Web-based in-service training requires new skills

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This is Mona Nilsen of University of Gothenburg. Credit: University of Gothenburg

Mona Nilsen from the Department of Education and Didactics, University of Gothenburg, has analysed continued professional development within the food production industry, a sector with a generally low level of education that is experiencing a great deal of change. In particular, new methods for handling foodstuffs and procedures for quality assurance must be introduced in a great number of workplaces.

Mona Nilsen has analysed how chat tools, one of several channels of

communication in the web-based environment, have been used for communication and discussions between course participants on ten different in-service training courses "Chat tools are one option for industries where continued professional development has traditionally been difficult to effect. The food production industry is characterised by geographically dispersed small and medium-sized companies. Rarely is it economically feasible in this industry for staff to be absent from production for lengthy periods in order to attend professional development courses. Instead, they have the opportunity for distance learning, from their own workplace," says Mona Nilsen.

The material on which the study is based comprises chat log files, which are printouts of course participants' discussions.

"What interests me the most is how the course participants initiate discussions with one another via digital technologies and the skills required for learning in web-based contexts. I'm not just looking at how they accommodate to the chat technology, but also what they kind of discussions they establish - the actual content."

The thesis discusses how these course participants' discussions are hybrid contexts for learning.

"The discussions are hybrid in the sense that they take their starting point both in more formalized training and in the course participants' everyday work experiences. Links to work and work challenges are often something that training strives to establish, although sometimes if not most of the time difficult to achieve. In my studies, the discussions are described as productive because of the experiences that participants share from actual and specific production work," says Mona Nilsen.

"Another component for these discussions to be productive is that the contents discussed are prerequisites for participants' continued

employment, something is at stake for the participants. In this case, course participants will be responsible for quality work at their respective workplaces once they have finished the course."

In her study, Mona Nilsen addresses the issue of how course participants engaged in in-service training learn, and must learn, to discuss content from various standpoints, for example, food technicians, consumers, industry representatives, students, and people in positions of authority.

Source: University of Gothenburg ([news](link) : [web](link))

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