

# Review of sociocultural theory and the mediational function of speaking as an alternative to improve standards in colombian EFL setting

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## Resumen

Este artículo se centra en algunos conceptos básicos enmarcados dentro de la Teoría Sociocultural (TSC) que puede contribuir al entendimiento de las prácticas pedagógicas en los contextos de enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera (EILE). Inicialmente, se brindará información básica sobre las especificidades del contexto colombiano. Luego, se presentarán algunos aspectos problemáticos en el aula de clase, teniendo en cuenta los factores contextuales y el mejoramiento que la EILE ha tenido en los últimos años. Finalmente, se discutirá cómo los principios y el marco conceptual de la TSC pueden ayudar a entender, analizar y mejorar los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje, específicamente, el desarrollo de la habilidad oral de los estudiantes de inglés universitarios a través de actividades basadas en tareas comunicativas. Se prestará especial atención a la visión de interacción y a conceptos tales como: la mediación, el andamiaje, la zona de desarrollo próximo y la internalización.

**Palabras clave:** interacción, mediación, andamiaje, zona de desarrollo próximo e internalización, Teoría Sociocultural-Habilidad Oral.

## Abstract

In this paper, I focus on the key concepts that Sociocultural Theory (SCT) can contribute to the understanding of classroom practices in EFL settings. First I will provide the reader with brief background information on the specificities of the Colombian EFL context. Then, I will present what I consider problematic issues in EFL classrooms in Colombia, considering contextual factors and the important improvement that the EFL community has achieved in the last few years. Finally, I will explain how SCT principles and conceptual framework could help understand, analyse and improve the teaching-learning practices and processes, regarding specifically, the development of oral skills of EFL students in tertiary level through task-based activities. Special attention will be given to the view of interaction and to concepts such as mediation, scaffolding, Zone of Proximal development and internalisation.

**Key words:** Interaction, mediation, scaffolding, Zone of Proximal development and internalisation, Sociocultural Theory-Oral Skill.

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## *Background Information*

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) has been an important issue in education in Colombia for a long time. However, the practices in the classrooms sometimes do not reflect the advances in research and multidisciplinary approaches of applied linguistics. In less than 20 years, Colombian teachers, and I particularly, have practised most of the approaches that English Language Teaching has had in its history. Starting from the translation methods, still used in some settings, to the most progressive attempts that have been used in different contexts and under varied circumstances, we have used it all. That is why, it can not be said that there is a traditional way of teaching English since some teachers might be using audio lingual methods or direct methods, I used it myself teaching at Meyer, while others might be implementing cognitive approaches to the teaching of languages (EAN, Colombo) based on either the information processing model or the Sociocultural Theory.

We have had different and successful attempts at university level. Throughout the history of the development of EFL in Bogotá, we have tried to separate skills at tertiary level, especially in English for Specific Purposes programmes. We have taught only reading comprehension techniques for students with specific needs according to the field of studies: Content-based learning, English for Specific Purposes, English for Academic purposes, and English for “passing international exams”, like TOEFL or IELTS, etc. Furthermore, we have been relatively successful in the last decade because we have institutions that have prepared better practitioners in languages to meet the demands of a globalised and internationalised world, where English has become the international language. Nonetheless, it is worth asking if we are doing enough to guarantee that our students in general, in private and public institutions, will achieve the communicative competence required in this competitive academic and professional world.

Communicative approach, task-based approach, content-based learning and eclectic methodologies are now part of every day teaching realities in EFL settings at higher education in Colombia. However, a thorough revision and understanding of our practices should be made in order to make sure that learning is taking place in a meaningful and effective way. There is evidence (MEN documents-2006) that our students are not accomplishing the desired international standards, recently established by governmental authorities by an official decree (MEN 3870, 2006). The ministry of Education, in an attempt to provide institutions with a coherent framework to approach English language teaching, has decreed the standards and level of EFL in Colombia. The British Council Colombia and the Ministry of education have adopted The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR, 2001; MEN, 2006). This framework of reference states, in general term, a perspective of language and language learning, and the means through which a communicative competence of any foreign language could be developed. The following quotation, extracted from the CEFR, summarises the main premises of the claim:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various conditions and under various constraints to engage in language activities involving language processes to produce and/or receive texts in relation to themes in specific domains, activating those strategies, which seem most appropriate for carrying out the tasks to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants leads to the reinforcement or modification of their competences (CEFR, 2001, p. 9).

The CEFR (2001) is a document that many institutions are using now to plan, implement and evaluate the English language teaching and learning and to develop international levels of proficiency at tertiary levels of education in Colombia. It contains most of the curricular information for all levels of language proficiency from a beginning to advanced level and it gives information of desired competences and suggests instructional approaches to teaching and assessment processes. This CEFR determines, on the one hand, the general competences (declarative knowledge, skills and Know-how, and existential competence) and the communicative competence (linguistic, pragmatic, strategic, and sociolinguistic) that students should develop in addition to establishing certain levels of proficiency. On the other hand, it also suggests the approach, The Task-based Approach that should be used to achieve the learning objectives and learning strategies fundamental to develop autonomous and independent learners in all EFL settings (CEFR, 2001, Chapter 7).

### *Problematic Situation*

There seems to be a problem with the proficiency levels established by the Ministry of Education based on the CEFR. At the tertiary level, students are expected to achieve a B2 (upper intermediate) or C1 (advanced) levels of proficiency in English according to the descriptors for common reference levels given in the CEFR (2001, Chapter 3). A descriptive scheme and the common reference levels were developed to describe levels of proficiency required by existing standards (MEN Guías No. 22), tests and examinations in order to facilitate comparisons between different systems of qualifications. However, these standards are more situated in a European context and do not respond to the reality of our educational settings, where traveling, for instance, is not as easy as in Europe, resources are not as easily accessible as in other contexts and opportunities for exposure to the target language are limited.

Despite all the economic, social and educational disadvantages we have in our Colombia. Especially in the case of Bogota, we have managed to reach acceptable international standards in English as a Foreign Language, at least with the population that has been able to reach the university level. Students have succeeded in handling most of the communicative skills, being more successful acquiring the receptive skills than the productive skills. Based on a report by MEN (2007), the results of ECAES 2007 showed that there has been a slight improvement in listening and reading skills, whereas, regarding the productive skills, most of the students might not be able to produce coherent short piece of written or oral texts. The latter assertion is also based on my teaching experience at different universities in Bogotá in the last 10 years. Therefore, in order to tackle this problem, teaching practices and the development of oral skills are going to be addressed in this paper since it is perceived as a problematic area that does not allow students to become independent users of language, autonomous language learners in the long term. That is to say that learners might have not developed the necessary strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their performances.

More efficient efforts have to be made in order to develop and improve speaking and more thorough research has to be done in order to understand how this could be implemented. It is a need in higher education so that our students will be able to accomplish international standards required by authorities in Colombia. Regarding these standards for the oral skill the CEFR- (Chapter 3) states descriptors with desired objectives ("I can do") for each level as follows:

#### B2

I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.

## C1

I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. Formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.

## C2

I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.

Most of our students could not be able to interact at ease, express themselves fluently or take part effortlessly in conversations using a foreign language. It can be said that only a small percentage of our students, at present, has actually achieved these high standards, set by the ministry of Education, in all the communicative skills, and especially in the productive skills. Research studies on oral skills development, interaction, or speaking activities are less frequent in Colombian publications of applied linguistics or educational journals. This might be because both writing and speaking represent a different challenge for researchers. Writing, unlike speaking, can be assessed and analysed by researchers more easily since there is always records of production, teachers spend more time in teaching how to write TOEFL or IELTS type of essay, and models to teach writing are employed more effectively.

Speaking, on the contrary, requires more effort in data collection, logistics, and transcription for researchers. Teachers spend less time in this type of activities and there is not a clear understanding of what developing this skill implies or how it could

be effectively developed and improved. It is a fact that speaking has been neglected and students are now better at writing than at communicating their ideas through clear, coherent and intelligible utterances. Speaking has been certainly forgotten by teachers. Students either do not speak at all or they speak in a very inaccurate way, not to mention the lack of vocabulary, intelligibility and coherence that is perceived when classes and interaction of any type are observed in the target language.

Many teachers share the feeling that speaking in an appropriate way in a second language for some students is a far-fetched goal. They struggle to make students become more fluent, and accurate in the target language through a variety of "communicative" activities such simulations, role plays, tasks, round tables, discussion groups, presentations, etc. On the other hand, students do not perceive a satisfactory improvement in their conversational, interaction and expository ability in the oral discourse, despite their interest and individual efforts that they put into their tasks and performances. Two explanations might be given for this situation; one that has to do with the way oral practices are set up by teacher, usually without any previous students' preparation on what it is expected from an activity like this, and the other is the way students interpret the assigned task. Usually oral tasks are in pairs or groups but students are not used to interacting, giving feedback to one another or focusing on accuracy, all at the same time. In other words, speaking is not seen as an opportunity to generate collaborative learning by means of oral interaction.

Interaction in collaboration (peer-peer, small group) in the classroom needs to be improved, since the senior student acts as the more knowledgeable peer and adopts the role of teacher according to Huong (2007). Her presence in one kind of group results in distinct differences in the way group discussion is managed and in how students participate in the discussions. When working

with other peers in the assisted groups, the more knowledgeable peer directs and controls the process of group work; she establishes the order of the turns and manages the timing by inviting group members to speak. In order for this to take place, teachers have to be informed or aware of what pupils can obtain from these activities as far as cognitive and social purposes is concerned and how to implement them efficiently, and students have to be trained on how to work in a collaborative way to make the best use of these opportunities. At this point a question arises: To what extent The Socio Cultural Theory can help understand how, through collaborative learning based activities, students might achieve a better command of oral discourse in a target language as far as fluency and accuracy is concerned. Let us take a look at this relationship in the next section (Naughton, 2006).

### *Sociocultural theory and Speaking Development*

Sociocultural theory, defined by Lantolf as “a theory of mind that recognises the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artefacts play in organising unique human forms of thinking” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p.1), is the perspective taken in this paper to analyse classroom practices and the development of the speaking skill in second or foreign language settings.

Also, a perspective of language and language development is assumed from the position stated by Lantolf and Thorne who argue that since SCT is a theory of mediated mental development, “it is compatible with theories of language that focus on communication, cognition and meaning rather than formalistic positions that privilege structure” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 4). If this is true, the meaningful communication should be the purpose of language lessons, expression of thoughts should be a priority, and

“utterances”, more than words, isolated sounds or well-structured sentences, should be the focus of speaking lessons. Tomasello’s (2003, in Lantolf, 2006) usage-based theory is the view of language development that best complements this view of language learning since it is based on a view of language as an emergent system in which people develop a repertoire of linguistics devices, to produce and interpret communicative intentions. Tomasello’s theory is predicated on the claim that grammar is not a precondition for, but is emergent in communicative language use” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 173)

Up to now, speaking has been referred to as an oral skill, interaction, speaking activities, etc. but output and participation could be other terms used to refer to the ability to construct meaningful exchanges of information, signs and nonverbal communication. Output is more characteristic of information processing models and participation is the new metaphor that SCT adopts to regard the second language learning process. Speaking interaction as viewed by SCT is what concerns us here. According to Ellis (1999, p. 21) interaction for SCT is “something that can be both social and private”, SCT does not limit the concept of interaction to the negotiation of meaning, “it is a social practice that shapes and constructs learning”, as a matter of fact, “interaction is the actual site of learning”. This is the perspective assumed here to continue talking about how to tackle the problem stated above.

In any communicative event human beings are mediated by language for interactional or transactional purposes, so they have to find the way to inform, describe, persuade, and influence others through utterances that are marked by intentions and other pragmatic factors of communication. Therefore, students can help each other to get messages across, help others receive the right input and take conversation to another level that surpasses the referential usage of language,

scaffolding one another to achieve a common goal; communication in a foreign language. Some key concepts such as mediation, scaffolding, Zone of Proximal development and internalisation have to be explored in order to understand the dynamics of the social relationships and constructed artefact. Also it is important to mention that mainly language and how, by means of this artefact, second/foreign language learning can occur. In the following paragraphs, we are going to take a look at some articles and studies that relate SCT and the development of L2 speaking skill.

Concepts such as mediation, zone of proximal development, and scaffolding are the most fundamental of Vygotsky's theoretical insights. Mediation allows humans to interact in an indirect way with the physical and psychological world; Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as the potentiality of goal achievement of students helps them to generate learning among themselves. Scaffolding as mutual help students can offer to improve their performances and internalisation as imitation, usage and entrenchment<sup>1</sup>, are relevant concepts shared by the authors interested in understanding the mediational function of speaking in second language learning.

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) refer to the relation between language and mind, from the perspective of the participation metaphor instead of the acquisition metaphor, by saying that "learning of a second language, under certain circumstances can lead to the reformation of one's mental system, including one's concept of self" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 5). Do students need to perceive themselves as valid participants, able to communicate their ideas, interact with their peers and teachers? In

<sup>1</sup> Entrenchment characterises the process whereby patterns become habituated through constant and successful use, thus making it difficult for something to be done in a different way. The more frequently a particular form is used the more it becomes entrenched. (Tomasello in Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 190)

fact, they do, they need to listen and be heard, and how to achieve this purpose is what is supposed to be done in classrooms by using interactive and collaborative activities where pupils learn from each other, from the teacher and step by step will internalise complicated micro and macro skills necessary to become better user of a second language at the oral level.

Several studies have been conducted based on the SCT in relation to SLL since the 80s and many important concepts have been incorporated by researchers to explain second language development (Lantolf, 2006), however, not until relatively recent times the mediational function of speaking has been explored in depth. Apple and Lantolf (1994), and Swain and Lapkin (1998), in this second study, Swain and Lapkin state that two adolescent French immersion students use language as a means of communication and a tool for thinking and they adopt the metaphor of input and output to determine the mechanism by which comprehensible input is converted into L2 knowledge and use. Swain and Lapkin provide empirical data of two students of French who jointly develop a story line and write it out, using language (L1 and L2) to co-construct the language they need to express the meaning they want and to construct knowledge about language. They concluded that peer-peer collaborative dialogue serves both as a means of communication and as a cognitive tool and that of particular importance for oral interactions is the negotiation of form which may appear when learners pool their knowledge and skill to produce collaborative output through metacognitive reflection on linguistic choices. However, they recognised that "as their data were so variable and students approach the task so differently, interviews could have been appropriate after the activity to find out what aspects individual students find appealing and conducive to learning" (Swain and Lapkin, 1998).

In the article, "the output hypothesis and beyond", Swain (in Lantolf 2000) argues that the importance

of output to learning could be that output pushes learners to process language more deeply, output demands more mental effort than input does. Output may encourage students to move from strategies use in comprehension to a complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production. One role for output in second language learning is that it may promote noticing either target language features or gaps of knowledge students may have. Swain states that by engaging learners in speaking activities, writing, collaborative dialogue is how language learning actually occurs mediated by language as a tool. The concept of output is extended in this article to include its operation as a socially constructed cognitive tool.

Swain, Brooks and Tocalli-Beller (2002), based on sociocultural theory principles, reported recent research in which peer-to-peer interaction was examined with the objective of understanding its impact on second language learning. They explore studies of collaborative dialogues in which students worked together to solve linguistic problems and /or co-construct language or knowledge about language as they work on writing, speaking, listening and reading activities. Regarding speaking particularly, the authors argue that through peer-peer interaction in speaking activities students improve over successive cycles as result of the opportunity to repeat or recycle their performance in front of different listeners. They say that the less proficient learners showed improvement if phonology, syntax and lexis as result of the interaction in the short term, the more peer-peer dialogue resulted in improved language performances in the long term. However, Swain, Brooks and Tocalli-Beller found that most of the studies were centred on writing activities, perhaps because the product of the dialogue process could be examined more directly. They also found that there was greater reliance on teachers' feedback. Students did not know how to provide useful feedback, and there were conflicts amongst collaborating students.

All these studies and articles show that student should be able to engage in collaborative language activities in a second language by working within their ZPD and scaffolding one another, they can achieve a good command of the target language and assimilate and incorporate new knowledge of the language through means of language itself in social interactions. But how internalisation, as "the process through which members of a community of practice appropriate the symbolic artefacts that mediate their mental activity" (Lantolf, 2006, p. 90) in a second language, occurred is not clear in any of the studies reported. The use of language can be taken as the acquisition of language in this type of studies and in the SCT in general according to Ellis (1999) and probably more research has to be done in this area to provide evidence that acquisition and/or internalisation of mental functions takes place in collaborative learning. Even though, SCT claims that internationalisation occurs through imitation and private speech (Lantolf, 2006, p. 95).

Collaborative speaking tasks such as dialogues, discussion, role-plays, rehearsals of presentations, can enhance learning opportunities by focusing on meaning and form as learners try to express themselves. In these speaking activities, writing could play an important role since the use of writing as a "cognitive amplifier" has demonstrated to be effective allowing learners to "boost his or her own thinking in a more powerful manner than is normally possible in speech" (Warschauer, 1997, p. 471). However, how can some problems such as students' lack of preparation in the tasks and the design of the task itself be addressed? As far as I am concerned, this could be tackled by teaching learners how to achieve self regulation through monitoring and evaluating their performances and by giving students appropriate training on cooperative strategies to effectively help each other.

First, students should be provided with opportunities to interact, first in a controlled way,

where repetition, predictable utterances, formulaic speech is advisable and with the assistance of teachers, so that learners can build up confidence and get emotional support to perform in a better way. Then, learners can move to more demanding tasks with the help of others (peers), until they are able to use language constructed socially in unpredictable and meaningful ways by themselves in a spontaneous, fluent and accurate way. Moving from others regulated, peers monitor each other, to self-regulated, self-monitoring, learners will be able to adjust their speech and correct their own performance in the end. Secondly, learners should be instructed on how and why collaboration may be important, in addition to teaching them specific strategies such as: asking for repetition, requesting and giving clarification, using repairs or modification and asking and giving help and other communication strategies like these that are not used in a spontaneous situation or are not transferable from L1 to L2 easily.

Communication strategies like those mentioned above were part of a study conducted by Naughton (2006) at a university language centre in Granada, Spain. She focused on the effect of a cooperative strategy-training programme on the patterns of interaction in small groups of students participating in oral discussion tasks. She set up a quasi-experimental study where intact classes were assigned to experimental or controlled conditions and triads were videotaped at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. In order to demonstrate that cooperative strategy training enhances language learning, a group of students was taught four strategies: the use of follow-up questions, requesting and giving information, repair as an attempt to recast their own and other's non-target-like utterances, and requesting and giving help. 45 EFL students participated in the study and overall participation, use of interaction strategies were measured.

The results of Naughton's study showed that specific type of structured cooperative group work, along

with the teaching of certain strategies, is crucial to the promotion of student's orientation and behaviour that is conducive to the development of collaborative dialogue in and about L2/FL. However, constraints such as task type, and student's lack of motivation to engage in artificial communicative situations, together with the quantitative paradigm used diminished the impact of this study and invites further research in this area, using better designed tasks and a qualitative analysis of data.

Even though, cooperative learning is peculiar to a teaching methodology, we can use these strategies to improve student participation in tasks of any type and expect them to be prepared to get involved in collaborative learning in class and out of class activities as well. Both, giving students meaningful speaking **tasks** in which they engage and construct with others could help them develop their oral skill and teaching learners cooperative strategies so that they can ask for and give feedback, can enhance learning experiences and might result in effective use of target language.

Mediational function of speaking can be implemented in the classroom by having students participate in teacher-directed activities first and then, maybe taking the initiative, learners will engage in more "collaborative type of tasks", in the Vygotskian sense, and therefore, achieve the ideal scenario of a dialogue presented by Swain saying: "It is dialogue that constructs linguistic knowledge. It is what allows performance to outstrip competence. It is where language use and language learning can co-occur. It is language use mediating language learning" (Swain, 2000 in Lantolf, 2000).

As students get involved in collaborative communication **tasks**, they can help each other, motivated by a "cultural constructed need" (Leontiev's, 1978 in Lantolf, 2000) —speaking



a second language—. They scaffold their knowledge and skills to succeed in communicating their ideas among themselves to the best of their knowledge. Thus, in these interactions the need becomes the motive to overcome problems of communication breakdowns and the help here comes in form of communication strategies used to augment their capacity and affectivity of production in the second language. Swain (in Lantolf, 2000) refers to this as going beyond the output saying that “output pushes learners to process language more deeply—with more mental effort—than does input. With output the learner is in control. In speaking or writing, learners can ‘stretch’ their interlanguage to meet communicative goals. Output may stimulate learners to move from semantic, open-ended, strategic processing prevalent in comprehension to the complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production”.

### *Speaking Task-based Activities and SCT*

Tasks have been used since the 80s (Prabhu, 1987) in SLL and they have been regarded from other perspectives since then. SCT provides an interesting framework to analyse communicative events, interactions and tasks in the classroom but, in order for this theory to be able to bring about more improvement in second/foreign language learning, it needs to provide a methodological framework for intentional teaching with clear ideas on how to implement tasks with all necessary cognitive requirements.

Communicative meaningful speaking tasks worked in collaboration might be the key point to be able to motivate, engage and make students become committed to helping one another in improving their oral performance. Besides, the mediation of language and tasks, as other mediating cultural artefacts, can help with the development of oral skills, since “the essence of SCT is that external mediation (teachers or peers assistance) serves as the means by which internal mediation (control

over functions, their own mental activity) is achieved” (Ellis, 2003), by taking part in social activities, students can develop each others skills and, by simultaneously focusing their attention on meaning and form, they construct knowledge of the second language as they perform a task.

The law of cultural development is applied in the performance of collaborative tasks in a clear way because through this social interaction, students are able to internalise knowledge and skills of the target language. According to “Vigostky, all higher mental abilities appear twice in the life of the individual: first on the inter-mental plane in which the process is distributed between the individual, and some other person(s) and/or cultural artefacts, and later on the intra-mental plane in which the capacity is carried out by the individual acting via psychological mediation” (Lantolf, 2000, p.17).

According to Ellis (2003) referring to SCT “acquisition occurs in interaction rather than as a result of interaction”, so dialogic interaction is seen as crucial to the development of verbal skills not only in the mother tongue but also in the second language. Students engage in task performances in order to achieve self-regulation in new meanings and forms, a task lends itself to provide opportunities for the learner to use new language forms and items through collaboration with others. Thus “task can be seen as tools for constructing collaborative acts” (Ellis, 2003).

In order for a task to account for all the attainable possibilities, it has to be designed in such a way that it responds to different levels of cognition (motives, goals and operations) and to several, if not all, principles of sociocultural learning theory. In relation to the former, student should know why they are doing it, they should be clear of what and how the task is expected to be done. In relation to the latter, students should feel challenged and motivated, they should be able

to assist each other, and finally, they can produce new or modified knowledge of mutual relevance. However, this ideal proposal, stated in other words by Ellis (2003), could only be partially attained, since the participants come to the tasks with different expectations, understand the task in different ways and the outcomes are always so varied that it is difficult to evaluate if all these objectives were met.

Sociocultural theory may argue that all task products are obviously different because individuals participate in this process bringing their own historical and cultural background; they all have different expectation and interests in particular tasks. If this were true, any product would be totally worth praising, and in consequence, no matter what the process and product are, any final outcome represents a valid learning experience and it should not be assessed with pre-established standards. However, we have profiles, standards, measurements; if we were to be coherent with the theory, these assessment processes should also be created in collaboration with all the members of the academic community so that the whole process from the beginning to the end were the product of a consensus in the EFL community in Colombia.

## *Conclusion*

To conclude, research based on Sociocultural Theory has demonstrated that Collaborative interaction is definitely an effective tool to improve Speaking with the mediation of L1/L2 and through processes of scaffolding and pushed output, as shown in this paper. Very likely, this conceptual framework can be employed successfully in EFL settings like the one described at the beginning. In my opinion, Classroom research and classroom teaching have to be hand in hand, as far as SCT principles is concerned. Research can not be conducted with

specific concepts born in mind without preparing the setting in which this study is going to take place, because the study of microgenesis of abilities could become the analysis of a product of a totally different approach to teaching and learning.

We have to make a real construction of an academic community in which teachers, students and researchers are working together for the same goal, during the process and in the analysis of products as well. The microgenetic analysis of communicative events has to be coherent with a sound methodological process experienced by teachers and students throughout a course. We can even take the SCT perspective to a macro educational level in which course design and curriculum design are closely related in terms of educational, psychological, linguistics and philosophical principles. Thus, classroom practices based on cognitive principles can be scrutinised and conclusions could be drawn more conclusively.

SCT is not a teaching methodology, but rather a philosophical approach to learning. If we were to adopt the SCT in our classrooms as methodological framework, and conduct research from the same view point, we would have to incorporate the SCT principle from the general curriculum to the course designed and classroom activities carried out in every day lessons. Hence students, teacher and researcher all of us could work in ideal symmetric grounds to produce knowledge in a collaborative way.

All in all, in our particular situation of the Colombian classroom situations in tertiary level, many teaching and learning processes related to speaking and other skills could be improved if a more coherent framework were adopted to managing, implementing and evaluating language learning through a participatory action research, guided by the Sociocultural Theory philosophical perspective.

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