

Focusing on participation in group meaning making

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Executive Editors

Welcome new subscribers

Many researchers participated in the International Conference of the Learning Sciences (ICLS 2006) in Bloomington, Indiana in June, joining ISLS and signing up to receive *ijCSCL*. Some of the papers from that conference may be submitted for publication in future issues of the journal.

The CSCL SIG of Kaleidoscope – a network of over three hundred researchers and doctoral students in Europe – is now joining ISLS through a special trial membership. Each member will receive an issue of *ijCSCL* in the mail and have electronic access during 2006. We hope they will become permanent subscribers.

Kaleidoscope will be holding an innovative regional CSCL workshop in January: an Alpine Rendezvous (<http://craftsrv1.epfl.ch/events/alpine>). Other regional conferences related to CSCL are CRIWG (<http://www.criwg.org/>) in Valladolid, Spain this September, and ICCE (<http://www.icce-2006.org/>) in Beijing, China, in November.

It is already time to start preparing for the next international CSCL conference: CSCL 2007 will be held outside of New York City at Rutgers University in July. The deadline for paper submissions is November 1, 2006. The next ICLS conference will be in Utrecht, near Amsterdam, in the summer of 2008. ISLS members will receive savings on registration at these conferences. For non-ISLS members, the conference fees will also cover the cost of a full ISLS membership, including the option to subscribe to *ijCSCL*. So put these conferences on your schedule. If you would like to propose a site for a future ISLS conference, look for instructions at <http://isls.org> in the fall.

The CSCL Community of ISLS held elections recently. The new Executive Committee was announced at ICLS: Pierre Dillenbourg, Cindy Hmelo-Silver, Chris Hoadley, Paul Kirschner, Tim Koschmann, Naomi Miyake, Claire O'Malley, Roy Pea, Hans Spada, Gerry Stahl, Dan Suthers, and Barbara Wasson. The new members are all on the *ijCSCL* Editorial Board.

Please send news of interest to CSCL researchers to info@ijCSCL.org.

A proposal for a CSCL research agenda

This issue starts with a call for a theoretical focus that can bring together the many research strands within current CSCL research, directing them each in their own way to investigate the phenomena of *intersubjective meaning making* as the most appropriate object of analysis for CSCL as a unique and important science. It suggests that “intersubjective meaning making” is a more productive term than “collaborative learning,” which is only visible indirectly and retroactively. Such a focus has implications both for the design of technology support and for the synthesis of multiple methodologies. The other articles can, coincidentally, be read as examples of taking this tack, each revealing subtle complexities that arise in practice.

Anchored discussion

The second contribution looks at how anchoring can aid technologies for intersubjective meaning making. Building on previous explorations of anchored discussion, this article provides quantitative evidence for the advantages and disadvantages of situating online postings about a document in the presence of that document, as compared to a generic discussion forum in which postings cannot directly reference locations within the discussed object. Issues of grounding and situating discourse are often investigated by looking closely at detailed cases; here quantitative measures can confirm hypotheses arising from such cases across a larger corpus of online textual interaction. By looking at how meaning is variously constructed in the different media, the authors refine our understanding of the pedagogical pros and cons of anchored discussion, which came from specific cases and participant impressions.

A handheld network

The third article shows that the technology of networked handhelds, the pedagogy of rich math settings and the scaffolding of collaboration roles can support intersubjective meaning making in small groups, but that the detailed results are hard to predict. A carefully crafted experiment in a real classroom included pre- and post-test measurements as well as qualitative and quantitative analysis of the student discourse. However, close attention to specific utterances showed that the students constructed their own ways of interacting and learning, often in opposition to the structures, hypotheses and measurements of the experiment. Learning can take place even by students whose participation in group meaning making is not very visible and, conversely, visible utterances can be used by students to avoid contributing to the group knowledge construction.

Participation networks

Social network analysis (SNA) has for several years appealed to many CSCL researchers as a way of quantifying the levels of participation of students in learning communities. It is even exciting to think of feeding such measures back to the students to increase their awareness and motivate their further participation. However, SNA has often proven to be more work than it is worth for its shallow findings. This paper, however, enriches the depth of the analysis by carefully combining SNA with other quantitative and qualitative methods. It then investigates the use of this hybrid methodology in three strategically structured case studies, conducted at the University of Valladolid and the Open University of Catalonia in Spain. It thereby uncovers both the power and the limits of this particular approach to focusing multiple methods on group participation processes.