

What does Making Things with Your Own Hands Give and Mean to You? – Experiences About Using Skills of Hands and Producing Artefacts

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WHAT DOES MAKING THINGS WITH YOUR OWN HANDS GIVE AND MEAN TO YOU? – EXPERIENCES ABOUT USING SKILLS OF HANDS AND PRODUCING ARTEFACTS

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Anotacija

Šiame straipsnyje dėmesys skiriamas rankų darbo įgūdžių svarbai šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje. Rankų darbo įgūdžių poreikis sumažėjo, nes, besivystant naujoms technologijoms, atsirado įvairios technikos, kuri daugelyje sričių pakeitė žmones. Naujovės ne vienam sukėlė nerimą, kad rankų darbo įgūdžiai taps nebereikalingi. Toks mąstymas – visiškai klaidingas: įvairios žinių sritys yra susiję viena su kita, todėl jos negali būti atskirtos. Be procedūrinių žinių (susijusių su įgūdžiais, "žinojimu kaip") negali būti konstatuojamųjų (susijusių su "žinojimu, kad"). Medžiaga šiam darbui buvo surinkta 2006 metų pavasarį apklausiant Helsinkio ir Joensuu universitetų studentus. Abu šio straipsnio autoriai išanalizavo atsakymus ir kruopščiai juos su klasifikavo. Rezultatai puikiai parodo įvairiapusę rankų darbo įgūdžių esmę. Šie įgūdžiai yra naudingi pradedant nuo savęs supratimo iki ekonominių ir gydomųjų gyvenimo sričių. Jie sudaro galimybę šiuolaikinei asmenybei sugrįžti į senuosius laikus, įgyvendinti savo troškimus, idėjas ir planus. Rankų darbo įgūdžiai sukonkretina abstraktų šiuolaikinį pasaulį bei leidžia remiantis vaizduote lavinti savo talentus, kuriant naujus artefaktus rankomis.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: rankų darbo įgūdžiai, nagingumas, rankų darbo meno dirbiniai, amatų manifestacija.

Abstract

This article concentrates in the many meanings of the hand making skills have in modern world. The importance of skills of hand has grown dimmer all the time as the technological development has produced new equipment to do the jobs earlier done with hands. The great increase of knowledge has led many to think it can take the place of old hand skills. This way of thinking is totally wrong: the different areas of knowledge are in deep connection with each other and these cannot be separated. Without procedural knowledge (connected to skills, "knowing how") cannot be declarative knowledge (connected to "knowing that"). The data for this research was collected from students of the Universities of Helsinki and Joensuu in spring 2006. It was analyzed by both authors of this article and the classification was done thoroughly. The results show nicely the many sided essence of the hand skills. The meanings reach from building self conception to economic and therapeutic areas of life. They form a possibility to a modern individual to have a bridge to old times, a channel to fulfil his own desires, ideas and plans. Hand skills make the abstract modern life more concrete, they offer a possibility to use imagination and develop own talents by creating new artefacts by hands.

Key words: Hand skills, handicraft, handmade artefacts, manifestation of handicrafts.

1. Background

Making things by own hand is one of the basis of all cultures when we go back in time far enough. Each culture has its own means of making things; these artefacts which are dependent on the environment form the basis of each culture. Also the amount of things needed in everyday life is dependent on the geographical location of the culture and society. Technologic and industrial countries need clearly less hand making in everyday life than agricultural societies. Actually, hand made things, in some fields, have become a mark of individualism and high quality, it has become high valued and high-prized product. Even the skills generally have raised their appreciation, and in modern societies professional craftsmen are highly paid and wanted. Actually, in countries like Finland there is a lack of skilful craftsmen in industrial field (metal industry and especially in building trade). This situation is due to the enormous development in high technology area and high standard in education: the young do not wish to work with their hands; they want to deal with computers and other modern equipment and media. They want to get a job where there is no need for smutting their hands.

In modern societies the original meaning of making things with hands has lost its significance. This significance has given the name for the whole species in which we, human beings, also belong to: the Primates, which means in Finnish language "those who have hands". Being a handed species sets also the basis for the whole humanity, and this we must not forget: we are made to use our hands. Handicraft and making artefacts with hands has many meanings for human beings. It is natural, because the whole survival of the species is dependent on it. The meanings come from the inside the individual, and it is directly connected with skills. When an individual knows that he is skilful in some area, it gives him a lot of self confidence and this way it has its effects on the whole self concept. Learning of skills includes procedural knowledge, which is an area of learning things. Learning procedural knowledge comes partly naturally and it is in strong connection with the structure of individual's giftedness. Not only have the talents explained skills learning, also the amount of practical training and the structure of the individual's schemata and personality are in connection with it.

The use of hands has many important effects in a human being: it is used in different therapies in cases where the mind has lost its balance. The use of hands in association with different arts makes a good combination for treatment. The practical elements of doing things with own hands also have its effects: it helps to keep the thoughts concentrated in one point, and this way it helps in relaxation. The enjoyment of making real artefacts with own hands is obvious, it gives deep satisfaction to see something concrete becoming ready. Doing by hands also gives intellectual stimulation as the planning processes connect with the practical object. Imagination and intelligence are needed in planning; problem-solving is one of the important factors of making things with hands.

Because the way of life is at the present time so far from using hands, it helps modern people to get away from their usual habits and everyday routines: it is something different. Making things with hands is quite close to artistic work. Skills of hand are needed in most of the fine arts as in handicraft industry, and the difference between them is only a line drawn in water. It is impossible to tell where the skill ends and art begins. This is one of the main reasons which make hand skills a key to a good and happy, satisfactory life in modern world.

The use of hand skills is always connected with creativity. It is needed in planning and executing

processes in many levels. This makes hand skills most important for kindergarten teachers, elementary school classroom teachers, etc. Creativity occurs in concrete products which are formed. It gives the creator a possibility to see the products of his own hands right away. The possibility to feel, see, smell and touch different materials by human senses is also an important element in hand-made products. The satisfaction which rises from succeeding in forming objects is unquestioned.

For many people the making things with hands means a possibility to get to know oneself but also to get a glance inside other people's minds through seeing, feeling and touching their artefacts. It means a way to build own identity and feel the joy of succeeding in cooperation with the others. Making things together means community, friendship, relaxation, understanding differences, stopping in the middle of the hurry, it somehow means a way to catch a moment of reality in a piece of paper, wood or other material. This is why many people try to find a hobby where they may use their own hands.

Also negative experiences may take place when doing things with hands. This is because of the challenge there always is present: the challenge comes from the need to with the problems the material causes or the problems in the creative or productive process cause. Often the negative experiences change to positive when the solution for the problems is found. In some cases, of course, the negative experiences may stay in the front place in memories of a child if the feeling of success is not found while making things with hands. Also, a too strong guidance in doing things by hands may cause negative feelings: a certain level of individual creativity is needed to keep the activity meaningful and reasonable.

The everyday routines include a lot of use of hands: cleaning, washing dishes, making food or washing clothes are simple but very necessary for the good and normal life in families. People feel safe when they keep doing their normal routines; it helps them to divide the time of the day in different sections dependent of the routines. These activities also help to spend the time without getting bored. Time flies when you do something you like.

2. Knowledge in connection with skilful hands

The connection between knowing and making things with hands is important. It forms a kind of red line in this article. Making things and working with hands form important historic, cultural and psychological role in the life of a human being and forming an identity in the early childhood. At its best the knowledge and skill form a harmonious entity where the human brain understands what the hands are making and the hands are able to execute the plans and the knowledge which arises in the brain. This harmony of skill and knowledge form the vision of a skill-information society: the explication of socially and culturally sustainable development basing on the enjoyment of making things skilfully in command of understanding thought.

In many different connections the importance of making artefacts self and using hands has been under discussion. The association of futurology in Turku, Finland has found three important themes in their aims for future (Turku futurology association, 2001). They are: 1) ecologically and socially sustainable development; 2) the importance of explicating identity and 3) discovering and controlling the social changes.

The border between handicraft and art is always a line drawn in water: handicraft has always a certain part of uniqueness although it may use subcontractors and rationalized production methods, even in width of industrial production. It places handmade artefacts somewhere in a dim area between industry and unique products. The handicraft and needlework at Finnish schools have traditionally been quite strong, maybe even stronger than in many other countries. It is an obligatory subject in the elementary school; many handicraft professions are educated in polytechnics or in universities where there are professorships for this particular area. All this is in connection with the strong and peculiar Finnish culture of hand making (Hietanen, 2002, 4–6).

Handicraft touches us all, it is seen in everyday life products and handmade artefacts and it is a beloved hobby for others while it is a profession to others (see Luutonen, 2002). Lately, it has been a part of the discussion in Finnish newspapers about the art and skill subjects at school and the division of teaching hours. In this discussion there have often been seen notions about hand skills developing personality, independence or self conception. The ability to deal with one's own feelings, solving problems, the ability to express oneself, the development of imagination, innovation and analytic thinking have often been stated out as being present in making things with own hands. Also, mental and spiritual stimulation, the lifting of motivation of education, the enjoyment of being at school and health, understanding and tolerance for differences are over and over again focused in this dialogue. The art and skills teaching and learning at school is often mentioned as developers of liberality and humanity in connection with the equality. General all-round education and protection and creation of own cultural heritage are some of the results in Finnish art and skill education at school. They are in strong connection with development of the visual culture and visual reading ability both with new design in Finland. Finland has a lot of traditions in the field of design. Together with many instrumental values the art and skill subjects have a lot of intrinsic values. These values are very important and a lot of eyebrow lifting has been caused by plans to cut the amounts of art and skills subjects. What kind of worldview and what kind of nature of knowledge can be behind this kind of plans (Airaksinen, 2001, B7)?

3. The manifestation of handicrafts

The Nordic handcrafts council (which is a loose joint of actors in the handicraft area) wrote down a *"manifestation of handicraft"* in the end of the 1990's. Eight different points of view were shown in dealing with the area. The areas were following:

1. Handicraft is a part of all-round education. It is born from the human need for fulfilling own ideas. The understanding of the executing of plans is dependent as the experiences about the process in which all senses are in use and the process strengthens the understanding of the entity.

2. Handicraft forms identity, community and cooperation skills. Many sided elements of culture are activated in handicraft and its language is international. It connects local to the universal meanings.

3. Handicraft is a joy of inventing and creating artefacts which connect beauty with the usefulness.

4. Handicraft is a skill and knowledge to solve problems, it is a giftedness which is transferred together with people and it gets stronger when it is used.

5. Handicraft is a possibility for design where the strength lies in the balance among the freedom of design and the demands of the material. The process and the product cannot be separated in handicrafts.

6. A handicraftsman is a modern entrepreneur, a self-employed person who strengthens the local community.

7. Handicraft is a circulation of materials, where products are long-lasting and they finally return to nature in the end of their using time.

8. Handicraft belongs to future, the practical knowledge of the human being connected to new technology producing new possibilities.

Every handicraftsman has skills which mean ability to solve problems and create new innovative products and at best when creative solutions are needed. He has a lot of quiet knowledge of a craftsman which is difficult to be transferred or taught to other people using words. It is a kind of portable capital which moves with the human being.

Handicraft is most important for women as they have it most often as a lifelong hobby. The experiences they get from doing things with hands often are like the ones raised by music or literature. Some researchers (Metsämuuronen, 1995, 1997) see the meaning of handicraft in need for creativity, imagination, curiosity, and the ability for boldness. As the skilfulness rises, the social ones get more meaning in the motive structure. Also, Anttila (1983) found out that the process of making something with hands is of great value itself. The attitude towards the product itself and also the usefulness of the product are of less value. The joy and enjoyment of producing things with hands was important in the research of Luutonen (1992). The respondents mention the handicraft as a means of relaxation and getting rid of stress. Being able to deal with one's own thoughts while producing things with hands is also an important channel for concentrating. Heikkinen (1996, 1997) jumped in her research into a conclusion that a handicraft process is difficult to be separated from the product itself. As a process handicraft is joy, work, rest and activity. It is seen as apart of personality and identity as it lifts up one's self conception and gives satisfaction. The more difficult the techniques are the more appreciation it gains. In this way the level of difficulty expires appreciation and value of the hand made things.

The project "in search for experiences" collected writings about the meanings of art and handicraft. It showed that finding the meaning of own life is essential for a human being, it means that art and handicraft connect talking to oneself with the meaningfulness of life. It also showed that handicraft has its social meanings through meeting other who are interested in the same area of life. It means a possibility to find one's own place in the rapidly changing world (Eskol, 1998; Linko, 1998). In hand making the joy comes from meanings of the process and the functions of the production process. These functions are succeeding in the work, therapeutic function, the deepened conception of self, and the peace of mind and strengthening of the identity. The positive attention from hand making has been a turning point in life of many; it has been used as a means of building self conception.

This is a feeling which has been described by Csikszentmihalyi (see 1991; 1996; 1997; Juvonen & Ruismäki, 2006) as a flow experience. It is something which can be achieved in doing something (usually artistic) deeply devoted and concentrated so that the rest of the world just seems to loose its meaning: the only thing that matters is what you are doing at that very moment, everything seems to go just the way it should go and everything seems clear and right. It is often stated that an aesthetic experience is close or even includes some kind of "flow-experience", which is a dynamic state, holistically or comprehensively stimulating experience that does not create anxiety about what is happening or what might not happen (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Juvonen & Ruismäki, 2006). In any case, emotions and feelings are usually present in all kinds of severe experiences, and that is why the happenings are often remembered even after many years. Naturally the intensity of emotions and feelings is dependent to personality structure.

Flow experience may be one of the important explainers in the meaningfulness of handicraft (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). He explains that the flow experience is a stage of mind where the consciousness is full of experiences in total balance with the activity. Everything we feel, hope or think is in balance.

4. The data

The data was collected in autumn, 2006 from students in Universities of Helsinki and Joensuu. There were also updating education students among the informants. The number of answers for the inquiry was 54. There were only 8 boys in the sample which describes somehow the gender division in the kindergarten teacher education and classroom teacher education. The questions both for this and the other research presented in this conference were given to the students during the lectures of both of the writers and the answers were given through the email. The percentage of the answers was 82%, which can be considered very high. This was because of the way the data was collected. The research question given to students was simply: What does making things with your own hands give and mean to you?

5. The method

This research belongs to a qualitative research tradition. The aim in qualitative research is to describe the target as well as possible and to increase understanding about the subject. The starting point for approach we used is consciousness and ability to build conceptions of different phenomena and to describe these conceptions linguistically (Nummenmaa & Nummenmaa, 1997, 65–66; Ahonen, 1994, 113–114, 121–122). The conceptions are built inside our head through experiences and thinking and with them a human being is connected to interaction with the surrounding world. Each person has different conceptions about different phenomena

which is because of the different experiments which form the conceptions in the first place. We form through everyday life so called pre-conceptions on which the understanding new experiences are built. Through analyzing and interpreting we build different describing categories which include different ways of understanding the world on general level without connecting the categories into the individuals who are being under research. These describing categories form the main results of phenomenographic research.

6. Main results

In this article we concentrate in describing the student's conceptions basing on these definitions which they made for our request. Both of the authors classified and analyzed the data thoroughly before getting together and comparing the classification. Although many of the groups were similar, there were also light differences in the basis of the classification. After a long and fruitful discussion the mutual understanding was reached and the final classification was made. The classification of the meanings of making things with own hands:

- 1) Therapeutic meaning
 - a. Relief of stress
 - b. Getting away from everyday life
 - c. Relaxation
 - d. Quieting down
- 2) A creative process
 - a. Self expression
 - b. Fulfilling oneself
 - c. Flow experience
- 3) Making a concrete artefact
 - a. The joy of active production
 - b. Seeing the product ready
- 4) The intrapersonal and interpersonal aspect
 - a. Getting familiar with oneself
 - b. Getting familiar to other people
- 5) Experiential aspect
 - a. Experiences of succeeding
 - b. Negative experiences
- 6) The routines of everyday life
 - a. Spending time
 - b. Doing casual routines
 - c. Habits of everyday life
- 7) Multiple classifications

7. Conclusions

The importance of skills of hand cannot be doubted. It is based on the different areas of knowledge which are important in all learning and developing processes. A human being cannot survive in nature or

in a modern society without skills of hands, although they have lost their vital meaning in defending one self from different dangers. They have different meanings is a modern society: they help modern people to solve problems, to survive with their everyday routines; they help them to know themselves through opening channels to show and understand feelings and emotional experiences. The skills of hands are in direct connection with giftedness and general intelligence; they help in building strong self assurance and healthy self conception. The skills of hand are always present when discussing art, good art always includes feelings and signs of skilfulness. In connection with creativity, imagination and inventiveness skilfulness opens the world to individual: they help to understand the phenomena of creation in multiple levels, they help to understand the inner brilliancy of a human being, they build a bridge between the old world and the modern one by saving the heritage in cultural, social and spiritual levels.

The whole idea of being a human being is built around the use of hands. Through the mere definition of our species the meaning of the hands is seen. The use of hands develops basing on the gifts and the structure of talents which the genetic heredity has given to each individual, but still: everyone is able to develop the hand skills through practice. The one who is able to use his hands is often seen clever and able to survive in different situations, he has an ability to create new solutions for problems. Also new technology is built by inventions to be used for helping mere hands.

The value of handmade objects has opened new channels for hand skills to survive in fight of a place in the sun together with maths, sciences or technologic in the modern world. But these commercial solutions form only a small way to lift skills of hands: they offer some people a possibility to earn a living. The cultural inheritance is often transmitted through this channel to new generations, but the importance of home can not be denied: home is the place where the basis of the values, conceptions and appreciation of one's own culture is built. This is why everyone is responsible for transmitting these important values, skills and routines to next generations.

The real value of hand skills is based on the processes of learning skills together with learning knowledge. These two cannot be separated from each other. If we try to do the separation with lifting one in cost of the other we are in a road to destruction. The weakening of the art and skills subjects at schools all over the world has become one of the most important topics in discussion about education. Finland, among other modern societies believes in high technology and education only. In last few years also the industrial world has noticed the importance of skills: to become a good industrial worker, you need to believe in your own skills, the ability to solve problems on paper makes good engineers, but the skills of a good handicraftsman built the world. The skills of artists make it a better place to live in. What is most important: the skills of hand lift us above the everyday life even in our own home every time we have a possibility to use it properly: skills are a key to flow-experience. They form together the long and winding road to a happy and good life, which should be the aim for us all.

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