



Søren Harnow Klausen

University of Southern Denmark & Åbo Akademi University

The role of craft in a balanced and contemporary education



Agenda

- 1) Diagnosing the current state of craft; challenges and opportunities
- 2) In search of theoretical foundation and basic aim: *Bildung*, rightly understood. A balanced conception of education in general
- 3) Applying the conception to craft: Maintaining traditional aims and qualities while transforming the subject; adapting it to the current situation
- 5) Didactic guidelines. Easier said than done to change the subject while preserving its core. But some inspiration can be taken from *Bildung*

The state of a craft as school subject

A subject in search of its identity, trying to forge a role for itself in contemporary education

As such nothing special. But a particularly (?) *deep* and *acute* identity crisis, due to

- Technological and societal development (less need for physical skills; increased focus on high tech and immaterial goods and services)*
- Public perceptions (as old-fashioned; unnecessary; merely hobbies)*
- Little real (apart from verbal) policy support

A subject undergoing rapid transformation. But attempts to meet new expectations and forge a new role for the subject raise new concerns.

”Changing in order to conserve”. But *how much* can be changed without selling out (: losing qualities that ought to be preserved)?

* Also nothing special. Craft is just in the frontline. *Books* are also considered old-fashioned and useless!

The many aims of craft (as stated in curricula, educational policy and educational research) (e.g. Garber, 2002)

- 1) Preparing students to cope with everyday tasks (using and maintaining tools; repair etc.)
 - 2) Fostering skills for contributing to services and production
 - 3) Strengthening motor skills (e.g. hand-eye coordination)
 - 4) Cultivating aesthetic sensibility
 - 5) Supporting self-expression
 - 6) Diversion from bookish learning
 - 7) Supporting creativity and innovation
 - 8) Stimulating interest in practical skills and technology (to meet labor market shortages; compensate for academization)
 - 9) Fostering inclusion and self-efficacy. Embracing students with skills and talents different from the academic ones; highlighting the diversity in skills and talents
- 1) and 2) have become less relevant during the last 50 years. But renewed relevance due to concerns for sustainability and renewed emphasis on production and the craft sector (and motivation and recruitment challenges; cf. 8).

The state of a craft as a school subject (2)

Recent trends:

i) Integration of different forms and aspects of craft (e.g. *woodwork and needlework*)

ii) Focus on innovation

iii) Focus on design

Especially in *higher* craft education: From *craft work (handicraft; techniques, materials)* to design ideas and business conceptions

iv) Adoption of digital technology (and other high tech) – as *tools, products* and as tools for *documentation*

Most recently: Adoption of AI

Challenges

- Maintaining traditional core qualities and developing and expanding the subject; ensuring contemporary relevance
 - Covering and integrating many different aims
 - Building a coherent subject identity
 - (not a goal in itself, but important for achieving recognition, aiding teachers' and students orientation, and effectively supporting the different aims)
 - Risk of students not knowing what the subject is about and what they are expected to learn
- In search of theoretical support



A paradox: The practical, material and bodily turn has not strengthened the role of craft

- Widely acknowledged that *making things* is inherently pleasurable and central to personal development
- Growing recognition of the central importance of *practice, bodily activity* etc. in educational theory
- But this does not necessary strengthen the role of craft! Rather viewing work with "bookish" subjects as practical and bodily activities. (Writing is *also* making; calculating *is* a practice)

But does this mean that the human need *for making things* is completely satisfied by reading, writing, speaking and thinking?



What is *Bildung*? (Core ideas from Humboldt, Schiller, Goethe et al.)

A human being must develop a self that is unique, coherent, and relatively independent (autonomous), *developing all human powers in concert*.

This formation (*Bildung*) of the self is a process of *mutual adaption*; an encounter with the social and natural world (as well as one's own nature) as something that is both good and challenging, and has to be mastered; a process of experiencing and tinkering with one's environment, carving out a place in the world, cultivating one's sensibility, coming to experience a unity with the world by seeing and feeling how one makes a mark on it.

Bildung is driven by a concern for, and experiences, of wellbeing (intrinsically motivated), even though it requires effort and experiences of challenges and limitations





Now partly forgotten: *Bildung* and craft

- Craft, for example carpentry, plays a central role in the seminal *Bildung* texts (e.g. Stifter: *Der Nachsommer*)
- The introduction of craft in Nordic schools was based on *Bildung* thinking (Gjerløff & Theisen, 2011)
- Etymology: From Slöghö (slyness, cunning or artfulness)
- Recent school policy and educational science clearly (though implicitly) assign craft a *Bildung* aim (Borg & Lindström, 2008)

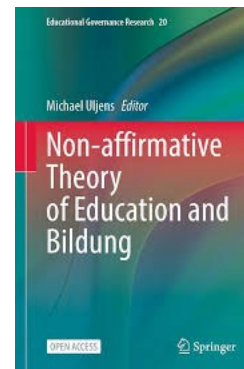
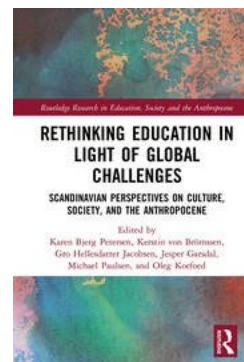
Bildung-relevant qualities of ”traditional” craft education

- Bodily activity; experience of connection between mind, body and the external world
- Self-expression (Pöllänen, 2011)
- Immediate experience and recognition of the product of the student’s own work (: own *production*; own *activity*; own *abilities*)
- Access to otherwise neglected (or vaning) experiential dimensions: forms; materials; textures; haptic qualities (Roberts, 2022)
- Contributing to a *broad* and *balanced* personal development
- Encountering challenges; experience of recalcitrance and limitations on one’s own powers
- Learning to revise, adjust and adapt while staying goal-oriented (Hartvik & Porko-Hudd, 2023)

Problematic trends in recent development and application of the *Bildung* idea

- One-sided focus on citizenship, reflection, information assessment, critical thinking etc.) (*Bildung* as enlightenment and consciousness raising)

Obviously important! But only *thinking*. Neglect of bodily, affective and practical dimensions of life (not really development of the whole person)



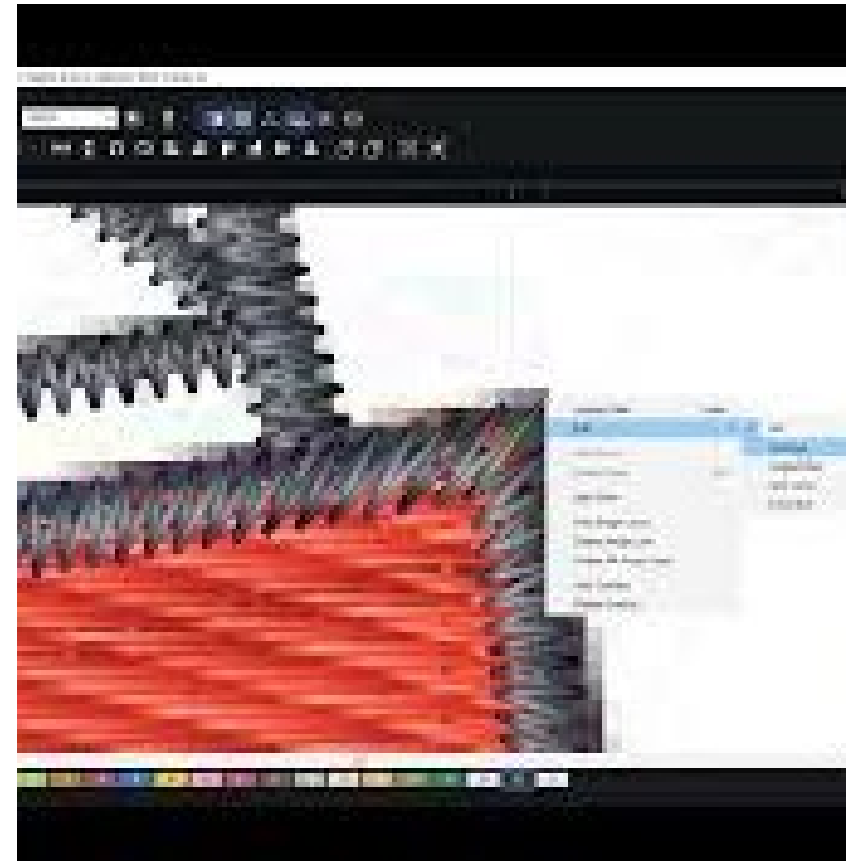
Craft: The dilemma(s), or balance acts

Preserve traditional qualities, while at the same time

- Rejuvenate and develop the subject
- Avoid "museum-" or "folklore"-like image
- Ensure contemporary (and future) relevance
- Maintain support and popularity; motivating students

Need to strike a balance (but *Bildung* is about balance, anyhow!)

A dilemma also central to craft as a *professional occupation*:
"How do we adapt AI into our creative process, while keeping true to the craft and not becoming too digitalised or straying too far from where we started?" (*Esquire*, 2023)



New burdens rather than solutions?

- Easy to say that craft should both maintain the traditional focus *and* embrace design, innovation, art and digital technology
 - Risk of curriculum overload and fragmentation; lack of concentration and immersive learning
- A serious risk indeed!

Ideas, guidelines and constraints. The need for integration

Taking inspiration from the *Bildung* ideal:

- Necessary – and possible – to pursue several different aims at once. Not additional *topics* or *tasks*. Different *aspects* of the same activities (→ *integrating* different tasks) (enabling them to be pursued jointly and not just in parallel)
 - Basic requirement: The practical, material, tactile dimension should be maintained (as well as a clear *task focus*).
- Activities should, as far as possible be integrated, including material, tactile, haptic elements (mere planning, designing, form-giving or appreciation of form and work – ”mindcraft” – is *not* craft)
- Digital technology should not be an add-on (a requirement based on concerns for feasibility (avoiding teaching overload) *and* subject identity *and* the students *Bildung*)

Design, AI and *Bildung*

- Using AI to lessen the bookish work and information seeking (achieving more balance)
- Also possible, but less good (?): Using AI to lessen intellectual demands. Less good because *Bildung* is about experiencing the mutual impact of thinking and planning and practical and material processes. Risk of craft becoming too easy (or *mindless*)
- Using AI to strengthen the explorative and collaborative dimension (no pre-defined solutions; no solutions to be had from the teacher; moving beyond familiar objects and functions) (Hansen, 2022)

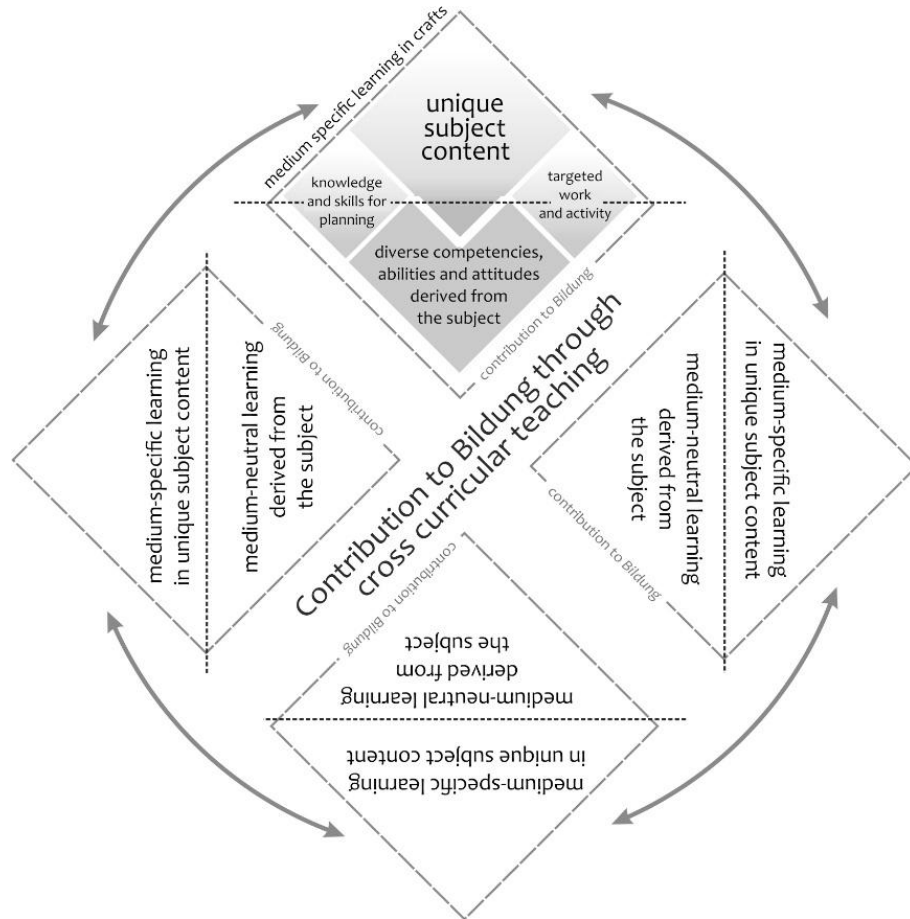
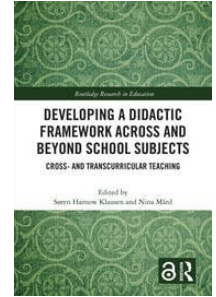


Craft and crosscurricular integration

Crosscurricular teaching as a (partial) answer to many of the challenges (though craft has not often been part of crosscurricular teaching activities)

- Bringing craft into focus. Craft as central (and not add-on) to crosscurricular project work. Demonstrating contemporary relevance. Integrating practical, material and intellectual dimensions. Adding materiality and "anchoring" to activities that are otherwise at risk of becoming too open and unfocused (Johansen, 2021)

As always: Didactic implementation as paramount



Thinking it through (and visualizing it): A tool for analyzing – and planning – crosscurricular teaching (Hartvik & Porko-Hudd, 2023)

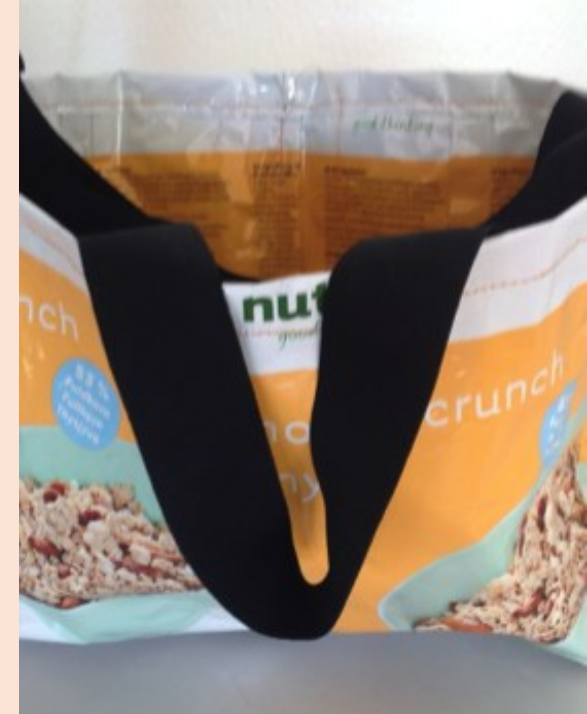
Taking craft as exemplary; conceiving crosscurricular teaching from the perspective of craft



Didactic implementation (2)

Complementary approach "from below":
Finding, sharing and developing ideas for
learning activities that allow for integration
of aims

(Use of AI for real practical, material-
involving purposes; work with materials
with relevant chemical properties; work
with materials that are also historically or
culturally significant etc.; constructing (not
just designing) things or practices that
support sustainability, wellbeing,
participation etc.





Coda: *Bildung*:
Sanding off the
rough edges;
polishing one's
personality



Find a Therapist (City or Zip)



How to Polish Your Personality

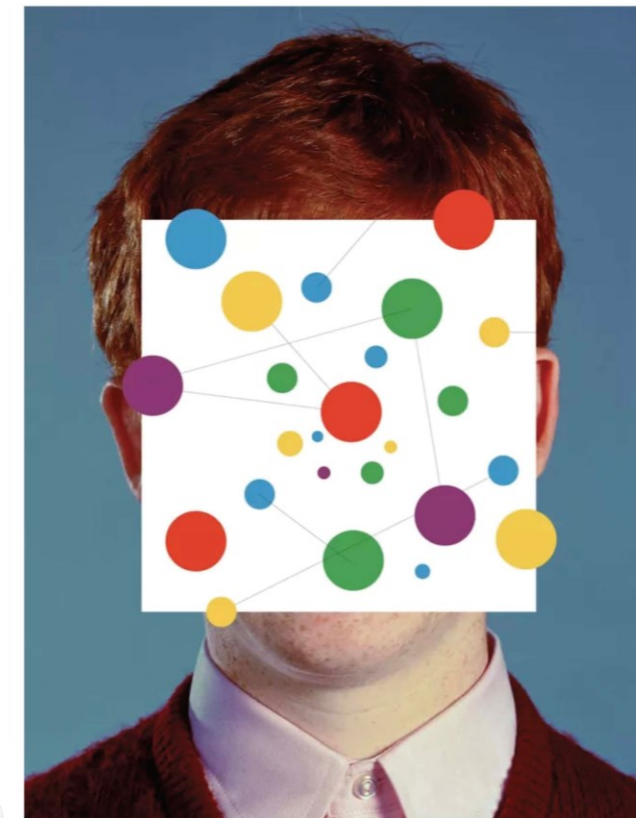
Most people recognize the need to tweak various facets of their personality, and it's entirely possible to do so. Change starts with a critical assessment of your traits and whether they work well for you—or don't.

By Grant Hilary Brenner MD, DFAPA published March 2, 2021 - last reviewed on March 11, 2021



Read More

Read More



Ryan McVay/Getty Images. Illustration by Ed Levine

Every one of us is endowed with a personality, an assemblage of more or less stable traits that consistently influence how we move through the world. Often, our success in it. Yet many people know more about their cars

References

Borg, K. & Lindström, L. 2008. Sløjda för Livet. Lärarförlaget

Garber, E. (2002), Craft Education in Finland: Definitions, Rationales and the Future. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 21: 132-145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5949.00308>

Gjøløff, A. K. & Theisen, Th. 2011. Sløjd og håndarbejde. To fag – for personen og samfundet. https://www.folkeskolen.dk/files/archive/_/1/9/Skaarup%20Ekstra%20sløjd%20håndarbejde%20materiel%20d%20TT%2026-08-11.pdf

Hansen, B. H. 2022. ”Teknologi i håndværk og design”. <https://www.emu.dk/grundskole/haandvaerk-og-design/fagets-didaktik-og-laererrollen/teknologi-i-haandvaerk-og-design>

Hartvik, Juha & Porko-Hudd, Mia. (2023). Analyzing domains of learning for crosscurricular teaching. 10.4324/9781003367260-14.

Klausen, S. H. & Mård, Nina. “For Life, Knowledge and Work: Rationale and aims of crosscurricular teaching and learning”, in Klausen, S. H. & Mård, Nina (eds.). *Across and Beyond School Subjects. A Framework for Crosscurricular Didactics*. London: Routledge, 19-32

Pöllänen, S. 2011. Beyond craft and art: A pedagogical model for craft as self-expression. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 7,2, 111-125

Roberts, T. (2022). Feeling Fit for Function: Haptic Touch and Aesthetic Experience, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Volume 62, Issue 1, January 2022, Pages 49–61,

Johansen, R. J. (2021). *Didaktiske relationer og diskursive positioner mellem design og håndværk - i valgfaget håndværk og design*. (Kandidat speciale). Aarhus Universitet; DPU, Arts.

Esquire Style. 2023. Exploring the Future of AI and Craftsmanship. Look beyond the warnings of an AI dystopia and there’s a potential utopia for the future of craft <https://www.esquire.com/uk/culture/a45626158/ai-and-the-future-of-craft/>