

# Swedish Crafts and Craft Education

Harry Arvidsson  
*Swedish National Board of Education*

The word *slöjd* in Swedish has several meanings, which makes it difficult to translate into other languages. It can be traced back to an Icelandic word meaning shrewd or cunning. Otto Salomon traced it back to the old Swedish 'sla', meaning deft, handy and cunning. *Slöjd* has an English 'descendent' in the word *sleight* of hand.

In the school context, NÄÄS SLÖJD is a familiar concept all over the world, as a result of Otto Salomon's handicraft teaching methodology for schools.

Another very familiar concept is SVENSK HEMSLÖJD, meaning production for and sale of both decorative art products and everyday articles made of many different materials and for the wide variety of techniques. The distinctive characteristic of *hemslöjd* and its practitioners is that this production is aimed at preserving old manual techniques, traditional forms, traditional patterns and locally typical features. The products are made as utensils for everyday use in the home, they are of native natural materials and they tie in with local traditions. Crafts in Sweden are classified as 'hard' and 'soft'. The hard variety includes, for example, woodwork, root work, birch-bark handicraft and wrought iron. The soft variety includes weaving, embroidery, lace-making and knitting, for example.

Traditional *crafts* are taken to include trades outside purely industrial production and trades not primarily resulting in artistic production. The craftsmen controls the entire production process and also produces artefacts, but with the aim of giving his products such qualities as functional efficiency and solid construction. The craftsman is a trained professional.

*Applied artists (konsthantverkare)* often produce their own wares on a one-off basis, but they can also accept decorative assignments. Frequently they are trained craftsmen who have received subsequent artistic education. The boundary between the domains of pictorial art and applied art can be a difficult one to draw. The work of the pictorial artist is distinguished by the product being intended for aesthetic use, to be looked at and contemplated, preferably as the vehicle of expression, substance or a message. Pictorial art is

taken to include painting, sculpture, drawing, graphic arts, photography and textile pictorial art.

In *Lapp crafts* the connection between handicraft and applied art is very conspicuous. All the applied artists who are now active began as craftsmen and have kept in touch with traditional Lapp crafts. Today one can distinguish between two main trends in Lapp crafts. One of them is trying to preserve traditional crafts, while the other is trying to develop a modern form of Lapp applied arts.

## The history of Swedish *slöjd*

In prehistoric and medieval times, when the primitive systems of the subsistence or family economy were still with us, the family or clan constituted a self-contained unit. The individual households produced everything they needed in the way of clothing, domestic utensils, other implements and weapons. They also did their own building. Some products were acquired externally, usually by means of barter.

Eventually this led to the next stage in a developmental phase whereby certain kinds of production were transferred from households to specialists. In the early stages this meant craftsmen performing, in the home and in return for food and a certain amount of cash payment, jobs which the members of the family were not capable of doing for themselves. Pictorial art and applied art were also produced by these craftsmen. It is more the exception than the rule for craftsmen to be known by name, because it was not the usual practice for them to sign their work.

With the development of urban communities, many craftsmen became townsmen and this led to the formation of guilds. Various efforts were then made to prohibit the practice of crafts in the countryside, but domestic crafts still lived on in rural areas. By and large, this struggle between town and country, between the representatives of guilds and homecrafts, continued until the guilds were abolished in 1801.

Some crafts, such as painting, sculpture and graphic arts, hived off from the guild system and disappeared into the newly established academies, giving rise to pictorial art which, as a result, became a 'fine art' in the sense of

'art for art's sake'. The abolition of the guilds was followed by the foundation of the first schools of applied arts and art industry, to fill some of the educational gaps which resulted. These institutions also developed special professional categories capable of imparting an attractive external appearance to crafted or manufactured products. It was these schools which eventually evolved into the present-day training colleges for applied artists and designers.

Ideas concerning the educational and instructional importance of work gathered strength in mid-18th century Europe. Pestalozzi, one of the foremost experimenters of these ideas, took the view that school classrooms should be equipped with work-benches and lace-making pillars as well as books. Work in the schoolroom should develop the children's dexterity as well as their intellects and feelings. In Sweden these arguments were used to justify the establishment of work houses for the poor and their children, to 'deliver them from the perils of idleness' and to develop the children's manual skills and prepare them for working life. *Slöjd* was very much a feature of the activities of these work houses.

At the end of the 1860s, a decline was observed in the practice of domestic and homecrafts in the Swedish countryside. This was connected with the onward march of industrialism and the abolition of the guilds. In several places, steps were taken to revive homecrafts (*hemslöjd*). Craft schools appeared, with the aim of training young people to be craftsmen. These schools were profoundly influenced by the working traditions of *hemslöjd*, with a view to gaining a livelihood.

Both private and public efforts were made to include elements of handicraft in the compulsory elementary school which came into being in 1842. But it was not until 1878 that the Riksdag passed legislation making it possible for the elementary school curriculum to include crafts for boys. State grants towards craft instruction for girls were introduced in 1896. This instruction could be provided in the senior classes of elementary school or in continuation school, as it was called, but at the discretion of parochial authorities. One



of the conditions attached to the introduction of school handicrafts was that they should be instructional and should confer a general familiarity with tools, not just proficiency in a particular occupation. For this reason, the objectives of the craft schools took second place to the educational role of crafts in elementary schools.

Otto Salomon, who in 1870 became superintendent of the craft school at Nääs, was the foremost exponent of educational crafts. As he saw it, craft teaching, in order to achieve its purpose, must be conducted by qualified teaching staff, not by craftsmen looking at the pupils' work with the eye of a professional. For this reason he introduced courses for elementary school teachers at the Nääs School of Crafts.

To further his aims regarding educational crafts, Otto Salomon drew up a pedagogical programme known as the 'Nääs Method'. This was based on a model series of exercises of progressively greater difficulty. The first series consisted of 100 different models to be completed in elementary school. The products were also to be suitable for use in the home. The 'Nääs Method' remained paramount in Sweden well into the present century, and it developed into a hidebound system where meticulous compliance with the models meant more than the pupils' individual ability.

Hulda Lundin became the leading educationalist where women's crafts were concerned. She founded Sweden's first training college for women craft teachers in 1882, and she endowed women's crafts with a series of models having a similar methodological structure to Otto Salomon's. Hulda Lundin also maintained that crafts should be used as a formal means of education. Initially she was a qualified elementary school teacher.

The 'Nääs Method' came in for a certain amount of criticism in the 1910s, both for its aesthetic shortcomings and for its failure to centre on the pupil. In a new curriculum issued in 1919, this criticism resulted in teachers being recommended to replace certain models at the suggestion of their pupils. The curriculum also recommended the introduction of new kinds of craft, such

as metal work and cardboard work, as well as the rapprochement to home crafts (*hemslöjd*) and the use of different working methods.

During the 1920s, craft interests were divided into two camps. One of these comprised the supporters of Nääs, and in the other camp were those who wanted craft teaching to emanate from the children's spontaneous interest and creativity. One of the greatest advocates of the latter method was Professor Carl Malmsten, himself best-known as a furniture designer. He wanted pupils to penetrate the technical side of woodwork by undertaking tasks of their own choosing. And, through 'natural crafts', he wanted to put new life into traditional handicraft. This debate was at its height during the closing years of the 1920s, when Malmsten was a teacher at Nääs. For many years he also arranged subsequent training courses of his own for craft teachers, the emphasis being on 'free creativity'. During the thirty years which followed, there were recurrent discussions concerning the emphases on craft education.

Women's crafts were the subject of a similar educational debate. Carl Malmsten's counterpart here is Maria Nordenfalk, who deplored the excessively obscure position allotted to homecrafts in relation to educational crafts. She also wanted to give the subject aesthetic objectives, on the child's own terms.

Art ('drawing') instruction during the 1920s and 1930s began relying more and more on the children's innate creativity. The theories of Richard Rothe concerning children's drawing were adopted and a debate conducted about the teacher as an adviser rather than an authoritarian leader.

Otto Salomon's programme of craft education, though modified during the 1930s and 1940s, remained the paramount method in schools, because 90% of teaching was done by class teachers. The remaining 10% was done by specialised teachers who had basically trained as craftsmen. These teachers mainly served in urban schools.

The end of the 1940s brought a comprehensive review of the Swedish system of schooling, and this was followed in 1955 by a new curriculum. Crafts were then made a compulsory

school subject instead of a municipal option. Teaching was given the express goal of harnessing children's natural creativity. The new curriculum made it possible for craft teachers to discharge their teaching duties completely without teaching crafts. This teaching was considered burdensome, and so they readily surrendered it to the specialist teachers. During the late 1950s, craft subjects were taught almost exclusively by specialised teachers with craft backgrounds. As a result, a new scheme of craft teacher training had to be introduced, and this was established in Linköping in 1960.

The next curriculum, in 1962, followed on from the first. Crafts, previously a practical subject, now acquired both practical and aesthetic status. Another important change was that crafts merged with woodwork, metal work and textile work to form a single subject. As part of the promotion of sexual equality in schools, both boys and girls were to acquire hands-on experience of both types of craft at the intermediate level of compulsory school.

A new curriculum in 1969 reorganised compulsory schooling in Sweden on a comprehensive basis. Where craft teaching was concerned, this meant that all intermediate level pupils were to take both types of craft but that senior level pupils were to choose one type.

The new curriculum, Lgr 80, puts more emphases on the technical and practical sides of the subject. The statement of objectives also attributes more importance to consumer questions and the cultural heritage. The time allocation is the same as in previous curricula, but craft activities have been reinforced through the introduction of craft elements at junior level in conjunction with general subjects. The new curriculum makes craft instruction compulsory at all levels of compulsory school.

#### **Craft (slöjd) education in Sweden**

At the age of six, Swedish pre-school children come into contact with creative activities using wood, textiles, paper, clay and also art and design. Activities are based on the children's own imagination and play.



At the junior level of compulsory school, pre-school activities are followed up by art and craft instruction as part of the teaching of general subjects. The class teacher takes the class for art education, while craft aspects are taught by a teaching team comprising the class teacher, the craft teacher and the textile teacher. Most of these activities take place in the school workshop and textile room, and their purpose is to strengthen the children's concept formation by getting them to work with tangible materials. The time schedule does not specifically allocate time for this activity, the scope of which is left to the individual school to decide. In addition to these activities, two teaching periods during the three years of junior level are earmarked for the teaching of crafts as a school subject, with all pupils taking part in both textile work, woodworking and metal work. The syllabus lays down that, by working with different materials, the pupils are to investigate and experience their properties and uses. Art education employs a communicative approach, focusing on the pictorial language of children.

At the intermediate level of compulsory school, pupils have a total of nine craft periods per week, frequently divided into three ppw per grade. Here as at junior level, lessons are taken by specialist teachers. The curriculum refers to the importance of these specialists collaborating with the class teachers, especially in the teaching of mathematics and general subjects. The syllabus for crafts underlines the importance of the pupils experimenting and working with different materials. Consumer questions are given additional scope at this level, while art education concentrates on photography, film and video, with reference to the children's own creativity.

At the senior level of compulsory school, pupils have a total of five craft periods per week, the allocation of which between the three years of senior level is left to the local school. The new curriculum which came into force in the 1982/83 school year made both types of craft compulsory up to a point. This meant that all pupils must now be taught technical and practical skills relating to the home and the

environment, but they can also opt for more specialised studies in one or other type of craft. Pupils at this level must be trained in selecting their own working methods and materials and must acquire a knowledge of homecrafts (*hemslöjd*) and cultural traditions. In art education, pupils develop their capacity for using two- and three-dimensional techniques of depiction. They must also be made aware of public cultural policy, the role of artists and different types of art.

Swedish upper secondary school has a voluntary and a general type of education for pupils aged 16 or over. It offers a large number of vocational lines of study for the training of craftsmen. The principal aim of these lines is to train young people for industrial employment. Training for applied arts of various kinds is provided in the form of specialised courses added to vocational education programmes or by means of in-house training schemes in industry.

Hitherto, arts and crafts education has occupied an obscure position in upper secondary school. Art education is an elective subject in most of the 25 lines of upper secondary school, but its scope is very limited. Crafts are an elective subject in two lines only and are very seldom actually arranged. Two Government Commissions have drawn attention to this shortcoming of upper secondary schooling, with the result that the Ministry of Education has suggested an experimental scheme of practical and artistic studies in upper secondary schools. In fifteen localities there is an experimental scheme of art, music and drama studies in the two-year Social Line, with six periods per week in each grade devoted to these three subjects. In four other localities, practical and artistic lines of study are being experimentally operated which focus on homecrafts and applied arts (*konsthantverk*). Pupils taking these lines of study receive 12 ppw practical artistic training in their first year and 15 in their second. The rest of the teaching time is devoted to general subjects for university and college entrance.

Due to the previous inability of upper secondary schools to provide training in homecrafts, a number of the old craft schools have survived as independent vocational training establishments.

They comprise Carl Malmsten's apprentice training school in Stockholm, Capellagården on the island of Öland and Nyckelvik School in Lidingö, as well as the weaving school run in Stockholm by the Friends of Textile Art Association and the Sätergläntan School in Insjön.

Arts and craft courses are conducted at more than 50 folk high schools throughout Sweden. These are voluntary schools for persons aged over 18. The courses are concerned with personal development and not with training for professional activity in the applied arts. The Lapp Folk High School in Jokkmokk has a two-year course of Lapp crafts which provides a basic knowledge of the subject and a foundation for further art education. This training is reserved for students of Lapp descent.

The Swedish Government has commissioned the National Board of Universities and Colleges to review art education programmes at post-secondary level. As things now stand, applied artists are trained at the National College of Art and Design in Stockholm and the College of Applied Arts in Göteborg. These training programmes have formed part of the Swedish higher education system since 1977. In addition to applied artists, training is also given to designers and, in Stockholm, to pictorial artists as well. Study programmes last for between four and five years and confer 170 university points. One term's studies corresponds to 20 points. To qualify for admission, applicants must have completed compulsory school or its equivalent, be at least 18 years old and display their capacity for assimilating the instruction. Eligible applicants are selected on the strength of work specimens or entrance examinations.

The National College of Art and Design in Stockholm is a higher education unit in its own right with seven general lines of study, viz Art Education (120 points), Painting and the Environment (200 points), Graphic Design and Illustration (170 points), Industrial Design (170 points), Interior Architecture (170 points), Textile Art/Craft (170 points) and Three-Dimensional Design (170 points) with ceramics, glass and metal design



specialities. The School also has a two-year subsequent training course for photographers.

The College of Applied Arts is a department of the University of Göteborg and has four study programmes. These are Design (170 points), Applied Arts and Crafts (170 points), Graphic Design (40 points) and Photography (120 points). The Applied Arts and Crafts programme is subdivided into Ceramics, Metal Design and Textile Craft.

These two higher education units also provide subsequent and further education for applied artists.

The Homecrafts Commission points out that there are strong reasons in favour of the two-year advanced specialised course at the Stockholm weaving school of the Friends of Textile Art Association, for homecrafts consultants, being converted into a higher education programme, but this has yet to be done.

Craft training courses for prospective compulsory and upper secondary school teachers acquired post-secondary status in 1977. Woodwork and metal work teachers are trained at the University of Linköping under three programmes. The oldest of these, established in 1960, is a single-subject programme qualifying the students to teach woodwork and metal work only and comprising 40 weeks. This course takes one year to complete. The admission requirements are completion of compulsory schooling and of the two-year Woodwork Line of upper secondary school, plus a one-year advanced specialised course of cabinet-making and joinery or one year's work experience of woodworking and a one-year course of vocational training in the engineering sector or else the corresponding work experience, or again the opposite, with emphasis on workshop techniques. These studies are not subject to the provisions of the Higher Education Ordinance, so the National Board of Universities and Colleges has decided to replace this education with a new training programme for craft teachers, comprising 120 weeks and constructed on similar lines to the training of textile teachers. The other training programme is a scheme of training for woodwork

\* ppw = periods per week

and metal work teachers, combined with English or mathematics. This programme comprises 160 weeks, with a minimum of 60 for woodwork and metal work and at least 40 in the other subject, plus another 40 distributed between pedagogics, methodology and teaching practice. The entrance requirements are based on the two-year Social Line of upper secondary school and on three years' upper secondary school studies of the second subject.

Textile teacher training programmes are based on the Universities of Göteborg, Umea and Uppsala. Textile teachers have two training programmes to choose from. Single-subject teachers undergo a 120-weeks training course, 80 of which relate to textile subject studies and 40 to the theory and practice of training. The entrance qualification is completion of the two-year Social Line of upper secondary school. The other study programme, like that for woodwork and metal work teachers, is a two-subject scheme, and subject studies in textile craft under this programme comprise 60 weeks.

Post-secondary opportunities also include subsequent training courses of weaving, comprising up to 40 weeks.

The National College of Fine Arts in Stockholm is affiliated to Stockholm University and offers two programmes of studies. One of these is the School of Architecture, while the other is called the 'Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Art programme', and comprises a school of painting, a school of monumental art, a school of sculpture and a school of graphic art.

#### **Craft elements in the teaching of general subjects at the junior level of Swedish compulsory schools**

The time schedule provisions of Lgr 80 (Compulsory School Curriculum) lay down that crafts are to be taught at junior level as a part of general subjects. The *travaux préparatoire* of the Curriculum state:

'Pupils, above all in the lower age groups, depend for their concept formation on handling concrete objects. The creative activities constituting such a large proportion of pre-school education must not be discontinued in compulsory school.'

In 1981/82, as a means of gaining

experience prior to a revision of the Curriculum, the National Board of Education launched an experimental scheme for the development of practical working procedures tying in with pre-school pedagogics. The aim has also been to organise crafts on a teaching-team basis, so as to facilitate a form of teaching in which the interaction of practical and theoretical items will be conducive to meaningful learning and greater equality between the sexes. A total of 423 classes and 654 teachers took part in the experimental activities.

The results of the experiments show that craft activities occurred throughout junior level but that most schools chose to concentrate craft teaching team activities on grades 1 and 2. The commonest arrangement of all has been teaching teams comprising the class teacher, textile teacher and craft teacher. Some teams have also included special teachers.

The work of the teaching teams have been viewed in a positive light. Difficulties experienced have been concerned with finding time for planning. Difficulties of this kind have been virtually eliminated in schools with a high level of pupil participation in the planning process.

Teaching time is dependent on the availability of resources for teacher ppw\*. Sessions of 2 ppw have been commonest and have been found the most satisfactory arrangement in terms of working results.

In most cases the fields of activity have been related to the main teaching items in general subjects. At the same time it has been possible to focus on other knowledge and skills, e.g. in Swedish and mathematics.

As regards working methods, the experimental scheme was aimed at testing team teaching so as to provide input documentation for future teacher arrangements in which theory and practice will interact and experiential, experimental working methods will be conducive to meaningful learning.

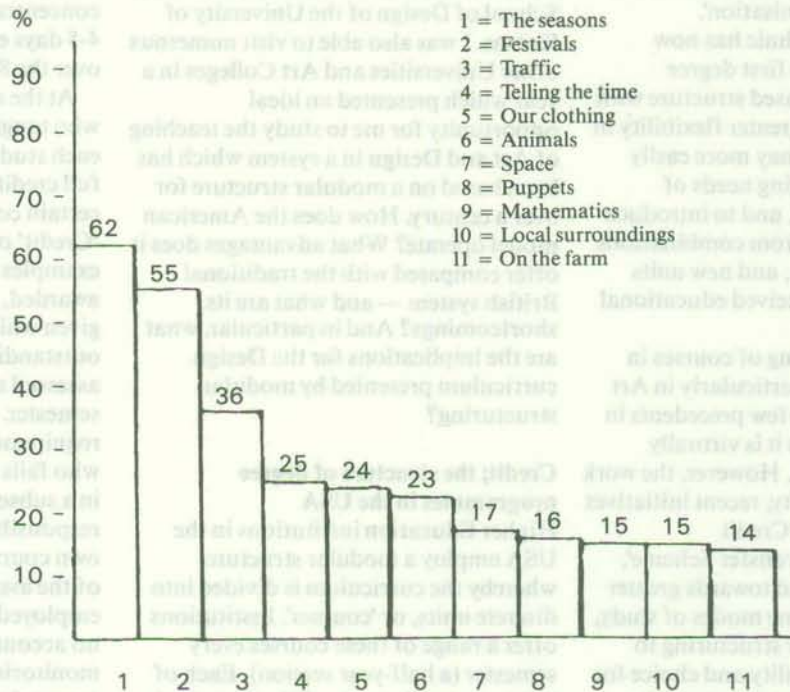
The pupils have become more interested in general subjects. Ninety-eight schools have reported a change of this kind. It has also been reported that teaching has changed in character. Half the replies received indicate that a more practical working approach has been



# Modular structuring in Art and Design: a comparison between British and American degree courses

David Burt  
Wolverhampton Polytechnic

Common fields of activity



51% of the schools worked with The Seasons and 46% with Festivals

adopted and that teaching has become more illustrative.

Where mathematics is concerned, the impression is that work has proceeded experientially by means of measuring practice, mathematical calculations, costing estimates, scale drawings and, for example, comparisons of size and length.

In Swedish, craft items have above all supplied documentation on which to base oral and written production, with the pupil recounting and describing what they have done in craft lessons.

Replies from 101 schools refer to deliberate efforts to develop the children's motor skills through craft items. The view is also taken that the children learn in this way to co-operate but also to use their powers of initiative. Creativity and creative capacity are also stimulated by practical work.

The overwhelming majority of schools reply that they have observed an improvement in technical/practical

skills. These activities also familiarise the pupils with tools and implements and with materials and consumer facts.

A scheme of companion teaching in crafts presents great opportunities of developing concept training. The teaching team, with its specific subject knowledge, can then collaborate in generating experiential, concrete teaching situations. This is in line with the intentions of Lgr 80 for team teaching activities.

The overwhelming majority of schools state that, at this early stage of things, they have not observed any difference between boys and girls in the matter of sexual stereotypes concerning craft activities. In cases where a difference has been observed, it has changed once work has actually begun.

Craft teaching at junior level does not mean craft in the ordinary sense of a school subject. Insofar as things are produced, the purpose of doing so is to concretise teaching or else to provide for

a common need. Teaching materials and games are produced, for example, or else the pupils work in decorating the school environment. Sometimes craft activities are based purely on experiencing, testing and experimenting with things. These activities provide abundant opportunities for treating technical aspects.

Craft facilities, equipment and materials are a resource to schools for the practical teaching of such technical matters as mechanical strength, energy, mechanics and so on. Most compulsory schools today have at least one room for each type of craft, and so pupils can be given the opportunity of undertaking practical studies of technical questions in school workshops from the very commencement of their schooling.