

# **Analyzing Selected Components of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning**

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## **Introduction**

Computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) is clearly different from instruction delivered in traditional ways. Some characteristics that distinguish CSCL include:

- Learning is not confined by time and space
- Meetings are continuous in nature
- Interactions are not instantaneous or immediate
- Group contributions can be made without regard to interrupting others or having to “wait in turn”
- Social presence/dynamics differ
- Opportunity for cooperative work is enhanced
- Permanent records of group work and individual contributions are maintained (McConnell, 2000, pp. 64-65)

In a collaborative learning environment, learners are encouraged to take initiative, to express themselves, to interact with others, to participate in discussion and conversation, etc. Technology is utilized to enhance that process. In terms of learning theory, constructivism argues that learning is a process where learners actively construct knowledge. Social Constructivism views learning as a process of enculturation brought about through social interaction. Thus, the collaborative learning environment has the potential to dramatically enhance meaningful learning. (Fosnot, Catherine Twomey. 1996. Constructivism. NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.) CSCL not only provides a collaborative learning environment, it also provides abundant resources for investigative learning, interaction among cooperative learners, and maintains records of everything. As yet, CSCL is a fairly new medium in education and training with relatively little research being carried out into its relevance and effectiveness. (McConnell, 2000, p. 65). This article introduces three research contributions from the CSCL '99 Papers Program: Analyzing Communication Patterns in Small Groups, Learner Arguments in a Collective Environment, and Vicarious Learning from Educational Dialogue.