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Internationalisation in Crafting Workshops

Experiences in an Action Research Project, 2018–2019

Ulla Kiviniemi

The 'Crafting Workshops' initiative merges internationalisation and craft education into an action research and development project. The activities in the workshops were grounded in the concepts of internationalisation at home and cultural well-being, and the action was intended to take advantage of peer learning in teacher education through actual craft making in multinational groups. Finnish student teachers acted as instructors in workshops where participants were international exchange students from several countries; the working language was English. Action research combines science and practicality, and we aimed at influencing on the research object and its activities in a developing way. This action research was carried out in the true environment by using various methods of analysis. In this approach, active fieldwork and observation, student teacher reflections, and peer review through feedback discussions and participant surveys were used to map, monitor and direct proceedings during the pilot phases in 2017–18. The exchange students' positive reports emphasise cooperation with the local instructors and joy and well-being from learning about Finnish handicrafts and culture in the workshops. For the teacher students leading the workshops, home internationalisation worked well; working in small groups encouraged craft teaching and language-speaking practice, although more attention to promoting interaction during the activities is required. In this project, the student teachers participated and contributed cooperatively to the development of a new course structure. The workshop experiences confirmed that cultural interaction worked reciprocally between the student teachers and the student participants, and the model seems to be suitable for other subject areas in teacher education and could be incorporated into the curriculum.

Keywords: Craft education, cultural learning, peer learning, internationalisation, teacher education

Introduction

This article focuses on internationalisation and cultural dimensions within craft education. Under these headlines, an action research project was established at the University of Jyväskylä home campus with the aim of combining usually unrelated groups of short-period exchange students and local student teachers in a shared and collective project.

Craft is one of the required subjects in the national curriculum of elementary school (FNBE, 2016) and accordingly in class teacher education. In craft education, 'mastering the entire craft process' is key. The national craft curriculum has developed along many lines; besides technical mastery, craft teaching has encountered new imperatives such as developing ethical and aesthetic values (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2019a). In this context, communal and cultural dimensions, as well as interaction and expression, are highlighted as an integral part of craft teaching. Under these notions, holistic craft education proceeds from national to international concerns and from local to global views.

Crafting, or making, has been increasingly associated with well-being. In a study on craft memoirs, Pöllänen (2019) identified making as enabling expression and assisting well-being. The narratives in her study show how engagement in 'doing' empowers the makers and stresses the social meaning of craft by giving pleasure and relaxation. Elsewhere, Sjöberg & Porko-Hudd (2019) report similar findings

that, by counterbalancing stress and life's hectic pace, crafting activities can provide social community and meditative solitude. As a leisure activity, for example, knitting is a solitary act but many knitters enjoy each other's company. Riley, Corkhill and Morris (2013) conducted a worldwide online survey of knitters; most respondents were frequent knitters who reported knitting for relaxation, stress relief and creativity. Knitting with a group was reported to increase perceived happiness through social interaction with others. As such, practising art and crafts is seen to solidify personal and social participation in various informal contexts.

Furthermore, internationalisation and multinational cooperation are increasingly important within the educational sector, and the Finnish National Agency for Education (2019b) supports the internationalisation of higher education through various guidelines and funding programs. An international perspective should, for example, be combined in all degree programmes, although these do not necessarily require cross-border periods of study. The concept of 'home internationalisation' has therefore been established (e.g. Beelen & Jones, 2015) and, in conclusion to their study of these ideas, Weimer, Hoffman and Silvonen (2019) argue that intercultural teaching methods should be developed in institutions of higher education and that internationalisation should be included in personal study plans.

Traditional approaches to teaching mean that an experienced expert guides a younger person, but in this project, the concept of peer learning was used. According to Gogus (2012), 'peer learning' refers to situations in which peers support each other in the learning process and emphasises the experiences of all participants. He refers to other studies that identified the social benefits of peer learning as a means of decreasing isolation and improving motivation. Conversely, Havnes, Christiansen, Torunn Bjørk & Hessevaagbakke (2016) found that interaction and collaboration in groups does not equate to peer learning in as straightforward a manner; effective learning seems to also require accurately formulated learning objectives (see also Boud, 20). Reid and Duke (2015) found, however, that junior students in informal contexts benefited from observing the experiences and thoughts of their senior peers. In terms of internationalisation, Bønløkke, van der Linde and De Lorenzo Urien (2018) found that almost all exchange students were satisfied with most situations offered by the short exchange programmes. For cultural learning, these students highly rated situations such as sharing experiences, communicating with others and having a positive attitude towards discoveries; meeting other students particularly helped respondents to acquire cultural education.

In this project, Finnish student teacher teams organised crafting workshops and invited visiting exchange students to participate. The basic idea of the applied course was to design and practice craft education as under a thematic learning idea. This time the master idea and leading objective was to enhance cultural learning and promote dialogue between the two groups of students. The atmosphere was intentionally good humoured, and playful, offering a platform for participants to enjoy themselves and increase their well-being through craft activities (Pöllänen, 2019; Kiviniemi, 2017; Riley, Corkhill & Morris, 2013). Both groups were credited for their participation as a course in their respective studies.

Methods

The Crafting Workshop project was designed to form a three-stage action research and development study, and the data collected was copious. According to Stringer (2014), action research is suitable for developing teacher activities and different methods can be used within it with the focus on efforts to develop activities or improve situations. This study was conducted in close interaction with the participants, as is essential in action studies.

Action research involves the procedural stages of look, think and act (Stringer, 2007). The first phase of looking, or observing, is based on analysing what is happening in the relevant activity and itemising

those happenings. The next phase is thinking about, or reflecting on, the experiences of the participants during the activity and analysing the occurrences. An action cycle is completed with the third phase of concretising the analysis, or acting, in a developed way. As a new, re-modelled action cycle begins, the three phases of action research may be repeated.

The objectives and content of the project workshops were adjusted depending on the student group. The local student teachers participated in an ‘Applied Craft’ course in which their task was to organise craft activities for international students; they attended two or three course meetings for preparation, one workshop session as teachers and one workshop for peer evaluation. In designing the craft workshops, the student teachers were instructed to establish the educational objectives, design a learner-friendly craft project for a group of 16, and use the English language. The international students were formally enrolled in an ‘Introduction to Craft’ -course that offered the opportunity to become acquainted with Finnish craft education and traditions as well as to practise handicrafts. The pedagogical approach was active peer learning in a moderately non-formal setting. For both groups, the aim was to cooperate in a culturally diverse peer-group.

After running their workshop, the Finnish teaching students reflected on their experiences through a written assignment, and peer feedback was also provided by another student group that observed the session. In addition, observation and active fieldwork were used during the workshops. Feedback discussions were then used to specify the key experiences to further develop the action research, and through reflection and discussion, new perspectives were sought to be applied in subsequent workshop rounds.

During the sessions, observations or random discussions with the international participants did not provide sufficient information about their experiences. To collect and analyse their experiences an electronic questionnaire was provided to be used to form an illustrative case story of their thinking. Case studies are the collation and interpretation of detailed information about a particular person or group; illustrative versions typically use one or more examples to describe a situation where cumulative studies include information about a number of cases to draw general conclusions (Yin, 2009).

Results

The action research phases, and development activities will be outlined in this section; the key stages and major developments are presented in detail in Table 1. The developmental activities over time are presented in the rows, and the action cycle phases are presented in the columns as structured by Stringer (2007).

Table 1. Crafting Workshops project development.

	<i>LOOK</i>	<i>THINK</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<i>START</i> September 2018	<i>Plan</i> - Curricular structure, objectives and action analysis - Critical examination of the Applied Craft course	<i>Focus</i> - Attention on internationalisation, cultural learning, peer learning - Goal and action analysis	<i>Design</i> - Cooperate with the international liaison to optimise the idea and timing - Design the courses - Establish the pilot group
<i>PILOT</i> October 2018	<i>Implement</i> - Workshop reflections - Discussions with student teachers - Self and peer evaluations by the student teacher groups	<i>Pros</i> + Overall approach, structure and timing of the course + Peer learning framework + Enrolment, commitment and performance results of both groups	<i>Redesign</i> - Particularise the course objectives - Cooperate with the international liaison - Set up one extra course for the international students - Revise the course assignments - Collect extra data: taking photos - Formulate the questionnaire for the international participants

		<p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course size: more willing participants than places - Irrelevance of certain of assignments - Lacking documentation - No clear understanding of what the participants think 	
<p><i>SECOND PHASE</i> October 2019 November 2019</p>	<p><i>Implementation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As above - International participant feedback survey 	<p><i>More focus</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interaction during workshops - Distribution of tasks within teacher groups - Targeting the starting lecture to Finnish culture - More involvement in peer group activities 	<p><i>Contribution to the curriculum</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serves aims of internationalisation - Should be developed in the future

Crafting Workshops -research project started at the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year and that was designed as a three-stage study. Course preparation began in the first semester of 2018-19 when teaching was being planned for the year; previous experience and other curricular demands were assessed, and the new Applied Craft course was designed, with the concepts of internationalisation, cultural learning, peer learning and craft education in kept in mind. The actions and assignments of the similar courses were modified to support these objectives, and liaison with the international unit provided important assistance and discussion on matters relating to timing and recruitment.

Research phases and development

The pilot course was implemented in November 2018 to test the idea, frame the procedure, obtain feedback from participants and establish whether or not there was an appetite for this kind of course. A group of Finnish student craft teachers was introduced to the background and goals of the project; they were divided into small sub-groups of two to four people and asked to brainstorm the topic of their prospective workshops, plan and prototype their crafting activities and produce advertisements for the exchange students. After enrolment of exchange students, the teacher groups delivered their workshops. The course was available to all the exchange students in the Faculty of Education and Psychology and no previous craft studies were expected. There were 16 places for the course and attendance was confirmed in the order of enrolment.

Active observation was carried out in the research environment by the researcher and feedback discussions with teachers of the workshops and their peer evaluators after each workshop gathered new ideas and views, and in-depth notes were made for monitoring. Thus, the researcher's observations were not solely interpreted through the researcher's own gaze. The long craft teacher career of the researcher and the views of the young students broadened the understanding. The pilot phase confirmed that the overall approach was sound and that peer learning served the project aims. In the feedback discussions, the Finnish students said it had been nice to get to know students from other countries and be in contact with them. The international students participated eagerly with enough demand to set up several courses in the future. The original workshop time frame was a little tight, and so it was increased from three to four hours. In the pilot, attendance by student teachers for peer evaluation was relatively loose with no precise assignment, and so this was redefined to be more active with participation in the crafting and documentation by photo. The second phase took place in the autumn of 2019 with slight alterations in teaching and course assignments, as per the pilot. Again, with the cooperation of the international unit, two workshop courses with four workshops in each were delivered.

During the two years, the project involved several degree students and exchange students in the University of Jyväskylä. As described, two diverse course modules were carried out, one to Finnish student teachers and the other to international exchange students. There were therefore three ‘Applied Craft’ courses involving 47 Finnish students who, for didactic studies in craft education, held 12 ‘Introduction to Craft’ workshops for 58 exchange students. Summative session information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Crafting Workshops summative information.

Date	‘Applied Craft’ courses	Number of workshops	Number of student teachers	Number of international students on ‘Introduction to Craft’ course
October 2018	1	4 (3 hours)	19	20
October 2019	1	4 (4 hours)	17	20
November 2019	1	4 (4 hours)	11	18
Total	3	12	47	58

The first year focused on testing the bearing capacity of the idea, but in the second year, the aim was to get deeper in the analysis. In 2019, 38 international students from 13 countries visited the workshops. Some of them attended both courses that year, so 30 individuals attended both the workshops: 1) Brazil, Canada, Czech, Hungary, Mexico, Netherlands and United Kingdom had one participant; 2) Chile had two participants; 3) Spain had three participants; 4) Belgium and Italy had four participants; and Germany and Japan had five participants.

The number of workshops planned and delivered by the student teacher groups were separate sessions with different topics and activities, the themes emerging from the student teachers’ own interests and the activities being adapted to the time frame, facilities, equipment and materials available. In Table 3. the workshop themes are presented with some information about the materials and techniques used.

Table 3. Crafting Workshops themes and content.

Date	Workshop	Material / technique
October 2018	1. Jyväskylä -themed bag 2. Make your own dream catcher 3. Reflector - lifesaver 4. Modern <i>himmeli</i>	cotton / sewing, picture transfer onto fabric threads, beads, feathers / threading wool, reflective material / needle felting paper straws / threading
October 2019	1. Tote bag 2. Fridge magnets and earrings 3. Felted key ring 4. Sauna seat cover	cotton / sewing plywood / decoupage wool / needle felting cotton / sewing, embroidery
November 2019	1. Needle-felted decorations 2. Christmas socks 3. Metal decorations 4. Straw decorations	wool / needle felting polyester felt / hand sewing, applique metal wire, beads / crafting, straws, paper straws / threading

International student experience

At the end of the second action phase in 2019, an online questionnaire was launched for completion by the international participants. The questionnaire concerned 1) participation motivation; 2) expectations of the course; 3) crafting in workshops; 4) interaction between the instructors and the participants; and 5) development ideas.

Unfortunately, response rates were notably low because of the questionnaire's timing and necessarily late announcement; a period busy with completing studies and the start of the Christmas holidays combined with homeward travel for the exchange students. Repeating the invitation to respond was deemed unnecessary for the same reasons. However, the responses received (n=10) can yet serve as ethnographic data describing and explaining these students' activities, interpretations and conceptions of their environment and the activities undertaken (see *New World Encyclopedia*, 2012).

In the two action rounds, 58 international exchange students participated in the workshops. Most of the exchange students who participated were women. The main comments and feedback of the 10 international students are compressed into a compiled case narrative by the researcher. The thematic analysis of the responses started on each question in the questionnaire. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is well suited for identifying and reporting certain patterns in data. Braun and Clarke (2016) see thematic analysis as a method of identifying patterned meaning across a data set; not used as a case study method.

In the first stage, the found statements were recorded by themes or topics in a row. In the next step, such sentences were added to the themes that described the same thing but were written under another question. At the final stage, when the final story was written, an attempt was made to write in the whole range of opinions that were related to the experiences of the participants. An endeavour was also made to create a coherent structure, and informative contents.

The aim of descriptive narrative was to document the key features of international students' experiences. The narrative was compiled directly from the respondents' open response texts. Only pronoun and temporal changes have been made to combine separate stories into a continuous, one-person story. By using the participants' own words in the narrative, we let the readers draw their own conclusions. The narrative summarises an average participant's reflections over the workshops and story line proceeds according to the themes of the questionnaire described above.

First, the workshop advertisements were very inspiring; I was motivated by the opportunity to meet new people in a relaxed atmosphere. I also wanted more opportunities to communicate with other exchange as well as Finnish students. For the crafting, I did not have any expectations; I wanted to learn new stuff and gain experience of Finnish handicrafts.

This experience was great for me because I like doing craft, and it was a nice opportunity to generate new ideas and learn how to use specific materials, all of which will be handy for the future. I think that crafting is good for well-being, relaxation and happiness, although, at my home university, there is no possibility to study craft because we do not have this type of course. In the workshops, we were introduced to a theme but did not receive exact models; it was my own decision how my work would look.

The atmosphere was nice and relaxing; really good! The crafting tasks were well planned with original ideas, and not too difficult, being adapted to the participants' level. Some of the projects were challenging for me, and that is why I liked it. It was easy to follow the instructions and the teachers explained the tasks well. If I asked for help from the supporting teacher students, they kindly helped me! I love the things we made; they are the best souvenirs to take back home.

In some of the workshops, I think that the interaction was great. As the instructors were also students, I did not feel any pressure when asking for help. They did great work, and most of them supported us really well; we spent some wonderful time together! Some of the tutors gave good instructions, but were quite distant when everyone was actually working, and they could have gone around to have a chat with us. Even if it was not 100% interaction, the teachers were always ready to help when asked.

How to develop the course is a hard question because I was very satisfied. As I said, one lesson on each topic was probably too quick, and something extra work for faster students would sometimes be good. The start with cultural information was nice and the sauna quiz was hilarious! The course could be longer than just four sessions, and sometimes it would be nice to hear more lectures. In some cases, there could be more interaction between the tutors and participants.”

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) consider that one of the most important causes of reflection in action research is awareness of what should be learned in the future. This action study led us from the technical level to the practical level that is the nature of interaction. The critical issues highlighted by the international students were giving some harder challenges in craft making, give more time to learn craft making deeper and for the student teachers how to communicate with the students and to find initiative when guiding the making. The smoothness of workshop activities and craft making were at a good level, while focusing on cooperation and interaction between people will help to achieve the goals of internationalisation better.

Discussion

After two years of action and redesign, the course concept seems to work well for each set of students. The arrangement has produced the desired results as it has brought the two student groups together and increased student interaction and cultural sharing. Course setting has been developed with some alterations like adding workshop hours, offering additional courses and cutting unnecessary tasks. The workshops brought students from several departments together, so communication between organisers is very important in scheduling of sessions. Finnish handicraft was a good starting point for the course themes, but contemporary global subjects, such as dream catchers and Christmas socks, served the purpose too. In any case, Finnish handicrafts and craft education toned the activity.

The creating went well in the workshops; the exchange students were relatively inexperienced craft makers but they succeeded with enthusiasm. The products were themselves rewarding and delightful, but participation seemed to be as important. The international participants were seen to enjoy learning about Finnish crafts and traditions. For some, an introduction to craft was enough, but others would have liked to learn more detailed crafting skills. This was intended as an introduction to craft without deep exploration of craft techniques, so those wishing to acquire greater knowledge would be able to attend the standard craft courses at the university.

For the student teachers, the concept of home internationalisation through leading the workshops worked effectively; the course content and study activities were welcomed and faced no opposition among the students. The student groups prepared the workshops carefully in terms of language, craft work and terminology, as well as atmosphere. Working in a small group increased social confidence, for the responsibilities could be divided according your strengths, for example, hosting ice breaking activities, speaking English and craft teaching. Peer learning took place in planning and teaching within the workshop groups across all issues.

Interaction in the workshops was often considered as immediate and easy, although more attention should be paid to the student teachers' activities during the sessions. Although teaching was effective, guiding the making and informally chatting with the participants required more focus and an active presence. This was shown clearly in the collective narrative and needs more attention. The interaction of the student instructors should therefore be further developed. However, it can be said that the student teachers are aware of learner-centred handicraft education and were seen to emphasise individual learner goals.

Figures 1 to 3 below show the variety of some of the participants' creations through photographs taken by student teachers observing other workshops for peer evaluation. The materials available seemed to determine the designs more than the examples and models provided by the instructors; participants were provided with opportunities to express themselves freely in an encouraging and permissive environment. Though the major activities were determined by the instructors the personal designs of the participants open up complex but interesting opportunities for further research. The workshop activities could be developed with more experienced teacher students for example with Fab Labs ideas. These advanced

students would have developed their teacher personality and fostered their subject management so that they could encourage participants to experiment and discover new ideas in a free environment.



Figure 1. Tote bag workshop, October 2018. Photos: Saana Anttila.



Figure 2. Magnets and earrings workshop, October 2019. Photos: Tuomas Rätty.



Figure 3. Metal decorations workshop, November 2019. Photos: Aada Saatsi.

This action research project showed that cultural interaction may be enhanced by offering such studies where local and visiting student meet and the action is planned to create cultural interaction. Also, the model of this approach could be suitable for other subject areas within teacher education. To continue the promising potential of the Crafting Workshops, the programme could be incorporated into new curricula for teacher education in the university.

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