

Craft skills and creativity

Annelie Holmberg

Introduction and aim

Teachers have been educated in textiles in Fackskolan För Huslig Ekonomi (Home Economics Institute) in Uppsala, Sweden for over one hundred years¹. Initially handicraft as a subject was a supplementary unit in teacher training in home economics. The handicraft unit was seen as a way to increase employment possibilities for the newly qualified teachers. After some years handicraft became a subject in its own right, and by in 1912 the course was five terms long. Teacher training in textiles developed at the same time as courses in other forms of handicrafts became more prominent in teacher training. Until this point, handicraft, despite having been a compulsory subject in the education system for some time, had not been supported by formal teacher training. The teaching in the subject was often preformed by the teachers' wife or sister.

The education of teachers in textiles at Fackskolan För Huslig Ekonomi continued over time. High standards in the education and a belief that the subjects studied were important for the individual as well as the society were central for both the management as well as those being trained. The practical education offered was seen as equally important as intellectual knowledge, and was considered as an opportunity to cultivate intelligence, will and the senses.

The aim in this study, here related to, is to investigate how the textile subjects in the education of teachers in textiles in Uppsala changed during the period 1955-2001. What has the introduction into the academic, scientific tradition meant for the textile education? The aim is to describe what developments occurred as a result of this influence on the subject area, by analyzing the causes and factors inherent in this process. The period under consideration has been divided into four parts. These mirror periods of structural change in the education courses, which have been identified through the written documents and from verbal sources.

The research poses a number of important questions:

- How was the education of teachers in textiles influenced by documents from local (for example, from the relative university or training institute) and national level (for example, from government directives)?
- How did teacher educators realize directives and how did they as individuals influence and experience the development?
- How can change be seen in the artefacts that the students made as part of the education process?
- Which fundamental values and conceptions that have influenced teacher training in textiles can be identified in the research material?

¹ The teachers were educated to teach in the subject *textilslöjd* (Eng. Arts and Craft in textile materials). The subject was introduced in the compulsory school system more than 100 years ago. Since 1955 the subject has been a compulsory subject.

Method and theory

The research uses three different sources: documents, interviews and artefacts. The documents include both national and local aspects. To increase the understanding of the work and education that was carried out during the period of time under consideration, interviews have been made with current teacher educators. The interviews are made with a goal of finding out how the documents' aims have been realized and how this process was experienced by these individuals. The interviews, by definition, give a personal point of view of the course of events. Artefacts made by the students have been used as evidence in support of these personal accounts. The artefacts show the transformation of the educators' intentions and aims, which are expressed in the documents examined, into a physical entity by the students².

Government and policy documents make up a substantial amount of the written documentation. For instance at a government level, printed documents from official reports or laws have been examined. These kinds of documents provided the governing conditions within education and were used to communicate this information directly to personnel. The examination of documents at a local level includes those written by the management of the university or persons employed at the institution where the education was organized. Examples of such documents are the educational plans and written aims of the education course.

Nine interviewees have been used to provide a deeper level of understanding to the whole period of time. Only one of the interviewees can offer experiences relating to the first time period, but for each of the time periods from 1961 until 2001, there are always four interviewees whose experience is relevant. The interviews can be described as semi-structural, qualitative research interviews. The interviews were conducted using an outline of relevant questions and themes.

The artefacts studied are made by students and consist of textile objects, essays and a combination of these two. Five women have made all their course material, and the artefacts they produced, available to the study. Course material for following periods, 1955–1961, 1961–1977, 1977–1988 is from three individuals, each of whom attended the textile course over one of the periods in question. For the period 1988–2001, it was possible to analyse course material from two individuals. The study of the artefacts, like the interviews and the study of documents, is analysed using a question-based approach.

The documents, interviews and objects are joined to one unit in the analysis. When the different sources are joined together or positioned against one and other a unit is created. In the unit the sources confirm or contradict each other and a discussion about changes and what have happened emerges.

In the investigation of what changes, if any, have occurred in the practical assignments within the textile education course in Uppsala, the concept of practical knowledge will be used. Practical knowledge is considered to form the core of textile education. In this thesis, practical knowledge is assumed to consist of action, professional knowledge and reflection. These three elements are equally valid and work together in the acquisition of practical knowledge.

In addition to the theory of practical knowledge, gender theory will be used as a basis in the analysis. A history of femininity in the education is assumed to have influenced developments in the area of textile education. The concept of gender will be applied to perceived changes identified in the research.

² Pictures of some of the artefacts are to be found later on in this article.

Results

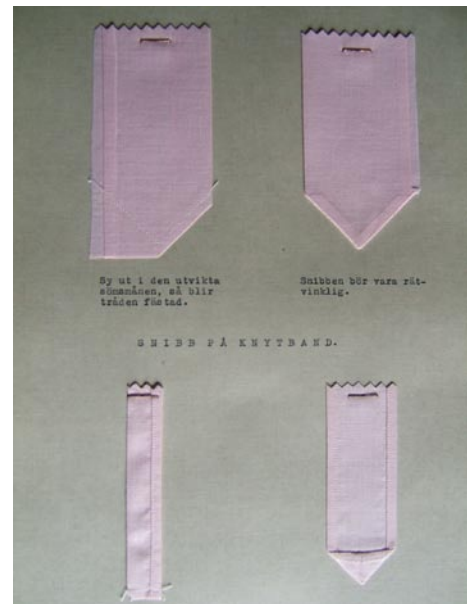
Fackskolan för huslig ekonomi 1955–1961

Initially, textile education was one of the courses in the private school Fackskolan för huslig ekonomi. The teacher training course in textiles had a duration of two years. The teacher educators controlled the implementation of the techniques learned, for example in how the students sewed a particular stitch or held sewing needle. The students learned the accurate craftsman's skills when they made the samples. A good technique that made the products durable was considered more important than creative decoration. Reflection was a part of the process but was not documented. Professional knowledge was also part of the process, which was ultimately controlled by the teacher educators. The teacher educators transformed knowledge from their own experiences and from books into a verbal aspect of the education. The students didn't have the possibility to read or find these sources for themselves and were therefore limited in the conclusions they could make from them.

The education described is identified as being dominated by practical knowledge, despite the fact that official investigations during the period determined that interaction between practical and theoretical education was important in particular for domestic education.



The box was made using bobbin lace as an assignment for the subject Embroidery. This is just one of an extensive number of samples worked for this subject area. This is a particularly fine example, not only in the choice of material, but also in the technical design and assembly.



Samples presented in a folder as part of the subject "Linnesömnad", complete with written instructions. To make it easier to follow the written instructions they were sometimes illustrated with drawings. The samples may demonstrate consecutive steps in a process, or as those shown here be a part of a theme.

Seminarier för huslig utbildning 1961–1977

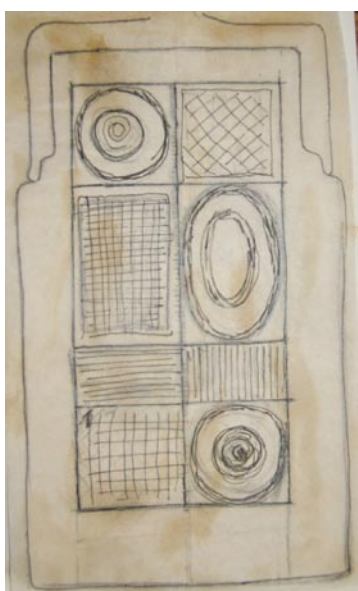
The private school Fackskolan för huslig ekonomi was in 1961 transformed to be a government training college: Seminarier för huslig utbildning. Textile education subjects seem to have been central since these subjects dominated the timetable. Skill acquisition in these subjects was studied in a similar method when

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compared to the previous period. The artefacts produced allowed the students to practice the relevant skills. New forms of learning, that included co-operation and creativity, were introduced through governmental influence.

The teacher educator's opportunity to let her personality affect the educational process is obvious in the planning of the courses. Despite the dissimilarity in the documentation, the artefacts made by the students show that the results of the different subjects were very much alike.

Professional knowledge was mediated verbally for the most part, but written summaries were also made by the teacher educators and books were referred to. Personal impression had become part of the process in the production of the artefacts and can be assumed to therefore have played a greater part in the acquisition of practical knowledge. The fact that it was decided during this period that boys must be educated in textiles caused a revision in the thinking of the teacher educators which in turn had an impact on how they taught their courses.



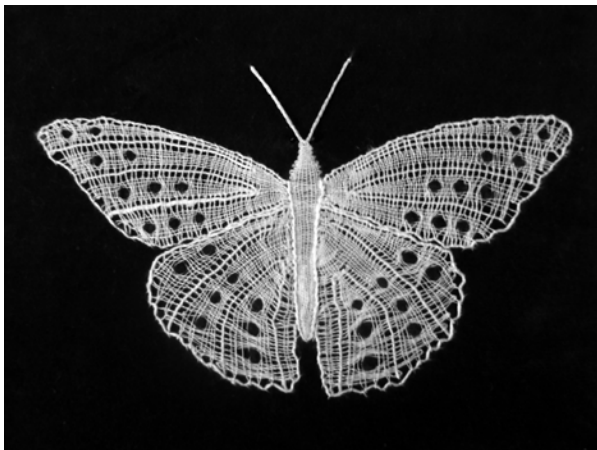
On the left is the preliminary sketch, with the finished product, a bag, to the right. The bag is decorated with drawn fabric work. The students' course in Embroidery involved the production of a large number of samples. This practical experience was part of the learning process and provided a level of knowledge, which the students could then apply to practical course assignments.

Textile education in the university 1977–1988

The teacher training in textiles has been a university course since 1977. New laws made it clear that the education now should be based on scientific grounds and connected to research. The teacher educators and other personnel connected to the education expressed a hope that this new organization and the new demands would be a positive force in textile education. There was hope that the lack of scientific tradition would disappear as co-operation with other subjects within the university increased. Feelings of hope were changed into feelings of disappointment. A struggle to determine that research and development of the subject should be done on its own terms and not at the cost of the knowledge based on action had made the development hard to carry through.

Despite the fact that the role of the teacher seems to be the most important in governmental documents, the handicraft skill aspect was still considered the most important in the education in Uppsala. An explanation of this might be found in the course's history and local culture that exists from earlier periods. The education changed when elements of critical thinking, the ability of comparing techniques and methods and the ability to analyze became parts of the coursework. Reflection was part of the learning process, not only as before where the individual instigated this themselves, but as a visible element that was to be discussed. The practical elements are still important in the education, the students learn by making samples and products. The amount of samples now varies in the different handicraft subjects. In addition, the students now start to write papers employing traditional scientific methodology, as part of their academic training.

Throughout the period of the research, the fact that the course and its methods were connected to a feminine tradition became obvious.



Butterfly made in bobbin lace and sewn onto fabric, from a sketch made by the student. When making such a piece, technical problem arise, such as how to fasten the loose threads from the wings to the narrow body. This provides a forum in which to implement those skills learnt through the production of the earlier samples.



Spectacle case and pencil case made of two different qualities from the same warp. These illustrate that even small, simple objects were made. It is likely that the aim was to develop activities suitable for the elementary school. The way in which the cases are sewn up also points to this explanation.

Institution for domestic science 1988–2001

In 1988 the practical and pedagogical subjects pedagogy and methodology were moved to the Institution for Teacher Education, Uppsala university (Swedish name Institutionen för Lärarutbildning). This fact made it possible for the teacher education in textiles to focus on the handicraft elements more than before. The economy, vision and focus were no longer split between the practical pedagogical (or educational) subjects and the education in textile handicraft.

A gradual change of the education appeared during the period. The education was more and more shaped by the students' individual responsibility and need to learn. Though thematic assignments a freedom to interpret the assignments became a possibility. The amount of literacy increased during the period. The students should increasingly search for their own knowledge in books. These changes can be seen as being

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linked to a reduction in the amount of teaching time. The teacher educators became more and more a kind of supervisor and less a teacher.

Reflection, as part of the learning process, is obvious during this period. The students were often expected to demonstrate their thought process in solving assignments both verbally and in written form. The role of reflection had moved to a central position in the production of the artefact. The quantity of written assignments, as part of the coursework, increased during this period and the students' essays show a higher academic level in their quality. This increased emphasis on the written elements of the course did not remove the status of the practical side where a deep knowledge in handicraft was seen as very important.

The management and the teacher educators worked to find a way to make elements of the textile course more scientifically grounded and more firmly connected to research. Through educating the teacher educators and getting connected with researchers the process was slowly on the way.



Samples from an assignment in printing fabric, using different colors on the fabric and the color of print. This illustrates the experimental aspect of the education. The students were encouraged to test, without prejudice, to develop their own knowledge in order to produce high quality results.



Felted sculpture, made with a felt needle. During the years 1988-2001 the creative process played an important part in the education. The creative process, together with a large amount of private studies and individual freedom made it possible for the students to individualize their leaning and the textile objects that resulted from it.

Conclusions

Government directives, whether laws or educational plans, have influenced textile education. Economical and structural assumptions have shaped the how the courses have been run and what elements have been included in these. An example is the co-operation between the different elements in textiles when the course was run by a government managed training college or how written essays that became a part of the education after 1977. The influences have been on a national as well as a local level. Government regulation and the economics of education have resulted in a changed structure and content of the education.

Governmental laws are responsible for the major changes in 1961, 1977 and 1988. The transition of the private school into a training collage managed by the government in 1961 made the former independent school lose its autonomy. At the same time the change gave the organization a more secure economic base and clear rules about how to manage the education. The Higher Education Law of 1977 made the teacher training course in textiles part of the university. That textile education should now be based on scientific grounds and connected to research was difficult to convert into reality for subjects without scientific traditions. Textile education embraced these ideas in a hope that a change could develop and make the textile handicraft subjects deeper. The subjects should not be part of an academic or theoretic process just for the sake of it; the subject should have something to gain from it.

When the practical pedagogical elements of the education were moved to the Institution for Teacher Education in 1988 an institution for domestic science was created. Under this framework, the education developed and changed and as a result, the students' potential to learning was changed. The education was influenced by a more traditional academic way of learning. The teacher educators implemented an increased amount of scientific literacy, in which they themselves personally strove to improve their own level of scientific awareness, all in an effort to live up to the change. During the last years a lecturer and a professor with competence within textiles were employed and one of the teacher educators graduated with a licentiate examination in research in the area of textiles.

The hesitation and the delayed realization of the directives regarding change can be explained by a lack of a unified focus. Another explanation is perhaps the strength of the textile tradition in Sweden. This tradition, not only encompasses historical elements, but also a level of skill and competence, which can be seen as important to preserve. To replace this skill level with elements of a more academic tradition, may not be considered as a progressive step.

In the change that gradually occurred during the investigated time, the inherent pride in the subject area and the traditions linked to the courses seems to have slowly diminished. The redefinition of textile education as part of the university minimized the value of the education's core based in action and domestic history, when compared with traditional academic subjects and their way of teaching and learning. Both the management and the teacher educators hesitated about how the subjects were supposed to change. Throughout these periods of progress, the focus on manual skills seems to have been maintained. Despite the fact that the teachers completing the course in textile education are prepared for the reality of teaching with assignments, there still remains a firm belief in the role of manual skills that dominated the education earlier. The acquisition of skills is seen as having value and as such continues to dominate the education. Connected to this value is the concept of carefulness, which can be seen both in the students' products and skillful, ambitious teacher educators.

Another important value is creativity. This has been an important part of the education and teaching that

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during period investigated. Creativity becomes a strategy in the individualized approach to education from 1988 onwards. In the time before 1988 creativity was a student instigated tool in the production of the course artefacts. The concept of creativity has changed over time. During the first years the concept was expressed in terms of the individuality that could be created through creativity. During the last period of the research, the concept most connected to creativity was flexibility. The concept was both a way of learning and a goal, students should, through the education, become teachers that had a wide experience and could always adapt.

The courses and the textile handicrafts associated with them, were as far as the surrounding society could judge, female in both values and conceptions. Within the education in Uppsala these conceptions were so dominating in assignments and the whole form of the education, that they became invisible. At the same time the management and the teacher educators did not give these issues priority since they were unsure as to what way this would improve the education.

The artefacts that the students made during 1955-2001 are a clear reflection of the philosophy behind textile education and what textile teachers were expected to know. The teacher educators could influence the course of the education during the whole period of the research, although it is not always visible in the documents. It is not always possible to see the reality of the teaching situation from the documents, or how much an individual teacher educator adapted these, since these documents are written in terminology that is appropriate for documentation at management level and expresses ideas held by the management group. The continued production of artefacts within the course, suggests that despite the use of scientific and research terminology, the manual skills and action were seen as an essential part of the education. Changes in society, in consumer habits, in the role of the household and work division can be seen in the textile handicraft subjects' constitution and contents. The artefacts produced reflect these changes. The written essays show the problem that occurs when traditional academic methods and theories are applied to knowledge that is based on a practical or skill based experience. Through this process, the textile handicraft subjects risk to lose their core and identity.