

Textile Students' Basic Knowledge and Skills

- Interpretation, Understanding and Assessment of a Practical-Aesthetic Discipline in Norwegian teacher education. A case study.

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This article reports a case study research of a textile module at the year-long module based course in arts and handicrafts at the Teacher Education at Nesna University College. The textile modules main focus is to give the students practical aesthetic experience as well as basic knowledge and skills of textiles and their qualities. The module has been regularly assessed by teachers and students, revised and developed, and offered for several years. Assessments show that students appreciate the module and its focus on basic knowledge and skills in textile. However, as an arts and handicrafts teacher at the college level, I've observed that students basic skills are underdeveloped, and some have unrealistic insight, demands and expectations about how much knowledge and experience a thirty five hour course in textiles will give. Some students with little or no textile experience have problems with interpreting and understanding the written task and also "getting started". Detailed explanations concerning the content seem to confuse rather than enlighten, and students' fear of failing gives me as a teacher several thoughts about cause and effect. In this case study a qualitative survey of a textile module's schedule, student's questions and desires for explanations, their written tasks, products and assessments are being used to enlighten and understand the problem. The results show that a detailed explanation of a practical aesthetic assignment does not contribute to increased understanding with some students, whereas a confrontation of the practical process will.

Keywords: Textile, arts and handicrafts, the craft process, ordinary craft, holistic craft

Background, aims and framework

"Creative work defines itself; therefore, confront the work" states composer Nye Ffarrabas (formerly Bici Forbes Hendricks) eloquently in John Cage's book *Notations*, (Ffarrabas, 2011). As teachers, we demonstrate techniques and guide students through craft processes. To achieve skills, the students themselves have to work with materials, tools and techniques, repeat exercises and confront the craft process; "Skill builds by moving irregularly and sometimes by taking detours" (Sennet 2008, 238). Garner (2007) writes about how students develop cognitive structures through reflective awareness and through visualization; "The more students become reflectively aware of what their senses are telling them and mentally represent this information through visualization, the stronger their cognitive structures will become and the more likely they will develop the ability to learn, create, and change". Vygotskij (Kroksmark 2006) emphasises the importance of lived experience for human development and culture, context and living environment are parallel terms used to describe human existence, identity and everyday life. He claims that learning occurs as a social process that makes the child a participant in our collective culture, and culture can therefore be said to be social. Vygotskij also claims that "That which the child can do cooperatively today can he/she do alone tomorrow" (Askland & Sataøen 2009, 193). Vygotskij's theoretical foundation lies close to the phenomenology that together with the pedagogy emphasises the importance of lived experience for human development;

“There is an important theoretical difference between constructing a reality and that reality arises through involvement and culture” (Kroksmark 2006, 329).

The arts and handicrafts curriculum's central aspect in the Norwegian educational guidelines is practical-creative work in the studio as well as idea development and product design (Ministry of Education and Research 2006). Knowledge in arts and handicrafts is knowledge about and skills in the subject's core areas and is also a basis for craft processes and reflection (Nielsen 2009; Pöllänen 2009). The yearlong, module based course in arts and handicrafts' main focus is on practical creative work in the studio (both indoor and outdoor) and the craft process. The focus strengthens the relevance and meaningfulness of handicrafts for the students and gives students practical skills and experience;

...a major aspect of technique in craft involves the hand's ability to carry out certain operations based on technical knowledge of material and mastery of motor skills... it is in the process of the hand carrying out technique (turning, weaving, throwing, chasing, knitting, etc.) that the craft object is formed and comes into being. (Risatti 2007, 108)

The textile module (Nesna University College, 2010) is related to the arts and handicrafts curriculum in Norwegian primary school, and the purpose is to develop the student's basic skills and craft processes for teaching in primary school. The given assignments are intended to prepare the students for what they will meet in the workplace with their pupils.

The need for further explanations

In the fall semester 2010 the module started with a careful review and discussion about the assignment. The craft process was thoroughly explained and demonstrated during work in the studio. The students were also given examples and visual images of previous student's reports and artefacts. They all started working and enjoyed the small exercises within needlework, embroidery, textile printing, and felting with wool.

Two weeks before the final exam, I received an email from the class representative asking for further explanations related to the assignment. The way the letter was styled it seemed that there was much confusion and uncertainty about the exam assignment. The writer, on behalf of the class, asked for yet another thorough explanation in addition to the, in my opinion, well written and detailed exam assignment. As previously mentioned, the module (curriculum and assignment) has been regularly assessed by teachers and students, revised and developed and offered for several years. The letter claimed that the assignment asked for one thing and the curriculum another. As a response to the letter, I wrote a detailed explanation concerning the curriculum, the report and a list of requirements that were to be included the exam portfolio. I encouraged the students to read through the written assignment several times to ensure that they had understood; “To be reflective aware, the students need to notice and thoughtfully consider the information that they see, hear, touch, taste and smell” (Garner 2007). The explanation was put out on the online classroom, and I also invited the class to a meeting where we could review and discuss the curriculum, the assignment and the exam portfolio.

The students appreciated the explanation, and I hoped that I finally had managed to make clear what was expected concerning the exam portfolio's content. I also wondered about why it was suddenly so hard to make the students understand what I meant, and felt it odd that I had to spoon feed them knowledge I felt was obvious. Take, for example, the difference between a two-dimensional and three-dimensional form. At the meeting, it became obvious that the letter concerning the assignment concerned a number of students that had very little experience with crafting and the craft process. When I asked about what in the assignment was unclear and confusing, most of the students said that

it was no problem to understand. The ones that were uncertain responded that my last written explanation made things clear for them.

As their teacher, I felt that the students having little or no textile experience anxieties of failing overwhelmed their ability to work and act rationally in their process. It seemed that their lack of experience made them uncertain and gave them the impression that I was holding back information. Pöllänen refers to the craft process where previous skills, experiences and various stimuli is the basis for pupil's problem solving activities;

Technical and visual design is considered to be the most essential phase in holistic craft. It includes information retrieval, making experiments, solving problems, evaluating solutions and the possible outcome, which all reflects personal and group working processes and balances the outcome against the resources available. (Pöllänen 2009, 252)

In their search for an "accurate and full understanding of the assignment", the students were blinded. This blindness hindered them from trusting my guidance and the craft process to start working with their ideas, techniques and skills. Instead of being legitimate participants in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) the students withdrew from the community and the process of learning in a sociocultural context (Askland & Sataøen 2009; Kroksmark 2006).

In this article, I will explore the textile module and the fact that some students have issues with interpreting and understanding the written assignment. Detailed explanations concerning the content seem to confuse rather than enlighten and student's fear of failing gave me, as a teacher, several thoughts about cause and effect. I will also address the problem of how to make students understand that the craft process totally depends on their own physical participation (action-based experience process) and effort through contact with the material. A survey of the module's schedule, the student's assignments, their products and assessments as well as their questions and desires for explanations will be used to enlighten and understand the problem. I will also refer to student's analysis of their own creative work. The student participants shall remain anonymous.

My investigations are based upon a case study and a qualitative approach using participant observation where detailed data is collected about people and situations thus increasing the ability to understand the behaviors and situations as perceived by those being investigated (Halvorsen 2008; Postholm 2010). The study is influenced by my subjective experience as head teacher for the textile module, and the study has the form of a narrative story (Repstad 1998). Reflections and comments from the students will be used to reinforce and support the content. The purpose of this case study is to create a holistic understanding of a minor textile module with the purpose of lifting knowledge and experiences from teaching and working with craft processes from a classroom context to a community context.

Methods

The textile module

The textile module is part of a yearlong, multi-module based course in arts and handicrafts. The students come to the Nesna University College campus for fifteen days total spread over three weeks. The Arts and Handicraft department has its own classrooms and workshops for textiles, woodworking, ceramics and drawing. The students have free access to the workshops with tools, machines, materials and large working spaces with large tables and natural lighting. It is expected that the students spend time on the handicraft assignments after classes and we have a policy of mandatory participation for

all classes. They are required to engage in what Lave & Wenger refer to as “Legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger 1991, 29). It is clearly advantageous to guide craft assignments directly from within the studio as opposed to just presenting online images of processes and artefacts. With our online classroom, Moodle, we communicate with the students as well as other teachers, and also put out relevant literature and links. As a small college, we gain close relationships with the students, and it is convenient for students to stop by the teachers offices for guidance outside of the classroom.

The curriculum

The curriculum has a rather detailed description of the textile module’s content (Nesna University College 2010). Under “requirements”, a brief list gives the students an overview of what is expected of them during the course. In addition, a book with examples of sewing by hand and machine, embroidery, textile printing, material samples and works of wool is given. A portfolio assessment is required for the exam and it should contain two artefacts; a pencil case and a woollen object. The requirements also include small exercises and a written report, 3-5 pages long. The written report contains a description of the process of designing a product, a description of the product itself and a didactic reflection. In addition to the text, the report must contain pictures and sketches from the craft process and the product. The curriculum gives a brief explanation about the students need to display understanding for following written instructions as well as creating designs in relation to textile materials, materials science, ecological thinking and use of resources. It also includes an introduction in the use of sewing machines, an introduction to simple fabric print techniques, basic hand sewing, embroidery and lastly, an introduction to techniques related to working with wool as a material.

The assignment

The main goal of the assignment is to give students basic knowledge and skills of textiles and their qualities through working with materials, tools and techniques. As previously mentioned, the goal is to prepare the students for work as arts and handicrafts teachers. By making a pencil case and a woollen object the students will experience craft processes that challenge them to plan, perform and assess ordinary reproductive craft and a holistic craft process (Pöllänen 2009). The students are required to mount, clean, set and sew with a sewing machine as well as experiment with textile decor through the use of printing technique, machine and hand embroidery, and needlework. They are required to distinguish different qualities of fabric and explore how to work with textile patterns as well as the craft process of developing artefacts based on both function and decor. They also have to assess didactical and methodological aspects of the given assignments. In the studio, students receive instructions in the use of tools, materials and techniques, and an introduction to the world of textiles. And finally, they are introduced to the craft process and how to make functional artefacts from a didactical point of view.

The students are assessed by their class participation, exercises, artefacts and written reports. The criteria for their assessment are outlined in their written assignment. The artefact analysis (Halvorsen 2007) is based upon the use of materials, technical solutions, aesthetic means and the contrast between material, form and function. Emphasis is placed on their ability to fabricate thoughts, ideas and impressions in an independent and original way as well as their ability to find new solutions. In addition, the students are assessed by the quality of the artefact as it relates to the given assignment, their use of relevant literature and their reflection, assessment and analysis of their own work. Finally, they are assessed by their thoughts concerning didactical and methodological aspects in teaching textiles.

The students document their craft processes by making a report containing sketches, ideas, pictures, trials and 3-5 written pages. The report must contain a brief description of the craft process, a reflective assessment of the craft process, the artefact, didactical reflections and references. As an introduction to the craft process, the students get practical knowledge and experience through small exercises in textile. They also have guest lectures, like Hanaa Mohmoud Azawi, a local woman from Iraq who gave a workshop on traditional Iraqi handicraft using embroidered needle lace and pearls on transparent textiles. The students have to demonstrate effort while both working in the studio and outside the classroom in order to fulfil all the requirements.

The pencil case

The first assignment is the design and making of a pencil case, and I will refer to it as ordinary craft. The students are assigned to make a pencil case based upon “a ready-made design that contains the aesthetic or technical qualities of the artefact (copy from a model) or a series of the artefact (using instructions)” (Pöllänen 2009, 251). The students can choose to copy from a model or design their own case. The case should contain a defined decor and the purpose is to become familiar with the sewing machine and the process of designing and manufacturing a functional and decorative product in textile. The criteria stipulate that the case shall be made in a properly handcrafted way; it must show good correlation between form and function and finally represent a good aesthetic product.

Pöllänen (2009) explains ordinary craft as reproductive craft without the maker affecting the designing phase. The purpose of the pencil case assignment is to give students basic knowledge and experience by practicing reproducing a previously learned model or technique. The students are given conceptions like images of previous student's artefacts, reports and other examples of completed handicraft. They are also given small craft exercises which give experience with techniques, materials and tools needed to support the activity. Some of our students are more advanced and, if they wish, can design their own case. However, for those with little or no experience it is often safer to remain in the ordinary craft phase. Students often make several cases in the process of developing new ideas while making, experiencing and evaluating their first attempt.

The woollen object

The purpose of this assignment is to challenge the student's creativity, skills and develop artefacts based upon their own ideas. The assignment can be described as holistic craft, where “The maker is in charge of the ideas, the designing, the preparing and finally the assessment of the artefact and the production process” (Pöllänen 2009, 251). The objects are to be inspired from art history, and the students have to plan, sketch and design an object or decorative pillow in natural materials like wool, silk, linen and cotton. The product must contain a decor with elements of texture and colour. The criteria state that the object is expected to be properly made; it must show good correlation between form and function and finally represent a good aesthetic product. It should safeguard aesthetic means and have a size within 15 by 20 centimetres. Experience related to sustainability and recycling is relevant in the way that the products are encouraged to be made of used materials. The object is based on the student's previous skills, experiences and various stimuli and contributes to the student's creativity and problem solving activities. Our students skills vary, and an object can, for students with few practical-aesthetic references, be hard to imagine. Therefore, we refer to it as an object or a small pillow/pincushion to give them an image.

The students

In the fall semester 2010 the student group consisted of 23 students, 22 women and 1 man. The class consisted of 16 students from teacher education, 3 established teachers from continued education and 4 students desiring further development of their own skills and knowledge. The student's ages spanned over 30 years, the youngest being twenty and the oldest being over 50. The course was a free elective for the teacher education students. These students enjoyed the creativity and handwork and expressed either a wish to be an arts and handicrafts teacher or a desire to use the area of creative aesthetics as a method in other subjects. Of the students in continuing education, all worked as an arts and handicrafts teacher, one at an urban elementary school and the other two at rural schools. Their main goal was to be certified as arts and handicrafts teachers, widen their area of knowledge and experience within a practical-aesthetic study and attain new ideas and inspiration for their own use both through the course and through social interaction with the other students.

Phenomenological method

This is a phenomenological study where the goal is to gather the participants opinions and experiences tied to a special phenomenon, and where qualitative methods are used in order to give the participants the possibility to inform and explain. The goal with phenomenological studies are to find central meanings and emphasise the descriptions that illustrate them (Kvale, 2001). The researcher and his/her pre-understanding must also be included as an important premiss in the presentation and interpretation of results. Findings must be understood within the context in which they have arisen as well as the researchers position. "Phenomenology means that something shows itself by itself, that something appears that before has been unclear and unacknowledged. (Halvorsen 2007, 22).

Case study

This study also has a case design that is a usual choice when the objective is to go in depth with explanatory questions like "how" and "why" when one has limited control over that which is to be investigated and the focus is on something happening here and now (Yin, 2003). This case study has its basis in the textile module within the arts and handicrafts unit 2010-11. It is a study of a limited activity that is location and time dependent and studied in a physical and social setting using a qualitative approach using observation and a survey of the students written tasks and assessments. I have also utilized a qualitative analysis of the students comments in relation to the results.

Informants and selection

I have chosen to focus on two students from the study; Anna and Per. Anna was in her late twenties and an employed teacher studying on the side. Anna wanted a lot of guidance as she struggled with a completely new material but had a clear focus on her own process and development. Per represented one of the oldest students and was in his late forties. He worked as a teacher at an urban school. Being an educated artist, he was confident in the process of developing a functional and decorative product. Per guided several of the other students in their processes (legitimate participant in community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991)) and asked for guidance himself mostly to obtain confirmation that he was on the right path. Both Anna and Per have given permission for use of pictures of their products. I have chosen to make the students anonymous in order to pull out elements from the other students' reports and evaluations in order to support the study's content.

Method triangulation and data gathering

In case studies, it is usual to gather a good deal of detailed data on that which is being investigated and one often uses several methods in order to shed light on the same phenomenon. I have observed the students work, been to meetings with them, have lectured them and received letters from them desiring more thorough explanations of assignments. I have guided them and completed their practical exam together with an external juror. I also have earlier experience with similar teaching. I have gathered the reports from the students as well as ten module evaluations where nine of these are signed.

Data processing, analysis and interpretation

I have chosen to base the article on my own subjective experiences through the different meetings with the class and the individual students. I have read all the reports, analysed their work and read the condensed opinions based on the reports and evaluations of the module.

Methodical weaknesses

I have not interviewed the students even if, "The research interview goes deeper than the spontaneous exchange of opinions that happens in the daily routine" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 23). I have also chosen to focus on two students and their comments. With a class of twenty three, I could have chosen to include several more. It is of my opinion that the two I have chosen best reflect the others in the class in that Anna has no previous experience with textiles while Per is a trained artist, works as a teacher and has experience working with creative processes.

Results

What do the students write about their processes and artefacts? I have chosen to give the example of two students who represent two different starting points: little or no textile experience, little or no textile experience but experience from being an artist in sculpting and painting.

Anna had some experience from working with ceramics and painting, but very little or nothing from textile. Her personal goal was; "to learn as much as I can about textile work, materials and techniques" (Student Anna). She interpreted the given assignment as having a basic goal concerning experience and knowledge related to basic skills in textile. Garner writes that; "Cognitive structures help students make connections with prior knowledge and experience by bridging from the known to the unknown" (Garner 2007). Anna made a case for her paintbrushes (*image 1 and 2*), and a Viking inspired travel pillow in wool (*image 3*). The brush case was her design, inspired and developed from the readymade design we had presented to them. Her decor was inspired by soap bubbles and she decorated her brush case with colourful block prints using a carrot and hand embroidered circles. Her woollen object was inspired by our assignment (*image 4*) and the travels of the Vikings, and shaped like a small Viking ship to rest her neck and head upon while traveling to Nesna. Anna referred to the Viking Age as an era in the history of art. The pillow was made by felted wool that was constructed as a three-dimensional Viking ship, and decorated with embroidery. Anna wrote in her report that she felt challenged and she appreciated the assignment and felt the content to be instructive. She had struggled, but learned a lot from the lectures, her classmates and her own crafting process.



Image 1. Anna's paintbrush case



Image 2. Detail of embroidered décor inspired by soap bubbles



Image 3. Anna's Viking inspired travel pillow



Image 4. Anna's brainstorming ideas

Per had another approach being a skilled sculptor and painter. He had knowledge and experience about the design process and designed a unique brush case by making a list of criteria. The criteria concerned function, for whom it was made, for what occasions, its functionality and if it was washable. On a second list, he concentrated on function; a room for paper to paint on, a room for a thermos or drinking bottle, ease of transport, robustness, ease of cleaning, interchangeable parts and aesthetically pleasing. Per made sketches and then models in paper to visualize its three-dimensional form. He experimented with fabrics, made swatches and slowly worked his way to the final design. He was happy about the result, and felt that he had made a product he would use on a daily basis as an artist. "Because design must be meaningful, it must take into account the way it fulfills its purpose" (Pöllänen 2009, 252).

Per had a clear idea about the wool object, as well, and wanted to make a pillow inspired by his childhood in his home country (image 5). Growing up on a farm, he used to watch the farmers having a rest while lying flat on the ground and resting their heads on watermelons. Per wrote, "The question I am asking myself through the whole process is how it should look, what can I use it for and where?" The work followed the same design process as with the brush case, first by making sketches, then by building models in paper and then by studying the object in detail. Per made a multifunctional object that with small adjustments could be made into a flower, a handbag, a pillow and a cap (image 6). An old woolen blanket was used in the main part and functioned as a cap. He claimed that the use of old fabrics is eco-friendly and can also carry memories. He found the assignments very exciting and relevant for pupils, since it could be easily adapted into an art and handicrafts subject curriculum in primary school.



Image 5. Per's brush case and pillow

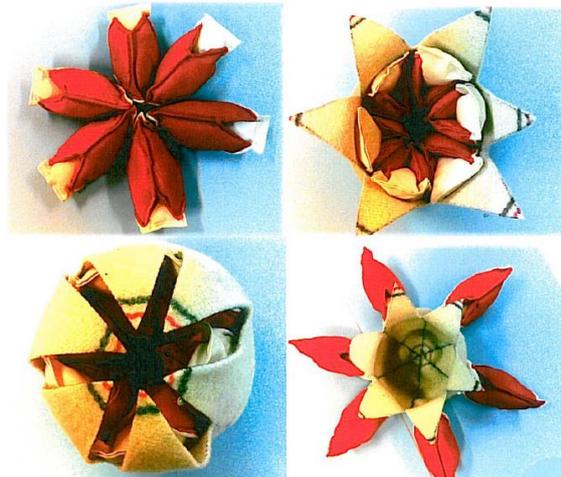


Image 6. Per's multifunctional pillow inspired by a watermelon

In addition to Anna and Per, I have selected comments from three student reports (student 1, 2 and 3) in order to give some of the other students' experiences.

Student 1: "I have little experience from this area with the exception of knitting and crocheting. In other words, my experiences were very limited". "This module has inspired me to work with a larger variety of textiles in school". "When I began to organize how I was going to put together my portfolio I realised that with so little time and experience that I was in over my head. So I went back to the drawing board to sketch a model of a simple pencil case in order to ensure I would make the case in the correct manner". "After a conversation with a fellow student I realised that I had forgotten the flap and had to make this".

Student 2: "The problems I had with the assignment I see as positive. In this way I gained insight into how pupils might feel when they have problems making things in arts class... In my case I took some time and struggled to finish the assignment due to stagnation and little knowledge in the area".

Student 3: After some time has past, I've experienced that it is wise to use time in the design process in order to understand the assignment, think out ideas, revise them, make a product and in the end evaluate the product and process". "I had to stop often because the conditions had changed, or were not as I first thought. Sometimes the expression didn't flow as I would have liked". I experienced that the more foreign the assignment was to me, the bigger the difference between the idea and finished product".

Students' evaluations of the module

Students need to make connections, find patterns, formulate rules and abstract principles (Garner 2007). The students were asked to evaluate the textile module and the following are some excerpts; "Nice that (the teachers) take initiative to make things better". "I think they were two great work assignments where we could design the assignment out from our own interests". "Completely OK, but I would like a more holistic teaching. I'd like more introduction material". "Obviously this course is relevant as far as children and adolescents are concerned. If someone has said otherwise one should be nervous as textile is a goal in the national curriculum". "It's been fun and challenging to work with textiles. Nice having open assignments, but it could have, as mentioned, been a little more clear in the assignment description so that others could understand". "Yes, I'm lacking in knitting and crocheting skills. I didn't know how but have learned from the other students. I think it's important because one works a great deal with it in schools". "The assignments were in agreement with the course syllabus". "I'd like better teaching of different techniques". "I think the choices are good and that we have learned several things within textiles that we can take with us". "I can imagine that textiles can be

difficult in school if there is only one teacher but now that we have learned the basic techniques it's great to plan work based on them". "I would have liked more time and would have liked an introduction in some techniques. But this just made me have to try myself - read and observe. That gave me a positive experience".

Discussion

As previously mentioned, the main focus is practical work in the studio, the craft process and teacher guidance. In between classes, the students continue studying and ask for guidance by email or make appointments for individual guidance. In the studio, teachers can guide and follow the students in their practical process and keep an eye on them as they are working. This is important for both the student and the teacher as the teacher can give immediate feedback about the students work, their way of using materials, machines, tools and body in the craft process. According to Sennet (2008), verbal guidance in the workshop is effective in how one can give immediate feedback to difficult procedures. "In the workshop or laboratory, the spoken word seems more effective than written instructions" (Sennet 2008, 178). This is in contrast to reading a printed page where the discussion is done internally and the feedback from another person is missing. Supervising and evaluating students craft process by email or digital classroom is ok, but often dependent upon previous meetings where the process has been shown and discussed between teacher and student. In that way, the teacher already knows the student's craft process and the teachers' internal image of the work can support and guide the assessment. The studio also works as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) where the class socializes and develops knowledge by sharing, supporting and encouraging members into interaction and co participation through their craft processes.

Anna is very focused on how to find solutions in her way of handling the assignment. She says she has little or no experience in textile, but is eager to work in the studio and immediately starts planning how to solve the assignment. In the didactical part, she is solution oriented and reflects on the importance of keeping pupils organized and active by giving small exercises. She is also concerned about the relevance of the assignment, in so far that the pupils should be able to succeed and handle it. Pöllänen discusses the same issue; "The aim is that the artefact is aesthetically pleasing, functions well and is feasible with respect to the pupil's skills, available time, materials, tools and costs" (Pöllänen 2009, 252). As a beginner in the world of textile craft, Anna transforms her lack of knowledge and experience into didactical knowledge, experience and organization of textile. She demonstrates an entrepreneurial approach to the realization of her ideas. By working hard in the studio and between the classes, her knowledge and skills increases and she makes artefacts that measure up to the goals set by the criteria. She also states in her report; "I've never learned so much about textiles as I have learned here at the college during these three weeks with the teacher, not to mention the students" (Student Anna).

Per is a trained sculptor and painter and his way of approaching the assignments clearly shows his skills as a trained artist when he comes to the design process. He interprets the assignment, develops ideas and immediately starts sketching. The craft process is his main focus, and it's obvious that he enjoys the challenge, creativity, freedom and playfulness in his designs. Both Anna and Per started working right away instead of dwelling on the details of the assignment and whether they had interpreted it correctly. They both focused on the craft process. Working in the studio, experimenting, searching for solutions and different ways to do things opens up worlds that are hard to describe or imagine before you have experienced it. "The assignment of the teacher is to guide the assessment and reflection towards the different phases of the holistic craft process. In the context of reflection, there is often discussion about guiding the pupil from instrumental and practical reflection towards critical self-awareness" (Pöllänen 2009, 253). The students who struggled to understand the assignment held

back on their effort in relation to the craft process. Their energy was put into discussions and questions about things related to the portfolios content and how to interpret the assignment making a pencil case and a woollen object.

The interesting part at the end of the textile module is that all the students ended up with products that reflected the assignments criteria. In the grading of the students portfolios, we used an external juror. None of the students failed and the mean grade was B. Three of the students received a D, five received a C, thirteen received a B and two received an A. Based on the comments in the students' letter and my impression that some students didn't understand or felt they couldn't accomplish the assignment, one would expect another result entirely.

Conclusion

There is a fine line between serving and guiding students. Pöllänen discusses the fact that one shouldn't serve the pupils too much. "Providing information or skills as a ready package may lead to the pupil taking a passive role in the learning process" (Pöllänen 2009, 254). For some of the students, things would have come more easily had they concentrated on working, trusting the craft process, the teacher, guidance and the community of their peers to help them through the assignment. Perhaps their fear of failing combined with a lack of basic knowledge and skills blinded and hindered them from realizing this. "It's in the process of the hand carrying out technique that the craft object is formed and comes into being" (Risatti 2007).

Perhaps the most important point is that students who have problems understanding and starting an assignment have to just confront the work in order to gain understanding and insight into the action-based experience. One will also fail to deliver what the assignment requires without anything concrete to work with. This experience will also have meaning when they meet their own students. Again it must be said, "Creative work defines itself; therefore, confront the work" (Ffarrabas 2011).

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