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Estonian and Finnish teachers' experiences of textile craft purposes in basic education

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the purpose of craft education and how this purpose manifests according to Estonian and Finnish textile craft teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers. The interview transcriptions were analysed using a qualitative content analysis method, resulting in seven main categories that revealed how the purpose of learning crafts manifests in compulsory basic education. According to the teachers, besides enhancing learning practical skills and how to use hands more skilfully, consistent craft making also enhances students' versatile thinking; generates holistic practices; nurtures confidence, perseverance and sense of responsibility; shapes mature ways of expressing feelings; develops personal authenticity; and promotes social connectedness.

Keywords:

Estonian craft education, Finnish craft education, adolescence, textile craft teachers.

INTRODUCTION

In modern societies, the educational system and curricula reflect both widely shared values and an understanding of the developmental potential of children and adolescents, and they are based on society's needs and views of what the citizens should master in the future. The status of different school subjects is continuously discussed and evaluated (Schiro, 2012) concerning what is valuable for young people and what is good for society.

During recent decades in primary and secondary education, arts, crafts and practical subjects have gradually lost their foothold in the curricula, where greater emphasis is given to academic school subjects (Nussbaum, 2010). The educational value of these subjects has not been as widely acknow-

ledged as the value of academic subjects (Borgen & Hjordemaal, 2017). However, recent knowledge of brain research and embodied cognition (cf. Veeber & Syrjäläinen, 2015; Huotilainen et al., 2018) has changed the understanding of the value of arts, crafts and other practical activities and has brought more activating, embodied and artistic teaching methods to many academic subjects (e.g. Kokko, 2015). In the Nordic and Baltic countries, the role of arts and crafts subjects in basic education has been recognised because they are standard school subjects on their own. For example, in Finland, the lesson-hour share of artistic and practical subjects covers almost one-third of the overall lesson-hour share (FNBE, 2016), and crafts are part of this subject group.

This article adds to the discussion of justifying crafts as a school subject forming part of the compulsory primary and secondary basic education in both Estonia and Finland, which are the context of this study. Estonia and Finland are neighbouring countries with many similarities and differences. Our research team of Estonian and Finnish craft teaching experts wanted to explore how craft teachers in these two countries see the purpose of craft education for their students. As the craft subject is broad and consists of many materials and techniques, we specified the research to focus on textile craft teaching, which is more familiar to the team. More specifically, we focus on adolescents' learning and making crafts in Finnish and Estonian basic education. Adolescence is a distinctive period that includes many learning experiences intertwined with changes in the teenage brain (Dahl et al., 2018). We explore the teachers' observations of the purpose of craft learning for students during this special period of their lives.

Crafts as a separate compulsory school subject has been part of Estonian and Finnish education since the end of the 19th century. Today, teaching crafts is undergoing changes and is seeking its place and role in modern education. In Finland, the question is discussed in professional and academic communities (Kokko et al., 2020), whereas in Estonia, the ongoing discussion is on a general level (cf. Pärli, 2019). Often, the idea of crafts is connected to skill learning, with a focus on manual skills. Using one's hands when learning crafts is without a doubt about skills, but it is also important to recognise that the skills cover many other areas besides manual skills (see Aktas, 2021). In this article, we examine Estonian and Finnish teachers' experiences of the purpose of textile crafts in basic education.

Craft teachers and their pedagogical choices are essential in how craft education is implemented in practice (Lind & Veeber, 2015). Working with adolescents, teachers receive a broad picture of what can be achieved through learning and the consistent practice of craft skills. In their work, they strive to make craft teaching meaningful and closely observe the reactions of their students to craft assignments. By investigating the experiential knowledge of Estonian and Finnish textile craft teachers about how the purpose of learning and making crafts in adolescence manifests, we highlight the educational experiences verified in everyday crafts classrooms.

Some earlier studies on Estonian craft education focused on teachers' understanding of the subject's content and aims, revealing a relationship between the learning outcomes and the objectives stated in the national curriculum (c.f. Lind, 2012; Paas & Palojoki, 2019). Apart from Jaana Taar's PhD research (2017), little research has examined textile craft teachers' experiences of working with adolescents. In Finland, craft teachers' approach to guiding the students' craft processes has been studied from a range of perspectives (Rönkkö & Mommo, 2016). However, since the study on Finnish craft teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Syrjäläinen, 2003), craft teachers' views about the meaning of their subject have received little attention. Our study sheds light on the numerous manifestations of the purpose of craft making for adolescent students observed by Estonian and Finnish textile craft teachers in basic education. By the phrase manifestation of the purpose, we refer to events, actions and signs experienced by craft teachers during the textile craft lessons that signify the purpose and meaningfulness of craft learning for adolescent students.

ADOLESCENCE AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PERIOD

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, with its own specific elements of biological growth and major social role transitions; in other words, it is a time when young people grow independent and become part of adult society (Sawyer et al., 2018; Dahl et al., 2018). The World

Health Organization (WHO, 2014) defines adolescents as people aged between 10 and 19 years; to distinguish among different developmental phases, adolescence is further divided into early, middle and late adolescence (respectively, 10–13, 14–16 and 17–19 years). In our study, the focus is on early and middle adolescence, that is, pupils attending basic school in Estonia and Finland (4th to 9th grade).

Growing up brings manifold changes to every young person's life. Dahl et al. (2018) highlighted that adolescent learning, development and maturation are about gaining a more detailed understanding of the functioning of adult society and obtaining such cognitive, affective and self-regulatory abilities that allow youth to seek new goals and priorities. They add that it is also about learning to handle an increasing number of new, ambiguous and intense social situations and using this knowledge when managing the growing range of social relationships with peers, adults and institutions. Another important feature of adolescence is the adaptation to a fundamentally novel form of one's emerging individuality, meaning that teenagers must find through trial and error their adult identity with 'heartfelt goals, values and priorities' (Dahl et al., 2018, p. 442).

Steinberg (2015) stated that adolescence is as crucial a developmental period as the first three years of life because of the brain's heightened malleability. One of the most important tasks of adolescence is to develop self-regulation: the ability to observe and manage one's thoughts, behaviours and emotions and make the necessary alterations to reach goals. In the world of instant gratification, it is quite a challenge for young people to set long-term goals and pursue them in the conduct of their behaviour, emotions and thoughts. Sawyer et al. (2018) found that when young people are given the chance to learn, explore, create and discover, they experience their adolescence as a transformative life phase for gaining the necessary resources to manage adult life.

In sum, as young people grow during adolescence, they experience major transformations concerning their social, cognitive, emotional and behavioural competencies. Their self-regulatory development builds up their identity in relation to the community and society. Many factors and experiences in everyday school life have an impact on these pivotally important developmental abilities. Therefore, every school subject and every teacher has a possible effect on individual students' development. This study focuses on textile teachers' experiences of manifested development.

CRAFTS AS A STANDARD SCHOOL SUBJECT IN NORDIC COUNTRIES AND ESTONIA

From an international viewpoint, crafts as a standard school subject is not common in all countries (Kokko & Dillon, 2016). Still, in the Nordic countries and Estonia, craft-related school subjects are part of compulsory basic education, with a slightly different emphasis in each country. We examine the differences and similarities to highlight the importance of learning to express one's creative ideas by using different materials and technologies while learning to work both independently and in collaboration (Lindfors, 2012; Illum & Johansson, 2012).

In Estonia, crafts are taught in basic education under the subject field of 'technology'. The subject is called crafts in grades 1–3. In grades 4–9, the studies continue in two groups: pupils choose to participate in either handicraft (textile works) and home economics classes or craft and technology education classes (wood, metal works). This choice is made for their entire compulsory basic education (Vabariigi Valitsus, 2014). Here, we focus on textile work teachers, and we use the term crafts as a synonym for handicrafts. According to the national curriculum, the aim of the technology field's subjects is to develop knowledge, skills, values and attitudes based on traditional and modern technology. Crafts is an educational subject focusing on the joy and satisfaction of personal fulfilment. This subject integrates theory with practice, connects pupils' creative thinking with practical manual activity and teaches them to realise their ideas in a targeted manner (Vabariigi Valitsus, 2014).

In Finland, the focus is on the so-called holistic craft process, meaning that the pupils operate at all phases of the making process: ideation, design, making and evaluation of the outcome. Design and learner's sense of commitment and responsibility are also important (Porko-Hudd et al., 2018). The emphasis of Finnish craft education is more on the craft process than on the craft artefact. The targets include strengthening cultural and technological competence and creativity (Yliverronen et al., 2021). In addition, the curriculum (FNBE, 2014) involves the aims of learning wider skills, such as problem

solving, strategic planning, interaction with tools and materials, patience, perseverance, independence and responsibility for the environment (Kokko et al., 2020). Before the curriculum change in 2016, the Finnish crafts subject was separated into two distinctive areas of textiles and technical crafts, but now the teaching and learning is *multimaterial*, including both these areas (Kokko et al., 2020).

Although the curriculum targets of craft learning in Estonia focus on creativity, innovation, design and cooperation, the tangible product and concrete craft techniques often receive more attention in teaching practices (cf. Pärli, 2019). As Johansson (2019) stated, when the craft artefact is a goal, it tends to overshadow the knowledge that students are about to develop in and through crafts. When the concrete product is in the spotlight, the hidden processes of craft making are given less attention.

Until the beginning of 2010s, the crafts subject was divided into gender-based groups where boys learned wood and metal crafts and girls were taught textiles and household work (Taar & Koppel, 2021). Today, in Finland, crafts are taught in gender-mixed groups, but teaching still requires specific textile and technical craft workshops. In Estonia, despite the changes in the curriculum that state clearly that study groups are not gender-based, historically rooted traditions persist in many schools (cf. Pärli, 2019). However, crafts are taught in smaller groups than in many other subjects, as students must learn complicated processes that require more intensive teaching by instructors.

Borgen and Hjordemaal (2018) noted that in Nordic countries and internationally, the so-called 'practical aesthetic subjects' (crafts among them) are seen as supportive of the 'core subjects' and as having a transfer effect on them. However, Fancourt and Finn (2019) are cautious when discussing transfer, arguing that the explanation of children's engagement in arts activities predicting later academic performance might also be grounded in overall improved behaviours and the personal development of such traits as motivation, perseverance and achievement.

RESEARCH QUESTION, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHOD

In this study, we are interested in the purpose of craft education for today's young people. We gathered data on textile craft teachers' long-term experiences and their observations of students' learning in textile crafts lessons based on the following research question:

How is the purpose of learning crafts in basic education manifested according to Estonian and Finnish textile craft teachers' experiences?

Through a semi-structured interview, we estimated and assessed the complexity and potential (Galletta, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) of teachers' experiences in the classroom. The interviewees were eight textile craft teachers (Table 1): four from Estonia (three from the capital Tallinn and one from a small town, Türi) and four from Finland (all from the capital Helsinki). In accordance with comparative potential (Flick, 2008), teachers were selected from schools with similar orientations. Interviewees were contacted via email with invitations to participate anonymously in the study. Each teacher was informed about their role in the study and their rights, and they all agreed to participate verbally. The interviews were carried out by the first and second authors in the teachers' mother tongue in each teacher's craft classroom. The duration of the interviews ranged from one to one and a half hours. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. To ensure anonymity, the names of the teachers have been changed.

The interview questions were formulated to explore the purpose of textile craft education according to the teachers' experiences. We also asked about the teachers' knowledge of craft education and curriculum, their own reasoning and rationales for craft education and their experiences of everyday practices in the textile crafts classroom.

The interviews were conducted at the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015. This was a pivotal time in Finnish crafts education as the implementation of the new curriculum (FNBE, 2016) integrating textile crafts and technical crafts into one multimaterial craft subject (Kokko et al., 2020) was close. During the interviews, Finnish teachers were already preparing for the change, but their teaching experience was from the time of the previous curricula. In Estonia, teachers followed a new national

curriculum that had been implemented in 2011. The main change in the curriculum was the shift in focus to general competencies and expected learning outcomes, giving teachers significantly more autonomy than before in regard to the choice of learning content (Vabariigi Valitsus, 2014).

TABLE 1. Interviewed teachers, their background and school type.

Name	Country	Experience as textile crafts teacher	School type
Kaja	Estonia (E)	23 years	Suburban school
Liis	Estonia (E)	4 years	Urban school with long traditions
Sirje	Estonia (E)	27 years	IB school
Ülle	Estonia (E)	20 years	Suburban school
Elina	Finland (F)	15 years	IB school
Laura	Finland (F)	29 years	Suburban school
Leeni	Finland (F)	16 years	Suburban school
Maia	Finland (F)	20 years	Urban school with long traditions

The method of data analysis was qualitative content analysis, which examines the occurrence of concepts in texts (Mathison, 2005). This analysis is an intellectual process of categorising qualitative textual data into groups of similar entities or conceptual categories to identify consistent patterns and relationships among variables or themes. This analytical approach is a way to reduce data and make sense of and derive meaning from them (Julien, 2008). The first step was to read the transcribed interviews repeatedly to gain a broad understanding of the data. Using QDA Mine Lite qualitative analysis software, relevant utterances were coded and organised into categories. The nature of this stage of analysis was iterative, as the categories were repeatedly reflected against theory and revised by the two first authors by rearranging and renaming them when necessary.

Based on the analysis, seven main categories were formed to reveal how the purpose of learning crafts manifests in basic school curricula according to textile craft teachers: Craft learning 1) develops psychomotor abilities; 2) enhances versatile thinking; 3) generates profound holistic practice; 4) nurtures confidence, perseverance and sense of responsibility; 5) creates opportunities to express, recognise and regulate emotions; 6) contributes to the development of personal authenticity; and 7) promotes social connectedness. The following section examines these categories in more detail.

RESULTS: PURPOSE OF CRAFTS IN BASIC EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS

During the interviews, the teachers mentioned numerous nuances in how they saw the purpose of craft education for their students. Overall, the teachers shared similar views regardless of their nationality. Some differences arose, which we reflect on later in the discussion.

- *Develops psychomotor abilities*

The interviewed teachers discussed how young people have no need and few opportunities to use their hands in a meaningful and challenging way these days. Therefore, they pointed out that crafts lessons at school may offer the only opportunity for many students to consistently practice manual dexterity. When asked about the purpose of craft making, most respondents mentioned learning or developing fine motor skills. Becoming more skilful with one's hands contributes to the development of psychomotor ability, which is the capacity to control and use the muscles of the body; the term applies to physical movements that are linked to conscious cognitive processing, e.g. the movement of fingers and hands with precision, coordination and strength (Kleemeier, 1954; Murrphy et al., 2017).

The teachers also mentioned that textile crafts create the conditions to learn everyday skills that may not be covered by other school subjects. For example, pupils can learn how to use safely and ergonomically different (household) appliances. Learning to use tools combines cognitive and physical capacities; crafts workshops may be the only place for some students to gain access to both simple and complex tools. One teacher noted, 'It's not just that they get to use the sewing machine, but many

children actually hold an iron for the first time... or the brush and shovel are held in hand for the first time in their lives in craft lessons' (Kaja, E).

- *Enhances versatile thinking*

The teachers said that craft making fosters adolescents' thinking in manifold ways. According to many of the teachers, making crafts offers experiences of manipulating with three-dimensional objects, contributes to the understanding of product development stages and simultaneously helps students understand how objects or tools are made from scratch. Further, craft making enables students to estimate the functionality of a product and its environmental impact. McGinn (2015) discussed how people not only have visual and auditory ideas but also manual ideas of things; in fact, the human hand is one of the main tools people use to learn about the world.

The teachers were unanimous about their views that working by hand contributes to students' cognitive thinking. They seemed to be highly aware of the brain–hand connection required by craft activities, as Ülle (E) explained:

From the child's point of view, learning and development are very closely interlinked with the activities of the hand. Then, any kind of finger touching or sensing helps the brain to develop, to think, to coordinate. Let's take the movement of hands, writing or crocheting or knitting or even that fine motor skill, the needle between the finger or the pearls between the fingers. All this helps the child mentally and it doesn't have to be a piece of art...

Spatial thinking is a mental skill necessary to solve spatial issues of navigation, visualise objects from different angles and space, understand ordered relations and grasp the topics of science, technology and mathematics (Newcombe & Frick, 2010). Sirje (E) stated that despite the daily use of technology screens, she hoped that students would develop their spatial thinking while making crafts.

Making a handicraft item is often a series of actions that comprise envisioning the outcome and designing it, then choosing necessary techniques, materials and tools and finding solutions to problems that arise during the making process. According to the teachers, students are expected to not only plan their work but also solve problems while making crafts. Consider the following: 'Yes, and problem-solving skills. It is without question. I want to remember that it should not be solved too much beforehand but to ask them what should be done next' (Leeni, F). As students are expected to respect the given timeframe to complete the work, they learn to plan their time for a longer period than just one lesson. The importance of time management was brought up as follows: 'They learn to plan their work, their time, no matter how capable they are. They have to manage what they have set for themselves' (Kaja, E).

While creating handicrafts, students are also expected to consider the functionality of the artefact: who is going to use it, where will it be used and what makes it usable? The process and the result are both important. One teacher emphasised, 'It's something you can utilise and, in that way, it is functional. In the 7th grade, they are making hoodies. It's important to them. For many, it is the first self-made clothing item they dare to wear publicly' (Maia, F). Many teachers guide pupils to consider alternative solutions if the project does not turn out as planned, as Elina (F): 'While working, even if the intended product is not quite going according to plan, it's important that a teacher can provide innovative solutions, so that the end result is still a fully functional product'.

Topics of sustainability emerge naturally while making. According to the craft teachers, students want to learn to reuse materials and repair or redesign clothes. Teachers voiced the understanding that, these days, it is not just an issue of fashion but a question of lifestyle and even a necessity:

We talk about recycling and what kinds of items could be redesigned to make new products. Learning crafts is purposeful when we preserve nature. We remake, repair, reuse and we create something out of it that is of value to our nature. (Ülle, E)

The teachers aimed to teach the students to consider managerial, spatial, functional and environmental aspects of making. As Laura (F) summed up, 'You have to always think about what you are doing. You are not just making because of making. You must think, "Oh yes, this and this. What will become of this?" It is, sort of, I think, about managing your thinking and the process, which is most important'.

- *Generates profound holistic practice*

Practice is the essence of textile crafts because one does not create an artefact simply by thinking or reading about it. The crafts subject offers learning conditions where students have profound hands-on experience of practice, from learning the basics of different craft techniques to realising their own thoughts and actions.

When discussing foundational skills and basic craft techniques, teachers mentioned the importance of providing the minimum elementary knowledge of craft making so that when students feel the urge to make something later in life, they will have some knowledge 'in the back of their head' (Sirje, E) about where to begin. The teachers mentioned some skills that they considered basic knowledge, such as how to use a needle and thread to mend one's clothes: 'You take your needle and thread, and you know how it works. That little needlework that you can cope with' (Sirje, E). The teachers who mentioned examples of foundational knowledge hoped that their students would have enough skills to build on with some external help.

In the holistic craft process, the students conduct all phases by themselves, either on their own or as active members of a group. The maker oversees the ideas, design, preparation, making of the artefact and the evaluations of the whole process (Pöllänen, 2009). Producing a craft artefact from scratch consists of several steps that have a logical order. Teachers emphasised that craft lessons give pupils an opportunity to envision, plan, execute and assess their products step-by-step: 'Precisely completing a piece. Designing it. It comes out as planned. The final product and the design match' (Maia, F).

- *Nurtures confidence, perseverance and sense of responsibility*

Learning to control one's behaviour, emotions and thoughts is an important skill young people learn during adolescence. Teachers recognised how craft making promotes character traits that support students' self-regulation abilities. Based on craft teachers' experiences, craft making nurtures confidence, perseverance and a sense of responsibility.

According to Gaul and Issartel (2016), low self-esteem is one possible outcome of poor fine motor skills. The teachers mentioned that courage is an essential aspect of craft making, referring to all stages of the work: the courage to try and learn new techniques, the courage to make mistakes and continue working when everything is not going according to the plan and the courage to begin again if something has failed or if some technique is difficult at first.

In this study, the teachers explained that coping with problems of craft making gives adolescents the courage and confidence to make something on their own:

The other idea is that you're not afraid to make mistakes. In fact, most of the things you learn are that you do something wrong. You sew sloppy stitches, you open your work, you look: 'Darn!' So that you dare to experiment and dare to make mistakes. That it is totally OK. Nobody squabbles when your stitch drops off; that is all right; we make an effect of this defect. (Sirje, E)

Teachers also reported persistence as one of the key elements of educational craft making. Craft does not happen quickly; it takes time to plan and execute an artefact. Elina (F) saw crafts as an antidote to the 'fast-living existence, as it teaches patience and perseverance'. Maia (F) demonstrated, 'Also, what crafts has to offer but many other subjects don't is persistence in working. You can't finish a task in an hour. You have to be patient and wait for it to be complete'. Persistence goes hand in hand with the third character trait mentioned by the interviewees, namely, responsibility. When working on an individual craft project, students practice responsibility for their input in terms of time, effort, materials

and for the outcome, answering to themselves and the teacher. When working on something collaboratively, they are also responsible for their groupmates.

- *Creates opportunities to express, recognise and regulate emotions*

The process of making crafts involves emotions (cf. Ojala, 2021), which makes this subject an appropriate environment for learning to express, recognise and regulate emotions. The textile craft teachers expressed a sense of responsibility to help adolescents manage their emotions during craft making.

The fact that craft making can bring up a multitude of feelings is known to anyone who has ever tried to create a crafted artefact. When discussing the purpose of making crafts for the adolescent students, the teachers focused primarily on the positive emotional aspects, such as simply feeling good while making something oneself and experiencing joy and pride. Even failure was seen as an opportunity to learn perseverance. The latter is in line with Huutilainen et al.'s (2018) suggestion that crafts often provide a necessary and safe context for practising failing and coping with the emotions involved.

Since the atmosphere in craft workshops tends to be less strict than in many other lessons, it allows pupils to create a safe space in which to learn how to handle strong feelings. This allows craft teachers an option to validate students' emotions and to teach mood regulation strategies. Some teachers said about their strategies to cope with the emotions: 'We have this rule here that when they get truly angry, they put their work down and go and walk to the end of the corridor' (Sirje, E). The teachers also recognised that craft making has a calming effect on students when the initial anxiety of learning a new skill has been overcome.

However, the teachers saw students' pride and joy in achievement as the most important and rewarding elements of learning. Experiencing success is important to all learners, but several teachers emphasised the positive impact on students who do not always thrive in other school subjects: 'Students get to experience the joy of accomplishment through crafts, because many students who do not succeed in theoretical subjects should have at least one subject in which they feel they are thriving' (Maia, F).

- *Contributes to the development of personal authenticity*

Adolescence is a time for developing self-awareness related to personal authenticity. According to Vannini and Franzese (2008), authenticity is about being true to yourself and it can be seen as a self-reflective and emotional experience. Being authentic refers to having self-awareness and genuineness and an ability to communicate that to others. Huutilainen et al. (2018) indicated that arts and crafts can empower adolescents and help them in self-construction. The teachers reported that young people develop their personalities in several ways when learning and making crafts. For example, students get to know themselves better, can make personal choices that test their own ideas, gain a sense of ownership and find meaning in the making.

The teachers recognised that adolescents discover a lot about themselves when making crafts. First, they learn about their preferences; when trying out different handicraft materials or techniques, learners develop inclinations related to their personalities. As Elina (F) explained:

There isn't only a right way or a wrong way of doing things. Just because I don't like a certain colour doesn't mean someone else can't choose to use it. There is no need to please. Just do as your intuition tells you.

Furthermore, Liis (E) observed:

I think, in a way, craft helps them, to some extent, to find themselves, because they get to choose yarns or the style... in many ways, the choice they make has immediate results. For example, when students come to the classroom with a textile, it is immediately apparent that it is theirs that they've gone and chosen the right one for them.

Second, learning about one's preferences goes hand in hand with the ability to make personal choices and express them. The teachers talked about the importance of developing personal individuality in adolescence. They recognised that the students enjoy their individual choices, designs and emerging craft work, which are unique and completely different from mass production: 'Somehow they understand that this is their own and they can make it look their own and personal' (Maia, F). The process of developing one's own ideas and having the opportunity to try to realise those ideas by making something useful for oneself was recognised as supporting the students' personal authenticity. A Finnish teacher reported:

And, of course, to see one's own design come true and the creativity it brings forth. These are purposeful things. And that there is not a ready-chosen garment or chosen model that they must follow. It is possible to make their own choices. Then, the product is meaningful to the maker. (Leeni, F)

Searching for meaning and being involved with meaningful activities is important in adolescence. The interviewed teachers had observed how some students had found meaning in the making; discovering a personal meaning was seen as important for the learner. Kaja (E) explained that sometimes pupils get so excited about a certain handicraft technique that they create numerous artefacts using that technique. This revealed the importance of the making process for the students.

- *Promotes social connectedness*

Although making crafts can be a rather individual activity, the teachers recognised that it also promotes student's connectedness with other people, either with peers in school or with family members at home. Collaborative work, being part of joint projects, connecting with parents and making gifts for friends or family members were all factors mentioned by teachers.

Pöllänen and Urdzina (2017) discussed collective work as one aspect of up-to-date craft education, which can in turn enhance learning motivation (Grönman & Lindfors, 2021). According to the interviewees, participation in groupwork or school projects covering several subjects enables students to learn in different social situations in which they can take on different roles or experience the nuances of a larger venture where everyone has an important part to play. For example, Elina (F) raised the advantages of projects, allowing the possibility to be part of something larger and still be one-of-a-kind: 'Yes, for example, when we have projects, such as musical projects. The students get to make sets and costumes and become a part of something greater. Their unique skills have special meaning.... A large, common project is rather rewarding'. In addition, Liis (E) discussed how the projects allowed the students chances to try on different social roles: 'We have different project work, then coping with each other and working in a team and the division of roles. [Students have to decide] who will take on the role of leader and how they will reach some kind of result together'.

Learning craft skills can bring together different generations. Some teachers had received feedback from parents who had been happy to learn the craft skills that the students had learned at school and then taught them at home. Maia (F) explained that a mother had said to her, 'Thanks for teaching them to knit socks. Now my daughter is teaching me!' She said, 'It seems that especially mothers and daughters find that common evening activity when the mothers notice what they are up to here and want to join in'. Ülle (E) observed that young learners take their positive experiences home and share them with the entire family: 'There is also parents' feedback as the pupil is going to talk about her successes at home. She may pass on what she has learned to her sister or brother or teach her mother to crochet again'.

The teachers also raised the meaning of social connectedness as they observed that the pupils often gave their handmade artefacts as gifts, allowing them a way to show their love and care. Sirje (E) concluded, 'This purpose is revealed when making gifts. A student may want to give a gift for mother but doesn't have a way to earn money anywhere, so she must come up with something that is made for mother from the bottom of her heart'. This is in line with Gauntlett's (2011) observation of how the ability to make and share handmade items increases engagement and connection with one's social and physical environment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we gathered information from eight textile craft teachers regarding how the purpose of craft making for adolescent students manifested in their textile craft lessons. We wanted to learn about the events, actions and signs the teachers had recognised as evidence of its purpose. Learning crafts is about working with the hands in the real, somatic world of concrete knowledge that has the ability to help make sense of abstract learning (Jensen, 2001). As Driscoll (2013) stated, the human hand should be taken as a capacity not only for shaping the world but also for shaping one's own body, mind and evolution. The interaction of hands and body in the craft processes makes crafts a subject in which adolescents have a chance to develop their thoughts, character and worldview through hands-on activities. These Estonian and Finnish textile craft teachers witnessed how consistent craft making affected the learner's way of thinking about the world and relating to it by nurturing several personal qualities and promoting more mature ways of expressing feelings.

The experiences of these teachers indicate that learning crafts is a favourable learning environment for early adolescents who face the developmental tasks of obtaining new cognitive, affective and self-regulatory abilities that support managing new social situations and relationships (Dahl et al., 2018). The teachers emphasised that while craft making takes time, it also allows time for the adolescents to work on their self-regulation skills. Accordingly, classroom settings are like small worlds where students practice their ability to handle new, ambiguous and intense social situations (Dahl et al., 2018). As we aimed to achieve a clearer picture of the purpose and significance of textile teachers' – as well as any craft or art teachers' – work, these findings provide craft teachers with the lenses through which to reflect and observe everyday classroom life. The findings that conceptualise students' behaviour and reactions may help teachers give feedback and support students in understanding their own development.

Our analysis of the similarities and differences between the teachers of the two countries revealed more similarities than differences and the results give a clear picture of textile craft classes in these two neighbouring countries. Both Estonian and Finnish textile craft teachers reflected on the objectives set out in the national curricula when giving their rationales on why crafts should be taught and the purpose of learning it these days. The teachers similarly discussed the various aspects of manual skills: problem solving, planning, designing and realising one's ideas in a targeted manner. The Estonian teachers also discussed the purpose of learning to cope with everyday life, which reflects the Estonian curriculum combining textile crafts and home economics in one subject. All Finnish teachers, however, stressed the importance of learning perseverance and patience in craft studies, reflecting these aims in their curricula. Thus, teachers recognised how the aims of the national curricula materialised for learners in the classroom.

The data for this study were collected in 2015 and thus reflect the curricula of that time, which we acknowledge as a limitation for drawing wider conclusions. However, although the content of the crafts subject may have changed over the last years, the main idea of the crafts subject – learning to use one's hands and tools to make up things from design to reality – has not changed. As we explored the teachers' views qualitatively, the number of participants was rather small, which is another limitation of broader conclusions. The small number of participants enabled us to go deeper into the large data and therefore build knowledge for future studies, where our results can be used, for instance, to research larger groups of craft teachers. Our study focused on textile craft teachers' experiences and observations, leaving out the technical craft teachers' perspectives. Further studies involving teachers of the range of craft subject content are needed to give a complete picture.

Some researchers (e.g. Borgen & Hjordemaal, 2017) have stated that the discussion about the arts and crafts field and its relation to more theoretically founded concepts is often not debated. According to Johansson (2019), the school subject of crafts is 'too often debated based on unreflected grounds'. Our study contributes to the development of theoretically founded grounds to discuss the purpose of craft education and the abilities and skills it promotes for adolescent learners.

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