

Classification of the interactions among students in discussion forums by Chiecher und Donolo

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1) Social and/or off-topic interventions. Their goal is social and relational. Within this category is a variety of interventions having different purposes, though all of them share the common characteristic of being unrelated to the academic task itself. Thus, included here are: saying hello and goodbye, addressing a member by his/her name, addressing the group as a whole, manifestations of humour, the use of emoticons, expressions of feelings, apologies and thanks, comments on personal life situations, etc. Below is an illustrative example taken from the students' discourse: *"I had to rush out to the children's clinic; my youngest child had a fever and a terribly sore throat... but now I'm going to get started on your great job!!!!!!!"*

2) Organisation interventions to perform the task. The goal of these is for fellow group members to reach an agreement on the best way of proceeding to perform the task collectively, to suggest deadlines to progress towards the answer, to suggest ideas or potential topics to be covered, or to share useful materials for the joint construction of the answer. For example: *"If possible, try and upload it before Tuesday so that we're not too pushed for time..."*

3) Progress in drafting the answer. The purpose of these messages is to contribute to specific progress in presenting an answer to the task. In general, one student produces and writes part of the answer and uploads it or posts it to the group forum, either as an attachment or as part of the body of the message, for consideration by his/her fellow group members. For example: *"Attached is what I've produced so far on the Option 1 Activity proposal."*

4) Requests for help. Questions, expressions or concerns aimed at fellow group members, relating to unresolved issues regarding the content on which they are working, or the instruction that they need to address. For example: *"I'm a bit lost, so tell me what I've got to do."*

5) Acceptance of the collectively produced answer. The goal of these is to notify fellow group members that they agree with the collectively produced answer and consider the assigned task (or part of it) to be complete. For example: *"Right, so let's go ahead with this. As far as I'm concerned, we can upload the work."*

6) Answers to requests for help. Information that the students give to their fellow group members in response to a request for help. For example: One student asks: *"I can't see activity 2 in the place where it should have been uploaded. Is it because I can't see it, or because it's being uploaded today?"* Answer: *"R. uploaded it yesterday. I don't think we should be able to see the post [...] because it was someone else who did it."*

7) Sharing the instruction and/or its interpretation. The purpose of these messages is to let fellow group members know about the personal interpretation made of the instruction that collectively they have to address, with the intention (sometimes implicit) of seeking to compare them with other students' interpretations and thus being able to see whether or not there is any agreement. On occasions, the students literally copy the work instruction to the forum, as a way of initiating exchanges among fellow group members, by putting what they have to do on the table. For example: *"The activity for this week is to choose a test."*