

Peer-reviewed article

Intercultural Learning through Crafts in a Nordic-Baltic Intensive Study Week Context

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Keywords

Intercultural learning, craft education, higher education, traditional craft, Nordic-Baltic region

Abstract

A Nordplus-funded project titled 'Higher Education on Craft Traditions' was established to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing in safeguarding craft traditions in the Nordic-Baltic region. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge on the intercultural learning outcomes achieved during an intensive craft week that took place in March 2023. This case study describes the contents of this intensive week and analyses the participating students' reflections (N = 14) on their learning outcomes using thematised content analysis. The main findings were thematised as hands-on crafting and deepening of craft knowledge and intercultural interaction and learning. The results highlight the various possibilities that higher education craft students realise for crafts as a means of facilitating intercultural communication and safeguarding traditions from the past for both the present and the future.

Introduction

Craft disciplines within higher education have often been overlooked in academic research (Kokko, 2022). Despite the discontinuance of numerous craft programmes worldwide, craft studies have firmly established themselves within higher education in the Nordic (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland) and Baltic (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) countries. These Nordic-Baltic countries recognise the significance of crafts as a standard school subject in the basic education curriculum as well as the related craft teacher education.

Consequently, extensive research on crafts has emerged, thereby prompting a growing interest in academic craft research. This interest led to the establishment in Finland in the 1980s—followed by Sweden and other Nordic-Baltic countries—of craft science as an academic discipline that focus on craft research (Kokko et al., 2020).

Craft studies in higher education encompass various orientations that focus on craft from different viewpoints, such as design, education, art, tradition and cultural heritage (Kokko, 2022). Despite their diverse orientations, students in craft study programmes play a vital role in preserving craft traditions. Indeed, future craft education will rely on understanding the past in terms of craft skills and traditions, the present digital and technology-enhanced crafts that promote well-being and the sustainability and materiality of future crafts (Mommo et al., 2025; Väänänen, 2020).

This article is situated within the context of the Nordplus project 'Higher Education on Craft Traditions' (HECT), which aims to foster international collaboration in traditional craft

studies. The project seeks to enhance craft study programmes in Nordic-Baltic countries by integrating researchers and students specialising in traditional crafts and craft pedagogy. An intensive week focussed on crafts in March 2023 gathered students from all Nordic-Baltic project partner countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway and Estonia) for jointly organised workshops and lectures on crafts and provided the opportunity to exchange their perspectives. In this study, we specifically focus on the students' experiences relative to their participation in this intercultural learning context. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of the learning outcomes achieved and to discuss how crafting supports intercultural learning. The theoretical basis of our research lies in the learning theories of intercultural education, which are discussed in the following section.

Intercultural education and learning

Internationalisation in a globalised world is important for collaboration (Achtenhagen & Johannisson, 2013). To overcome possible misunderstandings, stereotyping and prejudice and simply to understand each other, we need skills and competencies to facilitate this collaboration (Abdulai & Roosalu, 2022; Yang, 2022). Preparing people for global citizenship is considered one of the essential skills needed in the 21st century (Binkley et al., 2012), and it affects education at all levels, from basic to higher education (Halualani, 2008; Turner, 2009).

Culture can be defined as relational, systemic, heterogenic or temporal and it touches everyone (Jones et al., 2018). It is important to understand that culture is situational and evolving; hence, it is constructed through interactions rather than fixed and permanent (Roiha & Sommer, 2021). Kokko and Dillon (2016) discussed cultural ecology when interpreting how people interact in different environments. In an intercultural context, a more open definition of culture as 'beliefs, meaning, values and behaviours' might be plausible to avoid a fixed understanding of a particular cultural context (Byram, 2021, p. 50). According to Byram (2021, p. 44), 'intercultural competence' involves skills (to interpret and relate; to discover and/or interact), knowledge (of self and other; of interaction; individual and societal), attitudes (to relativize self and value others), and education (critical cultural awareness and political education). These competencies are framed in an 'intercultural communicative competence' (ICC) model that comprises linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and intercultural components (p. 62).

An interculturally competent person, as defined along the lines of Yang (2022, p. 33) is

a person who has an understanding of different cultures, especially their specific traditional consciousness, thinking habits, social customs and cultural taboos, based

on his or her own identity. Furthermore, this understanding can be applied to the communication process with people from cultural backgrounds or to complete various tasks in the cultural environment, effectively avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences.

Intercultural education means interaction and learning *with* representatives of different cultures instead of learning *about* other cultures (Kröger, 2012). However, Otten (2003) warned that intercultural encounters do not automatically increase intercultural competence. Instead, for competence to develop, reflection is required. To develop critical cultural awareness, 'questioning of one's own and respecting others' meanings, beliefs, values and behaviours' is needed (Byram, 2021, p. 44).

Craft in an intercultural context

Hall (1976) used an iceberg model to explain culture. The visible culture, such as culturally typical colours or patterns, is the most evident because we can see them. But what lies below the water are the things we do not see, like behaviour, values, or attitudes, among other factors. Craft is representative of the visual culture with actual artefacts, yet it also holds invisible traditional knowledge and skills that sustain these traditions and heritage (Ionică, 2022).

There are concerns that craft culture is becoming more homogenous and moving towards a unified culture in the globalised world (Bamford, 2011; Hughes, 2011) and that it is not practised and appreciated today (Kokko & Kaipainen, 2015). Then again, craft skills and techniques have always travelled and been shared between cultures (Walker, 1989; Jöeste, 2023) alongside the existence of distinctive localised practices (Nugraha, 2012). Kröger (2020, p. 214) reminded us that cultural heritage in crafts is more than the 'official' and 'institutional' narrative and perspective. It is also the heritage of individuals and their families within the culture. After all, crafts are living cultural heritage and deserve special attention in terms of their role in safeguarding traditions for future generations (UNESCO, 2018).

Kokko and Dillon (2016) found that craft works as a window to understanding cultural knowledge. According to Kröger (2012), craft can be used as a boundary tool for multi- and intercultural education because craft has cognitive, affective and interactive aspects attached to it. The cognitive aspect refers to the knowledge of craft culture, while the affective aspect includes attitudes, acceptance and respect for others. Indeed, interaction through crafting is an integral part of communication and encounters, especially in a setting of practising craft with others.

We adopted the term ‘intercultural’ in our research, in which the common denominator is craft. We examined craft culture through an intercultural setting, in which the members came together from different Nordic and Baltic countries—each with a rich cultural heritage of crafts—to view, learn, experience, discuss, reflect and envision what craft was in the past, what it is in the present and what will it be in the future.

Context

The HECT project was funded by Nordplus, which is a Nordic version of the ERASMUS programme, to increase student mobility between neighbouring countries (Nyborg, 1996). The network in this project aims

to encourage teachers and students to seek innovative approaches to established practices by exchanging knowledge, experience and vision on how to bring traditional crafts to the contemporary environment and to the labour market, keeping in mind the knowledge of the past and the needs of the future. (NordTradCraft Network, 2023)

The purpose of the intensive week was to bring Nordic and Baltic craft students and teachers together to strengthen collaboration between these countries and the participating institutions. Altogether 60 students and 15 teachers from seven partner universities (see Table 1) attended the intensive week.

Table 1

An overview of the partner universities and their craft education programmes and degrees.

Campus	University	Programme	Degree
Rauland	University of South-Eastern Norway - USN	Norwegian Traditional Art: Emphasis on hands-on learning, critical reflection, theoretical understanding of folk-art traditions.	Bachelor's (3 years) Master's (2 years)
Mariestad	University of Gothenburg	Conservation: Bachelor's programmes in paintings, buildings, gardens, built environment, and landscapes. Combines theoretical and hands-on craft teaching.	Bachelor's (3 years) Master's (2 years)

Campus	University	Programme	Degree
		Home to the National Centre for crafts, the Craft Laboratory, works to document, safeguard and develop traditional craft skills.	
Uppsala	Uppsala University	Textile studies: Focus on textile objects, crafts, techniques, and contexts (e.g. cultural, social, material, economic and historical). Provides skills for the textile occupation in various sectors.	Bachelor's (3 years) Master's (2 years) Doctoral (4 years)
Viljandi	University of Tartu, Viljandi Culture Academy	Estonian Native Craft: Specialisations in textiles, construction, metalwork, and circular technology. Emphasis on practical skills, sustainable application, and traditional crafts.	Bachelor's (4 years) Master's (2 years)
Tartu	Pallas University of Applied Sciences	Art education: Focus areas in design, conservation/restoration, and the arts. Curricula include photography, painting, furniture or leather design and restoration, sculpture and textiles.	Professional Higher Education (Bachelor's equivalent)
Helsinki	University of Helsinki	Craft science and craft teacher education: Multi-material craft education (technical and textile crafts). Includes pedagogical studies and practical teacher training.	Bachelor's (3 years) Master's (2 years) Doctoral (4 years)

Campus	University	Programme	Degree
Joensuu	University of Eastern Finland	Craft science and craft teacher education: Multi-material craft education (technical and textile crafts). Includes pedagogical studies and practical teacher training.	Bachelor's (3 years) Master's (2 years) Doctoral (4 years)

Methods

We framed this study as an intrinsic and instrumental case study as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2023) and Stake (2000, p. 437–438). Case studies are often interested in the intrinsic nature of a case and are used to understand a matter in a general way. We were interested in the case intrinsically, for its own sake, but we were also keen to understand our case instrumentally in a larger context, namely crafts in an intercultural learning environment. As typical in qualitative research, we are interested in understanding how people interpret and give meanings to their experiences and construct their worlds (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain knowledge regarding the learning outcomes that were achieved during a Nordic-Baltic intensive week on crafts and to discuss how crafting can support intercultural learning in this kind of context through these research questions:

What were the higher education students' learning outcomes in the Nordic-Baltic intensive craft week?

How can an international learning context support intercultural learning in a Nordic-Baltic context?

We describe our case—the intensive week—as an overview (see Hamilton & Corbet-Whittier, 2013) and analysed the participating students' (N = 14) experiences. As Stake (2000, p. 436–448) and the rationale of case studies suggests, we were interested in finding out what could be learnt from this case. In this paper, we first describe how our case evolved and how we gathered data and sought patterns in the data to construct knowledge on our case. The triangulation in this case study relates to the collaborative writing and critiquing as well as verification of the analysis.

Description of the case: overview of the intensive craft week

Arranging an international intensive craft week required collaborative planning. Each partner university took part in the design and continued collaboration with regular online meetings. The intensive craft week consisted of a lecture, seminars and short and long workshops that each university was responsible for arranging. The main lecture raised issues of the past, present and future of craft, which was the main theme of the intensive week. By taking care of our craft culture (Almevik et al., 2022), we avoid losing the crafting skills and knowledge that have passed through generations. We integrated theoretical elements into the students' learning process during the seminars and some of the workshops. Through these educational tasks and situations, we aimed to raise the students' critical cultural awareness with reflective learning tasks.

The focus of the intensive week was on learning about craft traditions and passing them to future generations within an intercultural learning environment. Learning in this context took place primarily through hands-on workshops practices and was guided by the teachers' instruction on various crafting techniques. The learning processes were complimented by reflective discussions in the seminars.

Throughout the week, an intercultural learning environment was fostered to enable learning from, with and about representatives (people and crafts) of neighbouring countries, as well as to explore the past, present and future of crafts in the Nordic-Baltic region. Opportunities for communication and learning emerged through both formal and informal interactions, such as in individual discussions and dialogues among students and teachers. Thus, we came to understand craft as tool, a method and a language for initiating discussion and intercultural dialogue among the participants during the week (see Kröger & Kokko, 2025). Culture and language are intertwined (Alisaari et al., 2019), and in the context of craft, they are expressed and conveyed through embodied knowledge and meanings (Schilhab & Groth, 2024).

There were five seminars, and each had a pre-assignment and a theme the students worked on in the seminar. The seminar topics were 'craft and crafting—exploring spatial dimensions', 'reflecting sustainable craft', 'seeing is believing—promoting craft in social media', 'pushing the limits of traditional craft' and 'current trends in craft on social media'.

For example, in the seminar 'craft and crafting—exploring spatial dimensions', the students were asked to read several articles (namely Carden (2023), Hui (2012) and Shahab (2021)) and they were given questions to guide their reflection upon different spatial dimensions of craft both from the literature and their own craft practice. These concerned topics of craft,

such as local identity, situatedness, displacement, mobility, local-global dependency, regional development and craft in relational, physical and relative space. The group was a mix of students from different countries and different crafts, and the discussions during the seminar gave them new insights into each other's crafting practices as well as into ways to regard and understand one's own crafting practices. The seminars thus aimed at facilitating critical reflection on hands-on crafting practices through discussions, i.e. communicating embodied knowledge and practice both verbally and theoretically. The intention was to facilitate reflective encounters between the students from different universities.

After the seminars, there were nine short workshops (approximately two hours each) that were organised by the teachers or students from the participating universities. The themes of the short workshops were 'jewellery design', 'renewing traditions', 'digital documentation', 'extending the lifetime of a material', 'belt-leatherwork', 'traditional window restoration', 'small size enamelwork with portable gas torch' and 'gardening workshop-grafting'. An example from the short workshop 'small size enamelwork with portable gas torch' introduced the ancient goldsmith technique of hot enamelling and how to use it with a portable gas torch. During the workshop, the students were given step-by-step guidance on the enamelling process through practical, small-sized test pieces (see Figure 1). Enamel is usually melted in an oven, but small-scale work can also be done with a gas torch that allows the use of this technique more widely and is energy efficient. In another short workshop, 'jewellery design', the learning assignment was to create a piece of jewellery that focused on form and/or surface. The materials used included wood, glass, brass, metal, wire, leather, leaves, other sustainable materials and even rubbish from workshop boxes.

During the intensive week, long workshops (approximately 5.5 hours each) were open for the students to take part in. Altogether, there were seven long workshops with different techniques and materials that were again tangled with the expertise of the participating universities and the teachers. These workshops had themes such as 'designing and making an artefact', 'two-end knitting', 'multipurpose, multifunctional, multiweave', 'greenwood stool making', 'heavy timber frame joinery cutting with power tools', 'log cabin workshop' and 'nalbinding'. In the long workshop for 'greenwood stool making' the aim was to make a highly functional piece of furniture using basic hand tools and beginning in the forest or with a freshly cut tree. This approach created a complete understanding of the process leading all the way from tree to chair (see Figure 2). Thus, the workshop facilitated the gaining of practical knowledge about woodworking (e.g. wood as a material, hand tools, and all the possibilities that lie within).

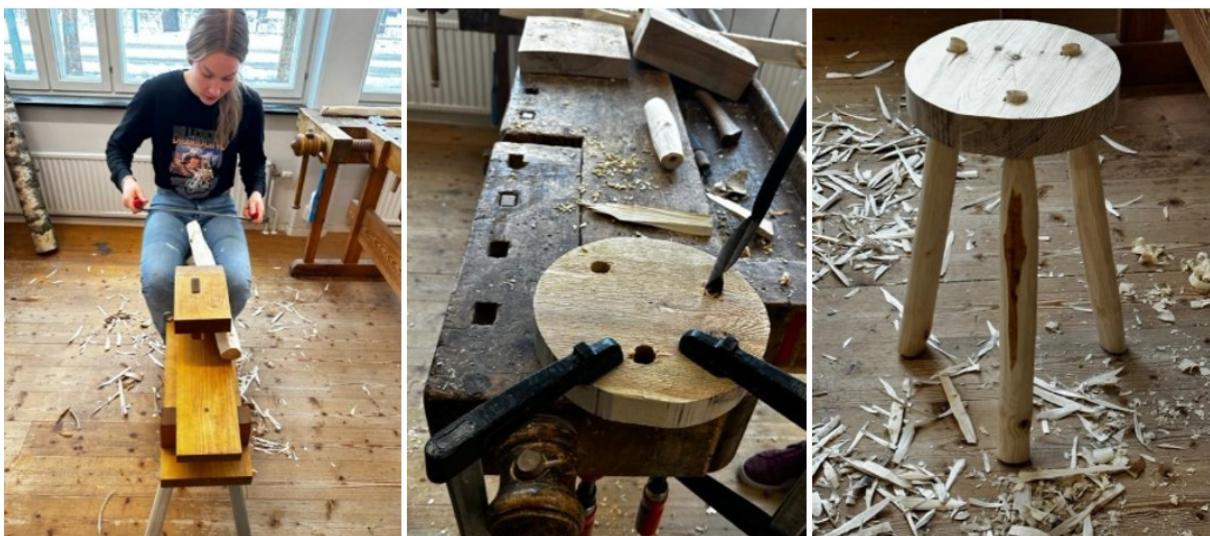
Figure 1

Specialized skills and knowledge on spreading pigment on enamel work. © Väänänen, 2023.



Figure 2

Craft teacher student Alina Jyrkinen processing greenwood on the shaving horse.



Note: Name published with permission of the student in the picture. Shaving horses were used before industrial appliances to shave wood in the process of creating a desired object. The technique has long been used in the Nordic countries, especially in Swedish basic education. © Väänänen, 2023.

In another long workshop, ‘designing and making an artefact’, the aim was to use cultural heritage as an inspiration to design and make an artefact. Cultural heritage is described as an inheritance system which stores and transmits information through communication, imitation, teaching and learning (Peedicayil, 2001). People have inherited various intangible

and material objects and customs from the generations before, and these items affect the lives and craft businesses in many ways. They are a cultural heritage that we interpret, renew and pass on. The students were asked to read two articles before the workshop (namely Han et al. (2019) and Shu & Sun (2020)) and to start the design process beforehand to increase their understanding of traditional design cultures and improve their own ability to design functional artefacts. The goal was to offer students' new strategies and innovations for traditional design.

The week also included excursions to cultural heritage sites and time for collaborative reflection and social activities. As a summary of the intensive week, the organising teachers integrated intercultural, social, and affective learning activities throughout the week (see Turner, 2009). Even though the groups were formed freely, the groups were diverse in terms of the students' backgrounds and skills because they mixed with students from different universities and countries. Some workshops or seminars had more students from certain countries, which allowed the participants to communicate and reflect in their own language, but the common language of the intensive week was English. However, the communication benefitted from the embodied features of crafting. To gain embodied knowledge and understanding of crafts and crafting relies on showing and sensing the materials in making and learning different craft techniques (see, i.e., Groth, 2017; Groth & Gulliksen, 2024). During this craft week, intercultural communication was incorporated into the learning of crafts, and the evaluation of learning was done through reflection in the lecture and the seminars (see Reid & Garson, 2017).

Student perspective—a qualitative survey

The data for this study were gathered through a qualitative survey (see Jansen, 2010) that was sent to the participants after the intensive craft week and remained open for two weeks. Participation in the survey anonymous and voluntary. The survey consisted of questions on the students' backgrounds (gender identity, age, university, years of study of craft in higher education), experiences of intercultural interaction ('What are your key learning experiences from the symposium?' 'How would you utilize your key learning outcomes in the future?' 'What were your experiences of the intercultural learning environment?' 'What did you learn about crafts in higher education?' 'What did you learn about craft traditions?') and feedback on the course contents and arrangements. The students were able to reflect and share their thoughts in their native languages or in English. We were careful to follow the research guidelines of European Union (2016/679) and Finnish legislation related to handling personal data (1050/2018).

We received 14 responses from the students, who were between 18 to over 55. A third of them were between the ages of 18 and 24 (N = 5, 36%), which represented the largest age group. For privacy reasons, we did not ask the participants' exact age. The students represented different gender identities, with the majority identifying as female (N = 10). Most of them had studied crafts in higher education for two to four years (N = 10).

The non-English responses were translated into English. The survey responses were short–ranging from one to seven sentences–and the sentence structure varied from a main point to more explanatory summaries of key learning. The texts were analysed using the content analysis method, first by reading the texts and followed by coding, categorising and thematising them (Bengtsson, 2016). The analysis framework is presented in Table 2. The students' reflections on the key learning experiences were thematised as hands-on crafting and deepening of craft knowledge and intercultural interaction and learning.

Table 2

Analysis of students' learning outcomes.

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
<i>Hands-on crafting and deepening of craft knowledge</i>	Hands-on crafting	Techniques Tools
	Deepening craft knowledge	Diverse crafts Individual expression Personal relationship with crafts
	Prosperities for future career	Personal development in crafts Tools and methods for profession Collaboration
	Educational diversity	Diverse craft programmes in higher education Diverse learning outcomes for different programmes Balance between theory and practice Specialised craft knowledge and skills

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
	Importance to safeguard traditions	Keeping traditions alive Connecting past, present and future
<i>Intercultural interaction & learning</i>	Intercultural interaction	International relationships
	Intercultural cultural competences: skills, knowledge, attitudes and critical cultural awareness	Learning about other cultures Small talk Comparing cultures Appreciating your own culture

Findings

The students' reflections on the key learning experiences were thematized as hands-on crafting and the deepening of craft knowledge and intercultural interaction and learning. Because the workshops and seminars included both practical and theoretical perspectives, the participants reflected on them. The citations from the participants are referred to S (=student) with number given in the coding process.

Hands-on crafting and deepening of craft knowledge

In the students' responses, hands-on crafting and the deepening of craft knowledge were described frequently. 'Hands-on crafting' referred to learning new techniques and getting acquainted with materials the students had not used before. The new skills studied in the workshops gave the students a different viewpoint for approaching their craft. As one student wrote:

I learned about how I should approach my work and what I should consider while planning. How I can use the similar techniques and tools to streamline and speed up my work process. Which will be useful in the future. (S13)

One student described 'deepening craft knowledge' as follows: 'That craft is very versatile and individual, and that every person has their own relationship with their craft' (S7). This indicated that the student's understanding of the broad concept of crafts had deepened

from immediate crafting towards a more holistic understanding. Getting to know other students with the background of a range of materials and methods of crafting was considered important, which this student pointed out: 'I think it was instructive to get to know other students from the different countries. They had different experiences ranging from blacksmithing, wood and textile crafts' (S11).

When the students were asked what they had learned about crafts in higher education, they unanimously emphasised the 'educational diversity' of the craft study programmes. They had realised the different craft study programmes emphasised different aspects, namely a focus on theory and practice and specialised craft knowledge and skills. This opinion was shown when, for instance, a student reflected, 'That there needs to be a balance between practical and theoretical education' (S7).

When they were asked what they had learned about craft traditions, most of the participants wrote about the 'importance to safeguard traditions' in connecting the past, present and future, which was the main theme of the whole intensive craft week. Some participants felt that the contents of the intensive week was too focussed on a basic level of crafting. They critically reported that they did not learn new aspects about craft traditions: 'Much less than I had hoped for' (S9) and 'Can't think of anything I didn't know already' (S1). These students might have expected to gain deeper knowledge about craft-making skills or traditions, which was not possible to deliver in such a short time. For the others, the intensive week fulfilled its purpose in connecting the past, present and future.

To learn about crafts traditions today you can't ignore the past no matter if you're practical or theoretical in your approach. With the help of traditions, you can see connections and get new innovations through a multi-disciplinary view. (S6)

When asked about their plans and prospects for how to utilise their key learning outcomes in the future, the participants reflected on their 'prosperities for future career'. They referred to actual crafting as in the terms of the use of tools and methods in their future professions, their personal development in crafts and collaboration skills. The tools and methods in their future professions were elaborated as an acquired new skillset. For instance, one student regarded a practice-based knitting workshop as teaching basic skills to practice that could be practised until a level of proficiency could be reached:

For the long workshop, I chose two end knitting, which I will definitely use in the future. I want to knit myself gloves and socks in this technique. When I myself have

become as proficient as possible in the technique, I will also introduce it to others.
(S3)

Personal development in crafts was demonstrated when the students reflected on the hands-on practices. As one of the students said, 'I would like to use some of the techniques I learned in my future art projects' (S8). Collaboration was seen in terms of networking and opening their minds to other views. One of the students thought it was beneficial to 'Discuss more with other people to get new perspectives' (S7). In view of future professions, the students also mentioned developing their pedagogical skills while teaching others.

Intercultural interaction and learning

The 'intercultural interaction' was appreciated as the students pointed out that the study atmosphere was memorable, friendly and welcoming. Even though they were meeting for the first time, a sense of community and belonging was achieved. As one student explained, 'I haven't been to a craft seminar before, so it was wonderful to hear so much enthusiastic talk about crafts' (S10). Networking was also seen as beneficial for future educational and professional development.

The analysis of the students' experiences of the intercultural learning environment followed Byram's (2021) categorising: intercultural cultural competencies in skills, knowledge, attitudes and critical cultural awareness. The students reflected on their learning about the other cultures that were present during the intensive week. Interaction was experienced as fruitful and supportive of intercultural learning. As one student explained:

I really appreciate multicultural groups because you always know you have something to talk about. If everything else fails, then conversations about the countries' differences can last for hours and that makes it sometimes even easier than speaking with "your own people". You can learn new things if others have something worked out better than at your home or if they don't you really start to appreciate the things at home more. (S1)

However, some of the students reported that they did not necessarily have the skills for intercultural interaction, and they needed more support from peers or the teachers. For example, in terms of the communication problems related to the language barrier, one student pointed out that as English was not anyone's native language, there were difficulties in using it, especially with craft-related terminology.

The embodied nature of crafting (Groth & Gulliksen, 2024), however, supported the communication through crafting as a practical language and a common denominator. When

observing hands-on teaching and learning, the students could learn about each other's crafting approaches without a common spoken language. The intercultural competence concerning knowledge (see Byram, 2021) was revealed in the reflections on interaction and the exchange of learning techniques or styles of teaching. As one student reported, 'I saw and heard different views on craft and how people do craft in different places' (S13). Intercultural competence relative to critical cultural awareness and attitudes (see Byram, 2021), such as, showing an appreciation of crafts was emphasized by a student who said, 'The learning environment was really interesting, and I liked how handicrafts were clearly valued' (S10). One student who relativised the value of other approaches to crafts wrote, 'I experienced that the learning outcome was very fruitful because of the different approaches and ways to learn and do crafts' (S4).

Discussion

In this article, we described the Nordplus-funded intensive week related to higher education crafts in the Nordic-Baltic context. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge regarding the learning outcomes achieved during an international intensive week on crafts and to discuss how crafting supports intercultural learning. We described our case study as a general overview of the multiple practices (i.e. seminars and workshops) within our case. We also analysed the students' key learning outcomes that resulted from the week. Based on the analysis, we can conclude that the students were developing their personal skills and knowledge through hands-on crafting and the deepening of craft knowledge and intercultural interaction and learning.

Looking at the experiences of this intercultural craft week from a broader perspective, we can say that the skills that have evolved in crafts are intrinsically transnational and intercultural. For instance, woodwork techniques achieved with hand tools and knitting techniques have travelled and remained the same with little variation across centuries (Jõeste, 2023). However, there are also very localised practices in different cultural contexts due to the resources or conditions dictated by the natural or societal environment (Ionică, 2022; Kouhia, 2021; Tung, 2012). In addition, the higher education institutions participating in this study all had different organisational and academic approaches to crafts. Some focused on practical aspects, while others emphasised the theoretical. By mixing with people representing different orientations on craft education at higher level (see Kokko, 2022), we were able to understand different viewpoints and relativise our thoughts, as was noted by Byram (2021) in an intercultural learning context.

To understand variations in our shared cultures and crafting context, we utilised the intercultural education framework of developing the intercultural competencies of skills, knowledge, attitudes and education (Byram, 2021). As Byram (2021) suggested, intercultural competence skills in refer to the ability to interpret, relate, discover and interact between cultures. The purpose is to gain knowledge of oneself and others. Transferring this framework to the context of our craft week illuminated the process of how we gained knowledge of our own and others' cultural nuances (see also Kröger, 2012). Therefore, the craft students and we—as teachers and researchers in the Nordic-Baltic craft context—were assembled to interpret, relate, discover, and interact between our cultures.

Another aspect for further consideration is the language. In the Nordic and Baltic regions, Estonian and Finnish have similarities, and Swedish and Norwegian are similar to each other. Even though these language families have the same roots, they are not the same languages. Thinking, learning and acting with a different language may be difficult when one does not know the vocabulary and terminology. The common language used in the seminar was English, which was not a native language to anyone. If the students could not understand the terminology, they used their native languages to communicate and asked for support from their peers. This kind of language support or 'scaffolding' was necessary to understand what was going on. This is one aspect of how the students learned intercultural communicative competencies, hence developing their linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competencies (see Byram, 2021) within the intercultural intensive craft week learning environment (see Kröger, 2012, 2020). From a pedagogical perspective, linguistically responsive teaching allows students to conceptualise their learning in their own language (Alisaari et al. 2019), and, as noted herein, crafts, language and culture are bound together.

The practice-based teaching and learning of crafts through showing, sensing and actions are embodied (Groth & Gulliksen, 2024) and thus can be practiced without a common spoken language. For instance, participants can mimic the teacher or peers or rely on non-verbal communication. But to fully understand and learn, these actions and observations need to be taken into verbal communication as part of the process of connecting and conceptualising the knowledge and experience of craft practice (Groth & Schilhab, 2024).

Conclusions

Our own reflection as researchers and participating teachers and those who learned from this case study revealed that the enthusiasm about craft in the workshops and seminars was tangible. This enthusiasm was also noticed by the students. When reflecting on our intensive craft week, we are happy about the format which provided a foundation for intercultural

interaction. There were participants representing a variety of nationalities and craft study programmes, which offered a starting point for participation. The important component of non-verbal crafting practice, which we pointed out as a tool for overcoming linguistic difficulties, is at the core of academic craft studies. The learning activities during the week with explicit tasks to connect craft practice with the theoretical reflections on the seminars and lectures could be used even more actively for developing intercultural competence together with craft practices.

We conclude that an intensive intercultural craft week, as described in this article, was indeed very intensive and required a lot of planning and futureproofing. It also required flexibility from the people involved in terms of the schedules and arrangements. The seminars and workshops were based on the participating teachers' expertise and vision to support the continuity of crafts in the Nordic-Baltic context.

The planning began with a network of craft educators in the Nordic-Baltic region who were willing to collaborate and facilitate craft education in higher education. Next, the network was financially supported by Nordplus. Without funding, this kind of intensive week would have been difficult to arrange, and it would have at least required private funding from the participants. Arranging and taking part in this kind of activity also required all of the participants to step out of comfort zones and collaborate on many levels, from organisational to individual.

In conclusion, crafts revealed their power to unify diverse academic craft practitioners during this week. Our objectives were to bring Nordic and Baltic craft students and teachers together to strengthen craft education and collaboration in higher education. Based on the overview of the week and the students' learning outcomes, we can say that this was largely achieved. In addition to learning about craft cultures and different approaches to craft studies, the participants developed their intercultural competencies through crafts. Crafting served as a tool and common denominator for exploring craft traditions in the Nordic-Baltic region, thereby fostering understanding and contextualisation of the historical roots and backgrounds of crafting. This intercultural learning environment created opportunities to connect with fellow crafters in the region through hands-on and reflective craft practices. The chance to meet, discuss and co-learn with like-minded individuals was seen as a key component of intercultural competence that encompassed appreciation, skills and knowledge of different cultures and peoples. This learning process was facilitated through crafts. The learning environment described in this paper could be utilised in other international crafting contexts to promote crafting as a tool to facilitate intercultural understanding and collaboration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the teachers and students who took part in the intensive craft week as well as the project coordinators and partner institutions. We would also like to thank Nordplus for funding the intensive week. This study did not receive any financial support from Nordplus for creating the study concept, collecting data or reporting the results. Instead, the contribution was financed by the authors' institutional basic funding.

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