Conference on the Dialogical Self* will take place on 26 – 29 August 2008 at Queens' College, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

The conference will focus upon the self and dialogue and the ways in which meaning is constructed and reconstructed.

Deadline for paper submissions is: 18 January 2008.

More information at:

<http://www.dialogicalscience.com/>

To communicate with the organizers or submit proposals:

dialogicalself2008@googlemail.com

6. New Books by ISCAR Members

L'entretien clinique en pratiques: Analyse des interactions verbales d'un genre hétérogène

Michèle Grossen and Anne Salazar Orvig (Eds.)

2006, Belin, 283 pages

<http://www.editions-belin.com/csl/page.asp?path=tScoSupPsy003984>

ISBN: 2-7011-3678-4

€21 euros

L'entretien clinique constitue un outil de travail privilégié dans de nombreuses professions et a ainsi fait l'objet de plusieurs manuels. Outils de formation indispensables, ceux-ci négligent toutefois une question fondamentale: que font exactement les psychologues, psychiatres, éducateurs, médecins, thérapeutes de famille ou de groupe, chercheurs, etc. lorsqu'ils mènent un entretien clinique? Quelle est la réalité de leurs pratiques? Cet ouvrage présente une série de travaux qui rendent compte du déroulement réel de l'entretien clinique dans des situations professionnelles variées. Il montre qu'au-delà de leur grande diversité les entretiens cliniques ont des «airs de famille» et constituent donc un genre hétérogène. Appuyé par une bibliographie abondante et fondé sur l'analyse de transcriptions minutieuses d'entretiens cliniques, il est à la fois un outil de connaissance sur une pratique professionnelle très répandue et un outil de réflexion qui encourage les professionnels à s'engager dans une démarche auto-réflexive et potentiellement créatrice de changement.

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7. Intercompréhension et divergences dans l'entretien clinique (Anne Salazar Orvig)
8. Psychopathologie et dynamique du discours: pour une clinique de l'efficacité cognitive dans l'entretien entre personne polyhandicapée et soignant (Michel Musiol)

Troisième partie: Du côté des patients: récit et présentation de soi dans l'entretien clinique

9. Le patient et son interlocuteur (Claire Maury-Rouan, Robert Vion et Béatrice Priego-Valverde)
10. Présentation de soi dans l'entretien: narration, explication, interprétation (Marie Carcassonne)
11. L'intonation et la gestuelle d'un jeune adulte autiste au cours d'un entretien thérapeutique (Laurent Danon-Boileau, Mary-Annick Morel et Estelle Haladjan)

Psicologia storico-culturale e Attività

M. Serena Veggetti
2006, Rome, Carocci, 126 pages
Series "Le Bussole"
ISBN: 88-430-3731-5
€9.50 euros

This book, like others in the same series, enlightens the essential concepts of the presented topic. It gives essential information about both: the historical-cultural psychology, as conceptualised by Vygotskij, Lurija and their younger co-workers, and the activity theory perspectives, elaborated by A.N. and A.A. Leont'ev, Rubinstein, Brushlinskij, Davydov and some present-day researchers at the Moscow State University and Russian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences.

Mention is also made about other representatives of non-reductionistic approaches in psychology, which resulted in a better understanding of the specific dynamics of human learning and knowing.

The book attempts to explicate the writings of the quoted authors, which are not yet available in languages other than Russian, or whose English editions are no longer easy to find.

Bibliographical references, quoted and essential, and a name index are included. It can be recommended for students of psychological and pedagogical courses as a first, scientifically qualified source for further deepening cultural and activity psychologies.

Psicologia pedagogica

L.S. Vygotskij (a cura di M. Serena Veggetti)
2006, Erikson, Gardolo (Trento), 388 pages
€25.00 euros

An Italian version of L.S. Vygotskij's *Pedagogical Psychology. Briefer Course* (1926), edited on the basis of a translation by Stefania Fronza (who studied Russian at the Moscow State University with Aleksej Leont'ev). It also includes a presentation by Carlo Trombettap (10 pages) and an Introduction by M.S.Veggetti (25 pages).

The introduction presents and comments on Vygotskij's aims and inten-

tions in this book, which was written for teachers, educators and others engaged in school activities. It was published originally in Moscow in 1926, written in a period during which the author was engaged in politics. It is a splendid book, and its contents are still relevant to many of the still unsolved questions of education. It was republished in Russia in 1991 (and again in 1996), with an introduction by Vasily Davydov, in a moment in which, he thought that the school in Russia was undergoing the same crisis as in the 1920s.

ISCAR News

7. ISCAR Congress

Information about the ISCAR Congress is available at the Congress website: <http://iscar2008.com/>

A flyer will be sent out in December with information about the program. If you have not previously received any mailings from the Congress organizers, then send your email address to Olga Vasquez: ovasquez@weber.ucsd.edu

The deadline for submitting abstracts is rapidly approaching, so you should be actively preparing your abstracts now.

Abstracts should be submitted using the simple web interface found at: <http://iscar.ucsd.edu/>

If you want to orient yourself, it is possible to look at the submission form without actually having to submit an abstract.

You are welcome to submit news items to: news@iscar.org
Send short abstracts of recently completed ph.d theses to: news@iscar.org
Copies of previous newsletters are available from: news@iscar.org
Send email and postal address changes to: new-address@iscar.org

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ISCAR is an association, whose purpose is the promotion and development of multidisciplinary theoretical and empirical research on societal, cultural and historical dimensions of human practices.

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