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Broadening the Scope of Craft Teaching

Exploring Out-of-School Teaching Practices

ABSTRACT

The focus of Finnish craft teacher education is on educating craft teachers in formal basic education. In this study, the aim was to research craft student teachers' experiences of teaching practices that were arranged in out-of-school contexts. The data comprised craft student teachers' (n = 18) written reflections included in their course portfolios. Their teaching practice took place in adult education centres, basic education in arts, older peoples' care homes, youth work centres, centres for people with disabilities, social work centres, museums, craft cafés and clubs and a vocational training institution. The written reflections concerned the students' expectations at the beginning and those at the end of the teaching practice and were analysed according to the principles of qualitative data analysis. The students found both similarities and differences in craft pedagogy in different contexts. The out-of-school teaching practice broadened their future career perspectives and equipped them with new pedagogical skills.

Keywords: craft teacher education, craft teaching, formal craft education, nonformal craft education, teaching practice

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in crafts has different orientations (Kokko, 2022). In Finland, university-level craft science education is related to craft teacher education, in which the students get a broad understanding of a range of crafts both in practice and in theory. In line with other teacher education study programmes, master's-level craft teacher education is structured such that the studies in crafts overlap with pedagogical studies, including teaching practice (e.g. Ropo & Jaatinen, 2020). Jarvis (2004) explained learning situations to be formal, nonformal or informal. *Formal learning* in formal education, such as schools and universities, is based on a curriculum. *Nonformal learning* refers to learning in a work or hobby context and educational contexts that do not aim to provide professional qualifications, while *informal learning* refers to learning skills and knowledge in everyday life. Much of the pedagogical studies in craft teacher education have focused on crafts in formal basic education; some of them have also qualified the teachers for other educational contexts, including nonformal adult education.

The current curriculum for basic education in Finland involves reduced lesson hours for craft subjects, affecting the need for craft subject teachers (Kokko et al., 2020; TAO & TOL, 2014). Thus, broad-based skills in pedagogy and crafts are increasingly important for craft student teachers' career prospects. Kiilakoski (2013) suggested that all student teachers would benefit from having access to a wide range of teaching and learning environments. Out-of-school and 'real-life' learning environments contribute positively to educational activities and can provide a more realistic picture of teaching (Durukan et al., 2022; Rust & Sinelnikov, 2010).

This study analyses craft student teachers' experiences of the *Applied Teaching Practice* course at the University of Helsinki (UH) and the University of Eastern Finland (UEF). The aim of this course is for students to gain first-hand experience in teaching crafts in various out-of-school learning environments. In this study, we examine craft student teachers' written reflections about their experiences in various craft teaching and learning contexts. The purpose is to determine what they learn about teaching crafts for different learners in various contexts and how this affects their future career perspectives.

Research context

Finnish master's-level teacher education comprises 300 ECTS on the teaching subject area and related pedagogical competence (Pursiainen et al., 2019). The purpose of Finnish subject teacher education is to provide students with pedagogical competencies to work in various educational contexts (Laiho et al., 2014). To qualify as a teacher, 60 ECTS of teachers' pedagogical studies are required, of which teaching practice constitutes about one-third (Valtioneuvoston asetus yliopistojen tutkinnoista 794/2004). Teaching practice is an important part of craft teacher education, which mainly takes place in formal basic education. In this study, we focused on the *Applied Teaching Practice* course at UH and UEF, both of which house a Craft Teacher Education programme. The student teachers searched for a placement for their teaching practice according to their interests. The purpose was to provide the students with an understanding and experience of the range of craft teaching and learning contexts that exist in Finland (see Raunio & Paju, 2022).

At both universities, *Applied Teaching Practice* was a five-credit (5 ECTS) course, which included the planning, implementation and evaluation of the students' craft teaching in the chosen placement. Each student taught 10–20 craft lessons and were supervised by the nominated person from the teaching practice environment. In addition, they were required to monitor the ongoing teaching and other activities in the teaching practice context and to study relevant research literature to support their pedagogy.

The teaching and learning material produced during the teaching practice was documented and compiled in a teaching practice portfolio. Portfolio work is widely used in teacher education to showcase one's learning and reflect on it (Jeskanen, 2012). It is also an essential part of formal craft education in Finland (Saarinen et al., 2021). Portfolio work captures and deepens learning through reflection (Jones & Shelton, 2011). Through reflection, a person goes through lived experiences and observations by conceptualising those experiences and reflecting them to theories about the phenomena (Jarvis, 2004; Schön, 1983). The students in this study reflected on their own learning goals and on their experiences of the teaching practice in the portfolios that they compiled during the whole process.

METHOD, DATA AND ANALYSIS

We approached the qualitative data, written experiences in the student portfolios, from a social constructivist stance to determine what subjective meanings the students attached to their teaching practice (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). We aimed to answer the following question: *What did the craft student teachers learn about craft teaching in various contexts during their Applied Teaching Practice course? How did the experiences of the Applied Teaching Practice course affect the craft student teachers' future career perspectives?*

The data comprised portfolios produced by craft student teachers (n = 18) in the Applied Teaching Practice course at UH and UEF in 2019 and 2023. These students had chosen to practice teaching in

nonformal contexts of adult education in liberal arts, basic education in arts, older peoples' care homes, youth work centres, centres for people with disabilities or social work, museums, craft cafés and clubs and a formal vocational training institution.

The portfolios were part of the course assignments. From the portfolios, a deeper analysis focused on their written reflections, which are considered narratives – the expressions of lived and told experiences of the participants (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Hänninen, 2004; Squire, 2017). In this study, we approached the texts as told narratives that reflected the lived experiences of the participants. Our focus was on the content and what was said, rather than the way the narrative was told.

The students were asked for informed consent for permission to analyse their portfolios. Their participation was voluntary and did not affect the course grading. In accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2016/679), the students were ensured anonymity in the research reporting. All materials in the student portfolios were in Finnish; for this study, excerpts of data were translated from Finnish to English.

We focused on thematic narrative analysis (e.g. Suter et al., 2021). First, the data were read carefully and then coded using Atlas.ti software. Following the principles of qualitative data analysis (see Phoenix, 2017; Squire, 2017; Suter et al., 2021), the codes were grouped thematically. The main themes arising from the data formed a narrative, a thematic story that followed a chronological structure (see also Phoenix, 2017); the students reflected on their starting points, the teaching practice experience and how it had affected their future plans.

In the following sections, we present the findings based on the analysis. The data were anonymised, so the citations were presented with given codes (S1–S18, S = student). To avoid revealing gender, we used 'they' for a person (he/she = *hän* in Finnish).

RESULTS

Motives for choosing a teaching practice placement

The students were encouraged to find a supervised teaching practice placement to develop their skills as craft teachers and craft professionals and to meet their professional interests with prospective career opportunities.

The students' motivations for choosing a teaching practice placement varied widely. Some wanted a placement that was as low stress as possible, such as a location close to their homes. However, for most, the main criterion was personal interest and meaningfulness in terms of professional development. Some students expressed that they had been looking forward to this teaching practice since the beginning of their studies and were highly motivated by the opportunities it offered, as mentioned by the following student:

As my studies drew to a close, thoughts of moving to work life have been swirling more and more in my mind; in what kind of environment I would like to work, what am I particularly interested in crafts and teaching crafts. I have become increasingly interested in the field of adult education and I was lucky enough to be able to do this teaching practice in the field that interested me most. (S5)

When writing about their objectives and expectations for the teaching practice, many students expressed being motivated to gain experience in an unfamiliar environment, such as the following student: "I went into the teaching practice with an open mind, with the idea that I would see what this environment has to offer me" (S2).

Some students had experience in their teaching practice place in which they had previously studied or worked as part-time teachers. Their experience had influenced their interest in choosing this place for the teaching practice. For others, the teaching practice was offered through personal or work-related contacts.

Expectations and experiences of teaching crafts in nonformal adult education

Since the students' previous experience of craft teaching was from formal basic education, children and youth, many of them were excited about the possibility of learning about teaching other age groups,

such as adults or older people. Often, there was a concern about mastering the teaching content, since the students felt their crafting competencies to be still modest. For example, a student who went to teach in adult education described their feelings about the content to be taught beforehand as follows:

I have no previous experience in guiding and teaching adults, which is why the training will be exciting and certainly a new experience. As my skills and knowledge are so weak in the field of fabric weaving, one of my goals for the teaching practice was also to learn something new about the technique. (S4)

Although excited about the new challenges, many students expressed their nervousness before the teaching practice, as they did not yet have much pedagogical experience, and the crafting contents were new for them. Since this was a supervised teaching practice, the role of the supervisor was pointed out several times as crucial in supporting the students in gaining confidence in their teaching skills. On the one hand, the supervisor was seen as a role model; on the other hand, they advised the student teachers both on the teaching contents of specific crafts and the pedagogical practices suitable for the group of learners.

An important aspect raised about teaching adult learners was their role as teachers and the teacher–student relationship. The students anticipated their role as craft teachers to be different from that of the pupils in basic education. For example, compared to compulsory craft subjects in basic education, the students were aware that the adult learners' participation in a course was voluntary. This meant that the teachers did not always know whether there would be participants in their courses or whether the participants would stay until the end of the course. The adult learners also paid for their participation, which was different from teaching the entire basic education for free. The students observed that all of this put pressure on the adult education teachers, whose popularity was tested by course enrolment. One student had heard that: "The courses taught by popular teachers are booked up in no time" (S3).

Another concern was how to meet the challenges of the heterogeneous skills of the adults in the same group, as this student assumed the following: "This also adds to the challenge for the teacher: the work should be challenging enough for everyone, but not too difficult. After all, people come to craft cafés to enjoy themselves, not to be bored" (S3).

In hobby craft courses, cafés and clubs, the student teachers also realised that not all participants were passionate about their crafting, but they had other reasons to participate, such as meeting people to socialise with them. Since adult learners have different backgrounds in crafting, the student teachers needed to plan the crafting content to provide suitable challenges for everyone (e.g. by paying attention to motivating the learners or searching for additional information about the teaching content).

Experiences of similarities and differences in craft pedagogy in various contexts

For many, this teaching practice meant a leap into the unknown. As the students' previous teaching practice had been in basic education, they compared their experiences of the Applied Teaching Practice course with the former teaching practice in basic education. The comparisons revealed many similarities in craft pedagogy in different contexts, as the following student expressed: "The pedagogy was largely based on the same elements as in basic education: planning the lessons, organising the learning environment, planning the demos, guiding activities, and designing learning tasks" (S5).

A central difference that the students noticed between teaching adults in nonformal contexts and pupils in formal basic education was the motivational factors of the learners. As adult learners participated in the nonformal craft courses voluntarily, the teachers did not have to focus on controlling their activities, behaviours or achievement in the same manner as in formal education.

The students practicing teaching older people in nonformal contexts had learned a lot about their special needs. An important issue was how to communicate thoroughly with different learners, as the following student anticipated:

Perhaps the most exciting thing beforehand is how to communicate with the workshop participants. Not all workshop participants speak fluently, and some can be difficult to understand. There are communication cards and some other aids available, but I have no previous experience using them. (S11)

Before this teaching practice, the students were used to written instructions in their crafting and pedagogy. Working with special groups directed them to find other ways to communicate the instructions, such as using more pictures to visualise the topic of learning. However, individual guidance was often used as the main method since it was found to be the most suitable.

During the teaching practice, some students realised that they needed further education to support their employability in special needs contexts. For example, the following student confirmed that they wanted to work with persons with disabilities and realised that they needed to further study social and health sciences or special education both to get more knowledge and to get the required qualifications: “I understood that the job of a workshop facilitator requires a degree in social and health sciences or equivalent” (S10).

To gain information from the specific teaching practice context, the students needed to search for support for their pedagogy through relevant literature. Many had used various sources to learn about the specific features of their learners, which had helped them build their pedagogical pillars.

The supervisor’s support on using suitable pedagogy for different learners and on learning the specific crafting techniques to be taught, as well as the peer feedback, was paramount, as stated by, for example, this student: “The most important factor in the development of my self-confidence was the encouraging feedback I received from my team members, my supervisor, and my fellow students about my plans” (S6).

Future career perspectives after the Applied Teaching Practice course

At the end of the Applied Teaching Practice course, the students presented their experiences to each other, which broadened their understanding of the specific features of craft teaching in various contexts. The students’ own experiences and getting information from other students’ teaching practice broadened their understanding of the possibilities of craft teaching in different contexts, as the following student expressed: “The teaching practice gave me a whole new experience of teaching crafts. It opened my eyes to the many different environments in which crafts can be taught” (S4).

Coping with teaching crafts in new contexts strengthened the self-confidence of the students as craft teachers. Some had gotten confirmation of their future careers to be out of formal basic education. Consider the following statements:

During this teaching practice, I got confirmed that I would like to work in some way with older people and crafts in the future. (S2)

Based on this experience, I could imagine myself working with people with disabilities in the future. (S11)

The experience of teaching in a range of crafting contexts broadened the students’ understanding of craft teaching possibilities and boosted their confidence as teachers. Overall, the students appreciated this teaching practice as a valuable contribution to their career planning. Many emphasised that it is essential to have opportunities to practice craft teaching in a range of environments during craft teacher education studies.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to gain knowledge of student teachers’ experiences of teaching crafts in various out-of-school contexts and to determine how this experience affected their future career perspectives. The role of higher education in crafts is to broaden students’ understanding of crafts and their education in different contexts (see also Kokko, 2022; Kröger, 2016). An opportunity to practice teaching and examine different formal and nonformal teaching contexts proved to be useful, affecting

the student teachers' opportunities to develop their pedagogy (see Kiilakoski, 2013). The students reflected on their experiences of the different requirements for craft teaching in different contexts and recognised how the specific characteristics of the teaching context and learners, such as older people and people with disabilities, influenced the pedagogical solutions. They developed their communication skills and adopted new pedagogical tools to support learners with different needs. They also noticed that, regardless of the context, there were many similar pedagogical principles to follow.

The students in this research acknowledged that their understanding of the possible craft teaching contexts had broadened during the teaching practice. Their ideas of prospective career paths also expanded. For some, the course confirmed the desired career path to follow, including an understanding of a need for further studies to meet the requirements of some special needs contexts. Considering the limited possibilities for craft teachers' employment in basic education in Finland (Kokko et al., 2020; TAO & TOL, 2014), we can conclude that it is important for craft student teachers to have an opportunity to explore the variety of craft teaching and learning environments during their studies. The importance of extensive teaching practices, including a range of formal and nonformal contexts, was confirmed (see Durukan et al., 2022; Laiho et al., 2014). The results demonstrate the potential, challenges and limitations of craft teacher education to equip students with the necessary skills and expertise to function as craft educators in various craft teaching and learning contexts in a changing world.

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