

# Abstract

Title: Craft and design in school  
– hand, mind, communication and other mediating tools  
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This thesis reports on an empirical study of the practice of craft and design [slöjd] in the Swedish comprehensive school. The aim has been to make an in-depth study of craft and design activities and the significance of craft and design as a social practice in school. Since craft and design as a social practice is largely an unexplored field of research, my primary aim has been to describe and analyse the activities which constitute craft and design in school.

The study was carried out over a period of time to be able to describe in greater detail the work in the classroom. The data consist of video recordings, notes based on observations, pupils' and teachers' diary notes and parent questionnaires. What pupils do and how they act are studied by observing authentic craft and design activities and having pupils, teachers and parents write about these activities. The data have been analysed partly at a micro level and partly at a more overall level over a period of time. The sociocultural frame of reference has been employed to describe and express craft and design activities in words. The results are shown together with transcribed excerpts of video recordings and quotations from diaries and are divided into four themes: interaction; verbal and non-verbal tools; artifacts such as equipment and machines, sketches, pictures, drawings and instructions; and materials, objects, aesthetic and emotional experiences.

Craft and design is characterised by comprehensive linguistic and non-verbal interaction. Pupils solve problems through social interaction, even though they work on their own objects. They learn from each other by observing and acquainting themselves with activities and gradually becoming familiar with the work by taking turns in assuming the role of being knowledgeable. The excerpts included in the study exemplify how the pupils try to find ways of coping with and solving new situations by communicating verbally and non-verbally, by means of body language, gestures, facial expressions and actions. One of the main impressions given by the analyses is that craft and design is very much a communicative subject. Inspiration and impressions during craft and design lessons are determined to a large degree by the pupils' everyday life outside school. During craft and design lessons, physical tools mediate and structure the pupil's actions. Also, mental and physical tools are integrated when the pupils work on transforming different materials into objects. Ideas and imagination are formed while working with the materials. During the craft and design lesson, the pupils practise interpreting texts and pictures by learning to see the relation between an imagined object and a model. Craft and design activities are characterised by the fact that several abstraction processes and standpoints are coordinated. The borderline between conceptual knowledge and physical practice becomes blurred. The results show clearly that craft and design is a communicative and reflective subject where children and young people meet in an environment where they are confronted by a number of both abstract and concrete challenges.