

# **DISCUSSING MEDICAL CASES ONLINE: TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS OF THE INTERACTION OF ADVANCED LEVEL MEDICINE STUDENTS**

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## **Abstract**

This study was conducted in the medical field with advanced level university students (N=49). Case-based asynchronous discussion groups were introduced to enhance reflection and critical thinking on patient management and more specifically on treatment. The tasks in the CSCL environment are based on real-life cases and the data collected are the transcripts. Groups of approximately 5 students were asked to discuss 4 cases during their clinical rotation in paediatrics, which lasted for one month. Data were collected over a one-year period. The main focus is on what happens in the discussion when we add structure by assigning roles to students. We explore how students share information, elaborate, negotiate and build consensus. Considering roles, we want to compare (1) the difference between a student-moderator and the instructor as a moderator and (2) the difference between groups with an additional “alternative searcher” and groups in which this role was not assigned to a student. A content analysis was performed to explore the different levels of social construction of knowledge in these different conditions. Messages were coded according to the interaction analysis model of Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson (1997). The results show that (1) there is a difference between conditions with a student as a moderator and conditions where the instructor is moderating; significantly more messages reflect a higher level of knowledge construction when a student moderates the discussion; and (2) there is no significant difference in social knowledge construction between the discussions where an alternative searcher is present versus where an alternative searcher is absent. A number of suggestions for follow-up research are presented.