Online courses are becoming more prevalent in college and university programs, and faculty are exploring the possibilities offered in the context of virtual teaching. One of the most interesting and promising aspects of online learning involves the potential inherent in the chat and discussion components. These components have been shown in previous studies to promote social interaction and problem-solving strategies among groups of students.

Face-to-face facilitated student discussion in seated courses is one way that instructors encourage students to apply readings and lecture information in activities such as simulations, case studies, vignettes, debates, and group projects. It can be difficult for instructors to evaluate student performance and contributions in these settings. The potential for analysis of student interactions provided by print-outs of online chats and discussion venues is exciting.

One of the goals of this study is to expand our understanding of the potential of chat and discussion activities in challenging students to demonstrate more sophisticated layers of reflective analysis. In this poster session, the results of the interactive aspects of online courses in graduate level teacher education courses are analyzed and discussed. Twenty-one students enrolled in a graduate level family research course participated in over 50 hours worth of chat and discussion assignments that have subsequently been analyzed for various levels of social interaction and problem-solving aptitude. These results will be presented and the implications for enhanced student outcomes discussed.