

DEVELOPMENT OF DIDACTICS AND PEDAGOGY IN THE DANISH PEDAGOGY PROGRAM THROUGH CRAFT ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

This research project has explored how craft activities can contribute to the learning of pedagogy students in their education and the subsequent impact of working with these activities on their practical experiences in schools and after-school care. Design-based research methodology is applied in this research project. The craft activities are aiming towards achieving two primary objectives: 1) To enhance students' learning capabilities. This proposition is formed, among other sources, such as prior research conducted by Dr. Anne Kirketerp, which has shown that craft activities involve repetitive movements conducive to training conscious focus on the present moment and strengthening attention these findings are supported by recent research in Craft Psychology (Kirketerp, 2020); 2) To strengthen pedagogy students' didactic and practical skills and competencies in conducting craft activities with children in school and leisure settings, ensuring that children have enjoyable and educational experiences with crafting.

Keywords: *Craft activities, pedagogy, student affairs.*

1. Theoretical framework and motivation

This paper presents an analysis of how engagement in craft activities can contribute to enhancing learning, and mental health among students, and instilling a love for craftsmanship in children. In a world characterized by rapid technological advancements and constant disruptions, the increased acceleration, speed, and numerous disturbances have impacted our ability to immerse ourselves and work with concentration (Rosa, 2010). Consequently, we have explored novel methods to promote focus, attention, and positive emotions. Craft activities, such as painting, knitting, sewing, and ceramics, have proven to offer opportunities for improved concentration and depth of engagement (Bjarkam, 2023). This paper focuses on identifying and analyzing the elements of craft activities that contribute to strengthening present-moment focus and generating positive emotions.

Craft activities involve repetitive movements that are conducive to training conscious focus on the present, enhancing attention, and simultaneously contributing to the creation of positive emotions. Additionally, these activities empower young individuals to feel that they are making a positive difference (Kirketerp, 2020, p. 30-35). The deep concentration required by craft activities can lead to an enhanced ability to remain in the present. We have explored how these activities can function as a form of meditation, supporting the development of attention skills. The project emphasizes creating haptic activities, focusing on engaging the senses, particularly the sense of touch, often designed to provide a hands-on experience.

2. Method

This research project contributes to knowledge about the use of craft activities to support student learning and the ripple effect on practice, as well as the exploration of innovative teaching methods. The project is rooted in "design-based research." This method was selected because it actively intervenes in and with practice, comprising iterative processes: design testing, evaluation, analysis, improvement, collaboration, and application-oriented approaches (Reeves, 2006). Data collection involved observations, interviews, gathered materials, photographs, and meeting notes.

3. Craft activities in higher education instruction - To enhance students' learning capabilities

This section of the project has investigated the potential use of craft activities in the instruction of pedagogy students as a method to strengthen present-moment focus, increase attention, and promote positive emotions in teaching sessions. Over 6 months in their education, students experimented with engaging in craft activities while participating in theoretical instruction during their internship module in the pedagogy program.

Following the instructional sessions, students were interviewed regarding their experiences with teaching incorporating craft activities. Several students mentioned a positive correlation between the activities and their ability to focus. Engaging in craft activities was viewed positively, but challenges were also noted in balancing the execution of activities while maintaining focus. The opportunity to be active and participate in craft activities was considered beneficial for concentration and engagement. One student stated, "It's nice to have some variety, and it's easier to stay focused as we're not just sitting and getting tired of staring at the board." Several students found it easy to multitask and follow the instructions, but for some, it could be challenging at times. One student mentioned, "Enjoyable, but the activity became occasionally challenging when I had to listen simultaneously." However, craft activities during instruction were generally seen by students as a way to make it easier to focus and engage. They expressed appreciation for teaching methods that incorporated variation and active participation, emphasizing the importance of versatile instructional approaches.

Based on the students' interviews, it can be concluded that students perceive craft activities in instruction as positive, offering a pleasant and diverse way of learning. Activities with practical applications are valued, and the diversity in teaching methods is considered positive. However, it is also observed that not all students benefit equally from instruction involving craft activities. Therefore, in the planning, execution, and evaluation of instruction, educators need to consider students' diverse preferences and strike a balance in encouraging students to use craft activities during the learning process. In traditional teaching formats such as lectures, it may make sense to support students in engaging in an activity to optimize their focus, but it may not always be necessary; perhaps note-taking or a specific focus on a visual element is more appropriate, where it would be inconvenient for students to look away. Students learning in higher education is not only about intellectual skills and competencies in their field of study; it is also important to consider the body as part of the learning process. Craft activities contribute to addressing this aspect. Sitting still for extended periods during instruction is often challenging; having the opportunity for movement has proven to be significant for learning. However, instructors must bear in mind that both the intellect and the body contribute to the learning process (Fredens, 2018).

Through this project, we have observed that pedagogy students have gained more varied educational experiences than previous students. One student expressed, "It's great with activities in teaching, especially activities we can use in practice." Craft activities thus serve multiple purposes, providing students with better outcomes from their education, offering concrete and physical experiences with craft activities, and providing students with ideas and skills relevant to their practice in internships and future professional life.

4. Integration of craft skills in pedagogical practice: Engaging children in after-school programs through craft activities

This section of the paper explores the application of pedagogy students' use of craft activities in after-school programs, with a one-hour painting workshop on one afternoon used as an example. The Danish public school system primarily focuses on academic skills (EVA, 2015). This emphasis is also reflected in Danish pedagogy programs, where vocational subjects have been de-emphasized over the past decades. This limitation results in children having limited exposure to crafts. As argued, there is potential for children to immerse themselves in a craft by interacting with physical materials and tools. Therefore, it is crucial to introduce pedagogy students to crafts so that they can instill joy in craft activities in children while enhancing their ability to concentrate.

A group of pedagogy students was tasked with introducing children to the craft of painting through a workshop. To qualify for this task, they received instruction for a day at a painting vocational school, where they were introduced to painting tools and various painting techniques. In the project, we take the professional aspects of craftsmanship seriously, enabling students to convey the professionalism of painting to children, inspiring them to engage in crafts, and broadening their horizons (Byskov et al., 2023). We consider this an essential aspect of the work of educators.

At the after-school program where the students conducted the painting workshop, they expressed a desire for a sign for their building visible to passersby. Based on this information and the students' visit to the painting vocational school, the pedagogy students strategically planned how the painting workshop could be facilitated for a group of children.

In the after-school program, the students translated their acquired skills from the painting vocational school into the following authentic task for the children: "Paint a sign for the after-school program together." The students and children collaboratively painted a colorful sign. In this context, the children learned to use painter's tape and paint using a dabbing technique. They also had the opportunity to be creative by deciding what to paint on the sign. This means the children both acquired new skills and had the opportunity for influence. Furthermore, the children also experienced professional pride in the joy of creating the sign and others' appreciation of it when the sign was used in the after-school program. This example illustrates the integration of craft skills into pedagogical practice and emphasizes the value of practical experiences for both pedagogy students and children.

The students have benefited from working systematically with didactics. They set goals for both process and product. The students were active participants in the process, guiding the use of painting tools and introducing children to techniques reminiscent of traditional apprenticeship learning. Additionally, pedagogy students and children collaborated in creating the sign, providing them with a shared endeavor and shared engagement (Lave & Wenger, 2011). For the students, the process has been rewarding as it opened their eyes to the potential of working with children and crafts. The serious consideration of craftsmanship in terms of incorporating painting traditions and using the craft produced (the sign) stands in contrast to the usual practice in Danish after-school programs, where children often paint on paper that is shortly discarded. Different groups of students visited various after-school programs; other students engaged in activities like flower arranging, cake baking, and playing as electricians. The students collectively reflected that craft-inspired activities could offer good variation in children's daily lives. The students expressed a desire to continue engaging in craft activities with children in the future.

5. Summary

The students are part of an educational environment characterized by a singular focus on developing intellectual competencies while simultaneously experiencing numerous disruptions and increased acceleration, both in their education and private lives. Therefore, in this project, we have attempted to create alternative learning opportunities where students can work on more facets of themselves than just the intellectual, strengthening their ability to focus and to systematically plan, execute, and evaluate activities involving craft for children didactically.

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