

## The origin of organized handicraft education for girls in Sweden 1880-1920

Eva Trotzig

Girls have been taught how to weave, how to knit, how to sew. In old days this training took place in the homes. The mother or the grandmother by and by taught the girls the different skills. The girls helped the grown up women to dress the loom and as they grew older they knew how to manage the loom themselves. In some cases girl were sent to skilful women to learn embroidery or other specialized techniques. There were also schools for girls where they were trained in different female handicrafts.

But all the efforts in homes and in handicraft schools etc. were nor organized or formalized. In this article we will meet the introduction of a more formal education in girl's handicraft.

In 1842 there was an announcement read aloud in every church all over the country. The message was that a compulsory school now should be obligatory for every child. This school, however, was not immediately established; it took five years to introduce the elementary school. From that on every child had to go to school. In the early period they learned reading, writing, mathematics and some geography and history. However the most important of all the subjects in the early curriculum was religion. Reading was a means to make it possible to read the bible or at least the 'condensed version' i.e. the little cateches. This small book presents the most important rules of the Lutheran faith.

Religion remained to be of great importance in education for many years to come. In the 1920's the subject religion lost it's position as the main subject. However in reality religion was still very important for decades to come.

As stated above the early elementary school offered so called 'theoretical' subjects. It could also be of interest here to mention that the little cateches was a book owned by almost every home in Sweden, poor or wealthy. The small book existed in many editions, many of them had the alphabet printed so that children could learn the letters. There could also be a foreword describing how the perfect teacher should be. The little cateches contains simple rules for people how to behave. There is, for example, a description of how a housewife should act and what she should look like. Her dress should be unpretentious and she should obey the head of the family. Parts of this small book is presented in the form of questions and answers, the question is put in such a way that the answer gives an explanation. Studying the little cateches was – in the countryside – controlled by priests. They visited the villages and tested people's understanding by questioning, and they checked people's ability to read.

As children spent more time in schools the need arose for a more diversified curriculum. New subjects were introduced. Among those was handicraft education for boys and for girls. It seemed to be natural that handicraft for boys was quite different from handicraft for girls. It could – although this article deals with the early years – be noted that that nowadays boys and girls are taught both textile handicraft and woodwork.

It was rather usual that the teacher's wife or a skilled woman came to the school and trained the girls in textile handicraft, sewing, knitting etc. However there was no curriculum, so this training was not uniform, and it was not compulsory.

The introduction of textile handicraft as a subject in the elementary school is in fact the work of one woman: Hulda Lundin (1847-1921). Of course she acted not on her own, other people supported her and the board of education in Stockholm was also very positive. Let us try to understand how she could get so influential!

Who was Hulda Lundin? Her life is very connected with the development and industrialization of the country. When introducing Hulda Lundin and her life and what she achieved it seems necessary to present

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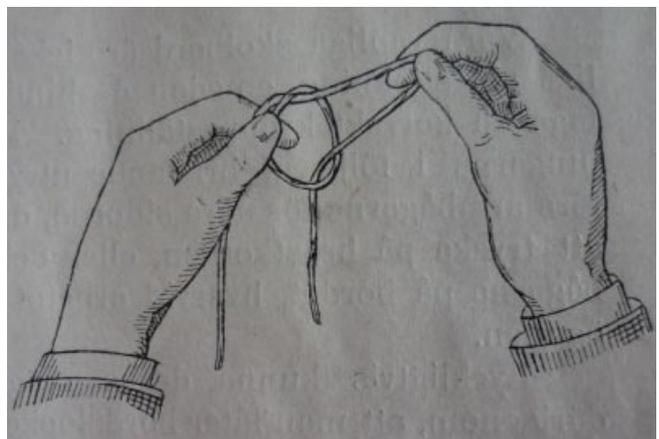
the social context of her life. Hulda Lundin was one of the five daughters of a military tailor in the town Kristianstad, in the southern part of Sweden. The sisters helped their father in his profession and learned tailoring. They also attended a girl's school in their home town, so the girls were well educated for their class. Her eldest sister Augusta (1840-1919) decided to move to Stockholm. When Augusta took the train it was a most modern way of travelling, the railway was quite new. Augusta decided to have a home in the city because some of her sisters should study there, she later told a journalist. However she started working as an assistant in a shop for hats. After two years she started a small atelier as a dressmaker. The small business developed and by and by she became the most prestigious fashion designer in Sweden. The royal and upper class women all had their evening dresses made at Augusta Lundin's establishment. When for example the famous author (of among other books Nils' adventures) Selma Lagerlöf got the Nobel prize for literature she wore a dress made by Augusta Lundin.



So Hulda Lundin and her sisters had a role model in Augusta, she really was very brave and enterprising. In all there were five sisters and they all moved to Stockholm, only their brother stayed in the home town. Hulda Lundin had already before she left for Stockholm worked as a teacher although she had not been properly trained for it. In Stockholm she also got a position as teacher from 1867. She attended a course for teachers 1869-70. Her position was permanent from 1874. As she had a special interest in girl's education she got a scholarship or grant and went on a journey to Germany 1881 to study modern handicraft education for girls. She was impressed by what she saw, but she did not accept everything. She wrote a report when she came home where she noted that the German girls knitted beating time. This was not what Hulda Lundin would introduce in Stockholm! As she was appreciated by the leaders of Stockholm schools she was given the opportunity to instruct all female teachers in the elementary school in how to train the girls. She exhibited Swedish handicraft education at the world exhibition in Chicago in 1893. She was a pioneer for women's rights and she was the first woman to be a member of the board of the worker's union for teachers in the compulsory school. She also worked for women's rights for example to vote in elections.

Her method was inspired by her study tours, but she transformed what she had seen abroad into a model of her own. Handicraft education for girls was introduced for all girls in the compulsory school in Stockholm. She trained all female teachers.

But Hulda Lundin was as much entrepreneur as was her sister. A seminar for textile teachers was founded, it was called 'The Lundin course' and it developed. 1882-1905 she was head of this seminar in Stockholm. She also published her method in books, printed in many editions. *Klädsömnad* (Dressmaking) was published four times between



1888 and 1910. *Handledning i metodisk undervisning i kvinnlig slöjd* (Introduction to methodological training in female handicraft) was published in eight editions between 1892 and 1924. When the method was available as a comprehensive book it was possible to train female teachers in all seminars in textile handicraft.

Hulda Lundin's methods were easy to understand and adapt to the local conditions in schools both in the countryside and in towns. There was no need for a special room for handicraft lessons, they could take place in the ordinary class room. Traditional crafts as spinning and weaving were not included in the curriculum. The reason for excluding those skills could be that they needed space and special equipment. Lace making and embroidery were also left, because they did not suit a simple home. Instead unpretentious undecorated things were to be produced. The models included were unpretentious, reminding of peasant's traditional clothes. It could look as if the models were inspired by the arising interest in traditional costumes, but that was not the case. The simplicity was chosen to fit the children's conditions. The elementary school children came from families with restricted economy, and Lundin choose those models – so different from her sister Augusta's dresses! – for the children. All things produced in the handicraft lessons were to be useful and practical. The girls should learn to sew aprons, shirts and practical clothing, they should learn how to knit gloves and socks. They were treated as small grownups. No toys or doll's clothes were allowed in the class room.

The training started with simple things and by and by more complicated models were introduced. Hulda Lundin was very stubborn. The book about how to sew a dress was, as mentioned above, published from the 1880's to the 1910's but the dress was the same. In society however no one made a dress in the same way for such a long period!

Which skills the teacher should have was also expressed in the *Handledning*. She should be educator and also skilled in textile handicraft. The method presented in the *Handledning* was very modern at the time. Clarity and progressivism were important.

Let us compare with boy's handicraft: slöyd! Otto Salomon had a seminar near Gothenburg, a world famous seminar. If you would be a trained slöyd teacher for boys you had to take a course at that seminar. Hulda Lundin choose to make it possible to train teachers in every existing seminar for female teachers. The training of male slöyd teachers took place in very prestigious surroundings, and the female slöyd teachers were trained in more modest conditions. In girls' and in boys' slöyd and handicraft the things that were produced were practical things that the children could bring home and that were suited for working class homes. The products should be simple and not too decorated.

In Lundin's seminar many teachers were trained. The method spread all over the country. It survived for decades. In 1932 (tree editions 1932-1946) a book that was written by one of Hulda Lundin's pupils, Elsa Valentin, was published. Here Hulda Lundin's methods were still vivid. Of course there is an explanation for the fact that handicraft education could stay almost unchanged. When introduced it was very well adapted to the paradigm that ruled: from the uncomplicated to the more complicated. However the educational modes changed but slöyd education still fitted in as the undecorated models were timeless. Two women who were trained at Lundin's seminar developed their own models for the subject. One of them was Maria Nordenfelt (1860-1941). She came from a wealthy family and she published in 1919 her method in a book, a much more elaborate one than Lundin's. Nordenfelt rebelled against the models introduced by Hulda Lundin. She was interested in letting the



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girls develop aesthetical values, they were taught different traditional embroidery techniques for example. The girls were also seen as children and doll's clothes were allowed to be sewn. Nordenfelt also established a seminar for handicraft teachers, both for the elementary school and for girl's schools. Andrea Eneroth (1873-1935) was another of Lundin's pupils who constructed a curriculum, published a book in 1904 and established a seminar. Eneroth, daughter of a wholesaler, however chose that her curriculum should be for girl's schools and her models were more embellished than Lundin's.

To conclude: Hulda Lundin was without doubt the leading person when girl's handicraft was introduced. Nordenfelt's and Eneroth's curricula are rebelling against Lundin. Their opposition against their teacher still is depending on her. In fact their curricula are rather similar to Lundin's. The three women had differing family backgrounds. All of them stayed single and devoted their lives to education. It could be said that they revolted against the contemporary ideals, a girl should be married and her husband was expected to be the breadwinner, women should keep the home tidy and look after the children. Their different backgrounds and the values that were important for them are depending on their origins: the tailor's daughter chose simple models for the elementary school girls. The aristocratic woman introduced beauty for girls in elementary school as well as in girl's schools. The bourgeois daughter chose to let girls in girl's schools embroider and embellish their clothes. As they led their seminars and earned their own living they were in some sense modern women. All the same their curricula aimed at educating housewives.

The curriculum of Hulda Lundin fitted well in to a society ruled by catechism, with demands of simplicity and cleanliness, but it also fitted in to the society undergoing changes – as for example industrialization – where school could take over the responsibility to teach girls handicraft, thus the subject handicraft was part of the modernization. It also fitted a later society where social sciences asked for cleanliness.

Almost every grown up Swedish woman to-day has got handicraft education at school that bears traces of what Hulda Lundin thought was important for girls more than hundred years ago.

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