

Threads of Discourse: Exploring Pedagogical Ideas in Unraveling Aesthetic and Cultural Expressions in Sloyd

Carolina Ekman
Södertörn University, Sweden

Cecilia Ferm Almqvist
Södertörn University, Sweden

Marie Hållander
Södertörn University, Sweden

Citation: Ekman, C., Almqvist, C. F., & Hållander, M. (2025). Threads of discourse: Exploring pedagogical ideas in unraveling aesthetic and cultural expressions in sloyd. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 26(3). <http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea26n3>

Abstract

Over the past decade, Swedish sloyd educators have grappled with the challenge of integrating *aesthetic and cultural expressions* into their teaching practice. As part of a larger research endeavor focusing on discourses surrounding sloyd pedagogy, this article examines the evolution of the concept *aesthetical and cultural expressions* in educational guidelines. The study's aim is to show how ideas regarding teaching and learning in and about aesthetic and cultural expressions in sloyd emerge in steering documents from 1994 to 2022. Using a social constructionist approach, the material in focus for the investigation are syllabi, commentary materials, and support documents, which are analyzed through Iterative Curriculum Discourse Analysis. The results reveal that various interpretations coexist within and between the chosen policy documents. These differing views may impact opportunities for expressive acts in sloyd creation.

Introduction

For more than a decade, Swedish sloyd¹ teachers have struggled with how to teach “aesthetic and cultural expressions” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015). What learning through and about aesthetic and cultural expressions mean, and how it can be assessed, have been discussed, as well as what content counts as aesthetic and cultural expressions (Broman et al., 2013; Frohagen, 2016; Mäkela, 2011). As a part of a larger research project, where discourses about the mentioned teaching and learning area will be investigated, this article highlights how the concept has been formulated in guiding documents from 1994 to 2022. A historical and current view of the formulations and how they have changed might help understand the struggles teachers face today. As Iversen (2014) underlines, even if curricula are outdated legally, they may remain active in teachers’ collegial memories, traditions, and actions. “In fact, it is perfectly possible that older curricula exert equal or larger influence on the practicalities of classroom action compared to recently introduced curricula” (2014, p.54). Analyzing older curricula can therefore help us understand today’s curricula, the implementation of the syllabus, and the reason why teachers struggle to teach them.

Some earlier studies of how the subject sloyd has developed in Nordic schools are based on analysis of curricula and syllabi. For example, the analyses focus on changes regarding the function of and motive for educational sloyd (Borg, 2016; Jeansson, 2017); views of knowledge (Hartman, 2014); and what is seen as the most important content over time (Fauske & Haakonsen, 2023). These studies agree that ideals from previous teaching plans remain in current curricula.

Sloyd was introduced in schools with the aim of educating the whole person (Hartman, 2014). The reasoning for introducing sloyd included “They wanted to liberate the individual and affirm modernity, but still revere tradition” (Hartman, 2021, p. 157). The development of both the individual and the personal expression of students proved to be in focus in the previous plans as well, which was a way of shaping socially capable citizens. Today’s teaching focuses more clearly on sustainability and global perspectives, more social aspects of the citizens of the future—the concept of responsible creativity continues to be an ideal starting point for teaching, but the content has changed over time (Fauske & Haakonsen, 2023). The concepts

¹ Today, the concept of sloyd is used to describe various activities in which materials of various kinds are processed into a craft object (Hartman, 2014, p. 12). Sloyd can refer to handicraft in the home (household handicrafts, domestic crafts), professional handicrafts (handicrafts), or artistic handicrafts (arts and crafts). Sloyd can also stand as a collective name for teaching and learning in different materials and techniques (Hartman, 2014, p. 12) School sloyd, also defined as pedagogical sloyd, is used by us as referring to the philosophical (aesthetic, cultural, traditional) and artisanal (technical, methodical, material) aspects involved in sloyd as a school subject.

aesthetic and cultural expression have not been in focus in text analysis, but they have been explored through other research approaches, which we present below.

Through practice-led studies (Broman et al., 2013; Homlong, 2013; Mäkela, 2011) the concepts are explored as teaching content. It becomes clear that students need to develop subject-specific language, to be able to understand aesthetic and cultural expressions and create sloyd objects. Based on a view that sloyd objects have something emotive to tell Broman et al. (2013) state that “they send out signals about aesthetic preferences, style and cultural belonging” (p.10) which is underlined by Mäkela (2011), who stresses the need to recognize the narrative characteristics of sloyd objects as it can contribute to meaningful learning and personal identity development. Frohagen (2016) continues: “Regardless of who or what designed and manufactured an object, an object always expresses some kind of cultural affiliation and specific function; the object has been created within some kind of socio-cultural context, during a certain time and in a certain place for a certain need, which may change over time” (p. 14). Visual literacy is linked to attention structures regarding students ability to interpret expressions in sloyd (i.e. how they can describe and give judgements about an object’s expression (Homlong, 2013). These findings challenge the ideals that stress the importance of students’ possibility to express themselves freely (Borg, 2001). “When children and young people are given the opportunity to design their own work and feel that they can have a real influence on what is to be done, I believe that sloyd also contains a cultural production in the form of a personal aesthetic expression” (Borg, 2001, p. 163). Borg accentuates that creating in sloyd is about communication between the craftsman and their surroundings and can be an expression of one’s own identity, a way to protest, to see who one is or what one likes. Frohagen (2016) completes this view by saying that it can also be about expressing or reinforcing controversial opinions.

The current study is particularly important as it may contribute to a deeper understanding of teachers’ challenges in relating to aesthetic and cultural expressions in their everyday teaching. Furthermore, the limited number of previous studies in this area (Broman, 2013; Homlong, 2006; Mäkela, 2011) in a Swedish context underscores the necessity and relevance of this research focus.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to illuminate how ideas regarding teaching and learning in and about aesthetic and cultural expressions in sloyd emerged in steering documents from 1994 to 2022.

- What kind of knowledge is reflected in written guiding documents over time, and how might the formulations impact opportunities for expressive acts in creation of sloyd (objects)?

- What fields of tension emerge between the concepts, and to which ideas and beliefs are these tensions connected?

Crafting New Perspectives: Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory in Policy Analysis

The study is based on a social constructionist perspective regarding our shared understanding of the world and the formation of knowledge. Within this framework, all human interaction, particularly language, is viewed as the means by which humans construct their understanding (Burr, 2015). This implies that various interpretations of reality arise within specific cultural and social contexts, and that knowledge is shaped from particular perspectives with certain interests in mind, thereby excluding alternative viewpoints and interests (Burr, 2015). Discourse theory can be used to make visible how linguistic constructions and their effects shape humans' understandings of the world. By analyzing discursive formations, we can uncover how language constructs and reinforces particular understandings and perspectives, shedding light on the complex ways in which people perceive and navigate their reality.

Laclau and Mouffe retract the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, and instead emphasize that all objects are established as objects of discourse (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2008). This starting point is important partly due to how we treat previous research, and additionally for how we view the syllabi and support material as a discourse, which will be referred to as policy documents. In this perspective, policy is seen as generating "truth" and "knowledge", thereby influencing what can be said or thought, and determining who has the authority to speak (Ball, 2006). The possible "thought constructions" depend on how policy as discourse embodies the meaning and use of *propositions* and *words*. What is important for this article is the usage of words and how they are ordered and combined in a particular way. These particular formations displace and exclude other ways (Ball, 2006). Also important is that the idea that social phenomena is never finished or total, which raises a constant struggle about definitions of society and identity (Jørgensen Winther & Phillips, 2000, p. 31). When Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2008) are interested in identifying concrete discourses, it is more about abstract entities than discourses in the concrete practice of everyday life (Jørgensen Winther & Phillips, 2000). However, in this study, the discourse analysis approach will be scaled down, and above all be carried out with the help of certain discourse analytic concepts.

Our focus is to investigate conflicting usages of two words that emerge as *floating signifiers* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2008) in policy documents—*aesthetic* and *culture*—and how these relate to different pedagogical ideas. Aiming to relate to sloyd practice we also analyze what the possible consequences of the *truth* or *knowledge* these policy documents might produce in the education of sloyd.

This study is scaled down to examine more domain-specific discursive formations as ideas instead of ideologies at the societal level. The starting point of the study is therefore to examine different and dominating ideas over time that emerge in relation to the concepts of aesthetics and culture. The ideas are seen to relate to the pedagogical rather than the political arena but are examined in the same way - as an ongoing struggle to attribute meaning that contributes to how the social is constructed. In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, the concept of overdetermination (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2008) suggests that a particular discourse or system of meaning becomes dominant and determines some ways of thinking and acting within a given context. In the case of a teacher, the curriculum as a discourse can govern and restrict the teacher's actions, thought processes, and identity by defining what is considered relevant, important, and legitimate in education. Thus, the teacher's capacity for action and freedom may be constrained by the discursive dominance of the curriculum.

Discourse theory proves useful for both visualizing and mapping the variations and partial fixations of meaning as they are organized through communication, and thereby shaping social structures in distinct manners (Jørgensen Winther & Phillips, 2000). By studying nodal points, i.e. central signs in the discourse, the meaning of the discursive formation is made visible. In the visibility of the different meanings of the nodal points, attention is also paid to possibly conflicting meanings, which may affect the understanding of the concepts central to this article—*aesthetic* and *cultural*. Due to these concepts being ambiguous, their identity changes as soon as it is put in relation to another word (cf. Jørgensen Winther & Phillips, 2000).

Carving Critical Insights Through Visualizing Webs of Meaning

To be able to fulfill the aim of the article, and answer the research questions on a socioconstructionistic ground, we have chosen to use Iterative Curriculum Discourse Analysis (ICDA), which is based on discourse theory (Iversen 2014; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). ICDA will help us to understand significant aspects of the curriculum, and how different ideological interpretations of concepts have been competing over time.

Selected Steering Documents (corpus)

By using the ICDA method we aim to get “the larger whole of the experienced curriculum as a set of concentric circles” (Iversen, 2014, p. 55) To be able to grasp how different ideas have been dominating negotiations regarding aesthetical and cultural expressions over time, we chose to include guiding documents for Swedish compulsory schools from the last 30 years. In the early 1990s, a more flexible, goal-oriented approach to education was introduced, focusing on overarching competencies and practical application, which differed from the previous detailed content-driven curricula by emphasizing integrated learning and allowing

teachers greater freedom (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2008).

The documents chosen are Lpo94 (syllabus 2000, syllabus for sloyd), Lgr11 & Lgr22 (syllabi for sloyd), *Sloyd: A conversation guide on knowledge, Working Methods and Assessment* (Swedish Agency for School Development, 2007), the commentary material to the syllabus in sloyd 2011 and 2022 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011, 2022), and *Aesthetic and cultural expressions – inspiration for sloyd teaching* (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016).

Iterative Curriculum Discourse Analysis

Iterative Curriculum Discourse Analysis (ICDA) is particularly suited for placing important curriculum texts in changing and controversial political contexts (Iversen, 2014). As Iversen writes: “The strategy hinges on identifying keywords and phrases that mean different things to different people, and then tracing the changing and competing use of these words through repeated instances of curricula over time” (Iversen, 2014, p 53). In this article, we both trace the use in a variety of steering documents and the currency valid for sloyd education in Swedish compulsory schools over time. “Contrary to many forms of discourse analysis, the ICDA method does not ‘find discourses’” (Iversen, 2014, p. 54). Instead, it is a method for analyzing text using the insights from discourse theory; in particular, the theory of Laclau and Mouffe outlined in their 1985 book *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Iversen points out that “ICDA is thus a form of discourse analysis without discourses. Instead, it uses discourse theory to present us with webs of meaning which represents a repertoire of usage of a given sign (Iversen, 2014, p. 64). In our analysis, we have worked with key nodes, identified both chains of equivalence as well as differences, and have followed the seven distinct steps that ICDA consists of:

- (1) Identify one or more key nodes.
- (2) Identify chains of equivalence.
- (3) Create a visual web of meaning.
- (4) Identify chains of equivalence in the next text in the corpus.
- (5) Layering the web of meaning by adding nodes from the latest analysed text.
- (6) Repeat point four and five until all texts in the corpus are covered.
- (7) Identify chains of difference: different and competing usages of the node.

The first step of the analysis was performed individually by the three authors. We looked separately for relevant “words or phrases that are used in different ways by different actors (or in different ways at different times)” (Iversen, 2014, p. 57) in the chosen steering documents. The goal was to get “indications of a power struggle, and a signpost that something interesting and important is going on in the text.” Not least we tried to notice “words”—related to

aesthetical and cultural expressions—“that are slippery in terms of meaning, but where the disagreement is not often commented on” (Iversen, 2014, p. 57). After our reading separately, we ended up agreeing that the actual concepts——cultural and aesthetic——constituted the significant nodes.

In the second step, we aimed to establish a wider sense of the meaning of the nodes, by creating a ‘web of meaning’ around them. ”Meaning-making and communication, for Laclau and Mouffe, is about reducing the potential meanings of signs we encounter in the world enough to enable action and communication” (Iversen, 2014, p. 56). In this article, it will be particularly interesting to study the way that certain meanings have practical or interactional consequences. “Once the meaning of the node becomes established, then a range of other signs will also have their meanings established” (Iversen, 2014, p. 56). This second step ended by the creation of preliminary iterations of visual webs of meaning, which transfer the analysis process to the third step. Here the node is placed in the center of a mind map, where the surrounding bubbles present competing interpretations. “The idea is that the entire web of meaning gives a rich image of the richness and contentedness of meaning of the key node within the discursive framework the data provide” (Iversen, 2014, p. 58). The influence of value between the bubbles goes both ways, but what is in the center, is the web of meaning that surrounds the nodes; aesthetics and culture.

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth steps, we performed the same procedures individually, related to the nodes respectively, we connected the web of meanings in the different texts to each other, and by that found, or created chains of equivalence.

In the seventh step, we started to look for chains of difference, which showed how the fields of tension had changed, or not changed, in the different forms of steering documents. Finally, we related the different web of meanings and chains of equivalence identified in relation to the three nodes, to each other, and by those chains of difference: different and competing usages of the node became visible.

Threads of Tension: Aesthetics, Culture and Result Findings

The result is presented firstly node by node, and what fields of tension that shown to be significant in each document and over time. Each part ends with a summary of the fields of tension. Thereafter the nodes are related to each other and to the concept of expression and, by that, webs of meaning and chains of difference, which become visible.

Node Aesthetics

In the curricula Lpo94 the different uses of the concept aesthetics constituted a node on one

hand in a web of aesthetic values, and on the other aesthetical aspects which took on competing meanings. Hence, it became clear that the student was both expected to develop *awareness* regarding existing values and *take personal stands* in relation to aesthetical aspects. Thereby, a field of tension between the personal and the stated, agreed upon, becomes visible.

Personal Views on Aesthetics ↔ Social Values of Aesthetics

Connected to Lpo94 and the reformulated syllabus 2000, is the ‘Conversation Guide for Sloyd.’ In this steering document, the concept of aesthetics is given several meanings. The node aesthetics becomes visible in a web of *aesthetic values/aspects*, *experience*, *knowledge* and *expression* that take on competing meanings. In the complementary material aesthetical values are labeled as an aesthetic aspect, in comparison to the basic steering document, where they are presenting competing meanings. Additionally, other meanings become visible, as the document uses the concepts of aesthetic *experience*, aesthetic *knowledge*, and aesthetic *expression* as one goal for working processes in sloyd. Hence, a field of tension between aesthetic values, and aesthetic experience and knowledge appears.

Aesthetic Values ↔ Aesthetic Experience/Knowledge

In Lgr 11 the concept of aesthetics is consequently related to the concept of expression. What becomes visible, is the field of tension between the inner personal aesthetic expression of a sloyd entity, and students’ personal aesthetical sloyd expressions. To be inspired by, for example, architecture in sloyd work to *express oneself* aesthetically is seen as important, as well as developing knowledge about *how sloyd is used* in youth culture to express personal values and identity.

Personal Views of Aesthetics ↔ Artifacts’ Inner Aesthetics

In the commentary material connected to Lgr11, the concept of aesthetics has different meanings and is used in different ways in the syllabus. It is underlined that aesthetics, when it comes to aesthetic experience, has nothing to do with the traditional “beauty”, but concerns sensation and perception. The inner aesthetic expression of a sloyd item has nothing to do with beauty, either, but with *originality*, *individuality* and *context*. The item should engage and touch the viewer. Art and craft are not set up against each other in this material, but sloyd is seen as craft, which content both aesthetic and practical values connected to identity. In the creative process, when design solutions are made, the students are to take aesthetic demands in relation to the users’ needs into account. On one hand the students shall develop the ability to combine color, form, and material towards creating more clear aesthetic and varied expressions. On the other hand, there is an ambition that the students develop a strong

language to be able to express themselves and interpret aesthetic expressions (even from other cultures), as well about their aesthetic experiences.

In addition to the commentary material connected to Lgr11, there is at this time also inspirational material available for teachers. Aesthetic expressions are here seen as something that should be understood and interpreted. This is exemplified by the importance of being able to express opinions about sloyd items and what the opinions are based upon. It is seen as important that the students are given different words to express what they feel and experience as nice, ugly, stiff or comfortable. An aesthetic piece should touch and engage. To be able to create aesthetic expressions the students must develop *basic skills* regarding (typical and non-typical) color and form and have the chance to try out combinations of the two, to see possibilities and limitations. It is seen as important to develop an ability to express *feelings, belonging* and *styles*:

It's about developing the ability to “see” and perceive what one is looking at.

Understanding the thoughts and emotions different objects evoke, and being able to convey something through one's own creation (Inspirational material, p.30, Our translation).

Then agree on an aesthetic expression that all students should use as a starting point in a craft project (Inspirational material, p.36, Our translation).

Interpret and Understand Aesthetics ↔ Create Aesthetics

In the last syllabus for Sloyd in Lgr22, the concept aesthetic is mentioned only two times, showing two perspectives of the relation between aesthetic and expression. One is the competence of *creating* different forms of aesthetic expressions, and the other is the competence of *expressing oneself* through different forms of aesthetic expressions. What can be stated is that the space for the concept of aesthetics is diminished compared with earlier curricula, but also that the field of tension is limited.

Create Different Established Forms of Aesthetics ↔ Create Own Forms of Aesthetics

In the commentary material related to Lgr22 aesthetics as a node becomes visible in a web of aesthetic *purpose, experience* and *expression*, where it takes on competing meanings. We can almost see that the same fields of tensions that became visible in the “Samtalsguide” (Lpo94) are present here, even if the steering documents Lpo94 and Lgr11 use the concept of aesthetics in different ways. The new component is aesthetic as a *purpose* that the students are to handle in their sloyd creating processes (where functional and sustainable purposes are seen as other possibilities). In the context of Lgr22, the most significant challenge may revolve

around balance between the exploration and creation of artistic expressions through sloyd with the consideration of their environmental impact (Lgr22). Being able to express yourself and creating personal expressions in sloyd objects is still a central part of the subject sloyd: “How colour, shape and materials can be combined to create personal expressions in one’s own craft objects” (Lgr22, p.40).

Teaching sloyd should arouse students’ *curiosity*, and the *desire to investigate* and *experiment* with expressions: “In this way, the teaching shall spark pupils’ curiosity and desire to explore and experiment with different materials, handicraft techniques and expressions, and to approach tasks in a creative way” (Lgr22, p. 37).

In the commentary material expression as a node becomes clear in a web of meaning surrounded by concepts like *conscious direction*, *desired (expression or function)*, *formulate own ideas*:

...the extent to which the student is purposeful and methodical in their experimentation, such as testing and comparing materials and craft techniques with the aim of achieving a desired function or expression instead of exploring aimlessly or without deliberate direction” (Commentary material, Lgr22, p.20. Our translation).

Central to Lgr22 is the ability to reason about and formulate one’s own ideas about expression and environmental awareness. A tension arises between being free in one’s experimentation but also to maintain a methodical and structured approach, to be given the opportunity to create artistic and creative expressions while simultaneously being considerate of the environmental impact. Aesthetic experiences are seen as something the students should be able to express themselves about, and they are to make choices and create different forms of (individual) aesthetic expressions through sloyd.

Aesthetic Values ↔ Aesthetic Experience

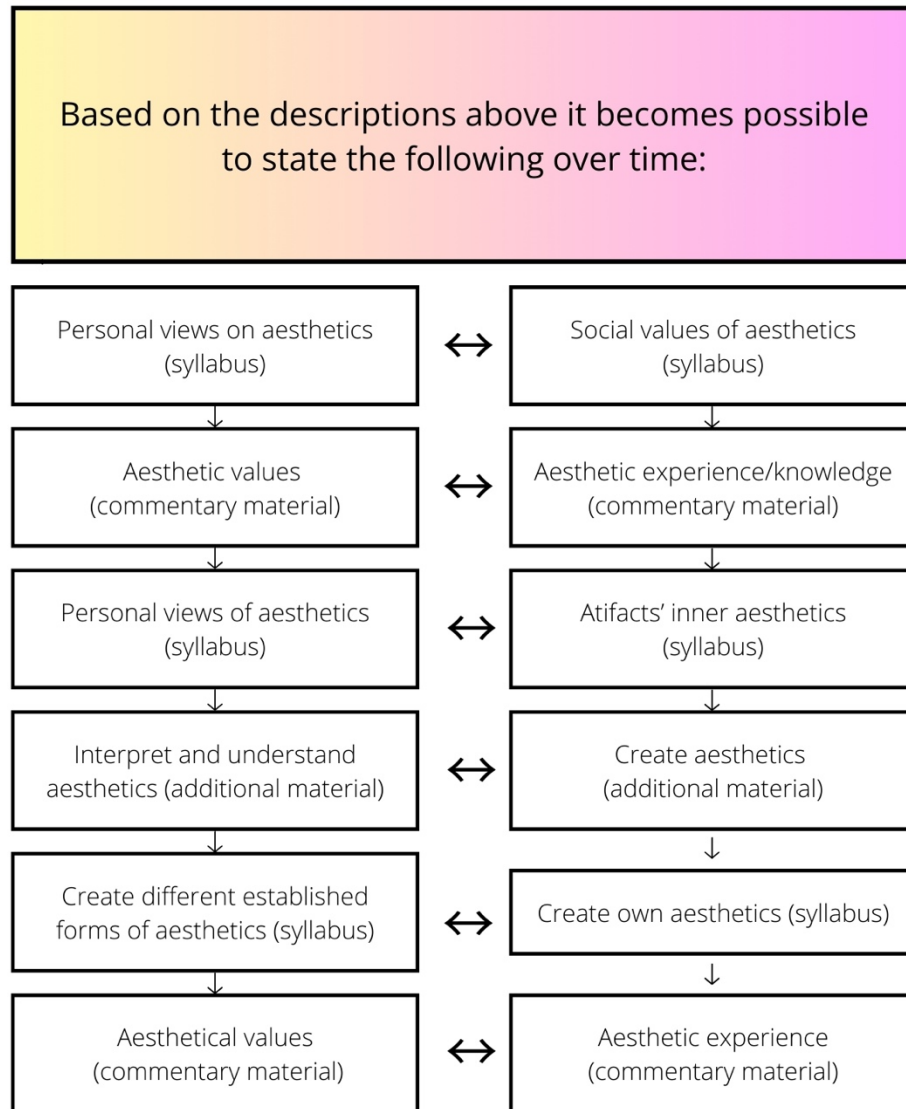


Figure 1.

Columns: Each box represents a specific conceptual aspect related to aesthetics in the different educational documents.

Arrows (↔): The doublesided arrows between the boxes illustrate the tensionfield in within each educational document.

Vertical order: The vertical order shows how these relationships are thematically structured over time.

Conclusion Aesthetic Node

What we can see is that the tensions in the additional materials are wider, and are kept almost the same during the years, the tension between socially agreed upon aesthetics and personally created aesthetics, while the fields of tension in the actual syllabuses vary in specific ways.

Node Culture

In LPO94/Kursplan 2000 we can see the emergence of different chains of equivalence in the cultural node. We see how the concept *culture* is written as *multi-cultural*, *different*, *as a background*, and *diverse*. In Kursplan 2000 this is shown by the formulation of the *students different cultural backgrounds*:

Crafts are also a means by which parts of our cultural heritage are maintained. The starting point for this may be local traditions or the different cultural backgrounds of pupils. The subject enables perspectives and understanding of different cultures to be broadened (Compulsory school syllabuses, 2000, p. 79).

In the quotation the *local tradition* and *the nearby society is also framed* as a way to deal with, and mediate cultural heritage. This kind of writing we do not find in later curriculum writings, in Lgr11 and Lgr22. The concept of culture is therefore framed as both *un-specific*, it does not state which culture the teaching of sloyd shall deal with, and *specific* (as in the nearby society). The *unspecific* is framed, for example in:

. . .develop an interest in and an understanding of creative and manual work through a familiarity with cultural heritage and craft traditions from a historical and cultural perspective (Compulsory school syllabuses, 2000, p.78).

The writing, and tension, of the *specific* (the children themselves as well as the local traditions) and the *unspecific* of different cultural traditions (an uncertain, unspecified - different - cultural heritage) is therefore there. "The subject enables perspectives and understanding of different cultures to be broadened" (Compulsory school syllabuses, 2000, p. 79).

Unspecific Culture ↔ Specific Culture

In Lgr11 we also see the tension between the specific and the unspecific. One example of this is the writing regarding cultural diversity in Lgr11, which states that: "Teaching should contribute to pupils developing an awareness of aesthetic traditions and expressions, as well as an understanding of crafts, handicrafts and design from different cultures and periods" (Lgr11, p. 255). In similar terms as in Lpo94/Kursplan 2000, it is phrased how different sloyd

traditions from different cultures can become inspirational material: "Handicraft and craft traditions from different cultures as sources of inspiration and models for pupils' own ideas and creativity" (Lgr11, p.257). In Lgr11, this specific culture appears as child and youth culture, for example in the phrase: "How symbols and colours are used in child and youth cultures, and what they signify" (Lgr11, p. 257), even though it is not specified which youth and child culture it refers to.

In the commentary material for Lgr11 we can find *chains of equivalence* between the concept of culture with the words *our heritage, identity, other*, as well as *different*. For example in the phrase:

The teaching of sloyd also helps to develop *the pupils' awareness of their cultural heritage*. The subject of sloyd bring different crafts to life while at the same time making use of techniques and idioms that have been passed down from previous generations or that through migration and globalization have become part of *our culture* (Commentary material Lgr11, p. 7, our translation and emphasis)

Other Cultures ↔ Own Culture

Consequently, the chain of equivalence in the commentary material for LGR 11 can be developed to deal with concepts like *imagination, visualizing, raising awareness in order to develop understandings of different cultural expressions*:

The encounter with historical and contemporary objects from different cultures, and the ability to interpret the aesthetic and cultural expressions of these objects, can also contribute with ideas for one's own creation. It is a way to get inspiration in the direction of developing a future personal design language (Commentary material Lgr11, p.8, our translation)

Preserving traditions and cultural heritage as well as giving students opportunities to create towards a future personal idiom becomes central. A field of tension emerges:

Develop Personal Expression ↔ Preserve Traditional and Cultural Expressions

We also found the formulation where this culture is specified, as in earlier text, and also here it is in relation to children and youth culture in this phrase: "By linking the teaching to *children's and young people's cultures*, identity development and current trends, the syllabus wants to place the subject of sloyd in a contemporary context and show its importance in different areas" (Commentary material Lgr11, p. 9, our translation and emphasis)

One culture that is specified in the commentary material for Lgr11 is the Sami culture as an

example for ethnic and cultural identity that the teaching of sloyd shall deal with: “An example of sloyd and handicrafts as an expression of ethnic and cultural identity can be found in Swedish and Nordic culture in the form of *Sami handicrafts*” (Commentary material Lgr11, p. 17, our translation and emphasis).

The chain of equivalence between different, multi-cultural and specific cultures, and the students own culture is also found in the inspiration material for Lgr11 where, on the one hand, cultures from different times, places and identities are written about as possible ways for the students to develop and relate their creations around. The definition of culture is broad in the material and contains formulations related to language, art, values, and norms within different groups or societies:

Culture exists in everything from how we dress to how we behave – you could say that culture is the way of life a society has with laws, customs, religion, traditions and norms. Culture can be seen over time and historically, but it also lives in the present. The term occurs throughout the world and can be a variety of things, such as language, art and values of a group of people or in a society” (Inspirational material Lgr11, p 19, our translation.)

There are also very specific cultures mentioned. For example, different indigenous peoples are mentioned in these phrases: ”Show and discuss different handicrafts and craft traditions that exist in different cultures, such as Sámi silverwork or bead embroidery from North America, to give students inspiration for their own sloyd work” (Inspirational material Lgr11, p26, our translation) and follows with: “In connection with the students learning about older cultures in other parts of the world, you can take the opportunity to highlight crafts from the rest of the world, such as Mayan Indians, Inuit or Aborigines” (Inspirational material Lgr11, p. 29. our translation.)

In inspirational material related to Lgr 11, expression in a web of meaning *voicing strong opinions, subjective judgements* about for example holidays and traditions emerge:

Start by presenting crafted items from different holidays or traditions and from different parts of the world. Discuss with the students what makes such an object appealing or not and what it is that makes the object associated with a particular holiday or tradition. Then have the students produce an innovative object, but with the same explicit connection to a chosen holiday or tradition (Inspirational material Lgr11, p. 36, our translation)

This complexity emerges when students need to interpret objects - they must make *subjective*

judgments, while also considering *established norms*: To have the opportunity to express oneself personally but also to fit in, the challenge of conveying and discussing emotionally charged ideas creates a field of tension.

Pushing the Boundaries to Express New Ideas ↔ Interpret Traditions and Cultural Expressions

In the inspirational material, other specific cultural phenomenon and cultures are also mentioned, for example under a working theme “sloyd with a statement” the Pride-flag, which is connected to the LGBTQ+ culture. In contrast to earlier writings, child and youth-culture is not mentioned in the later 2022 commentary material or in Lgr22. However, chains of equivalence between the multi-cultural/diversity/the other are still there. For example through the formulation of how the teaching shall cover: ”Design, fashion, art handicrafts and domestic crafts from different cultures and times as sources of inspiration in one’s own creation” (Lgr22, p.3).

In the commentary material to Lgr22 the Sami culture is also mentioned as a specific culture: “Handicrafts and craft traditions from different cultures can mean highlighting local traditions and cultures as well as national and international ones, such as the Sámi handicrafts or other indigenous peoples’ handicraft traditions” (Commentary material, Lgr22, p.15, our translation). It also states that the cultural expression can be drawn from the nearby society to the school, as in the quote: ”Design, fashion, artisanry and “domestic craft” can be included in teaching in many different ways, for example by involving the local community and thus finding inspiration outside of school”(Commentary material, Lgr22, p.15, our translation) or be inspired by earlier generations and/or by migration and globalization in order to deal with cultural heritage or legacy. Thereby, a field of tension between the *specific* and the *unspecific* culture, also becomes visible in this later curriculum in contrast to the commentary materials, where instead *own* and *other* cultures appear as fields of tension. Chains of difference that appear between the different texts, are which different *specific cultures* that are mentioned, such as child and youth culture and the students *own* cultural heritage in the early text, and in the later ones, the Sami or Mayan, Inuit or Aboriginal Culture.

Unspecific Culture ↔ Specific Cultures (syllabus)

Other Cultures ↔ Own Culture (commentary material)

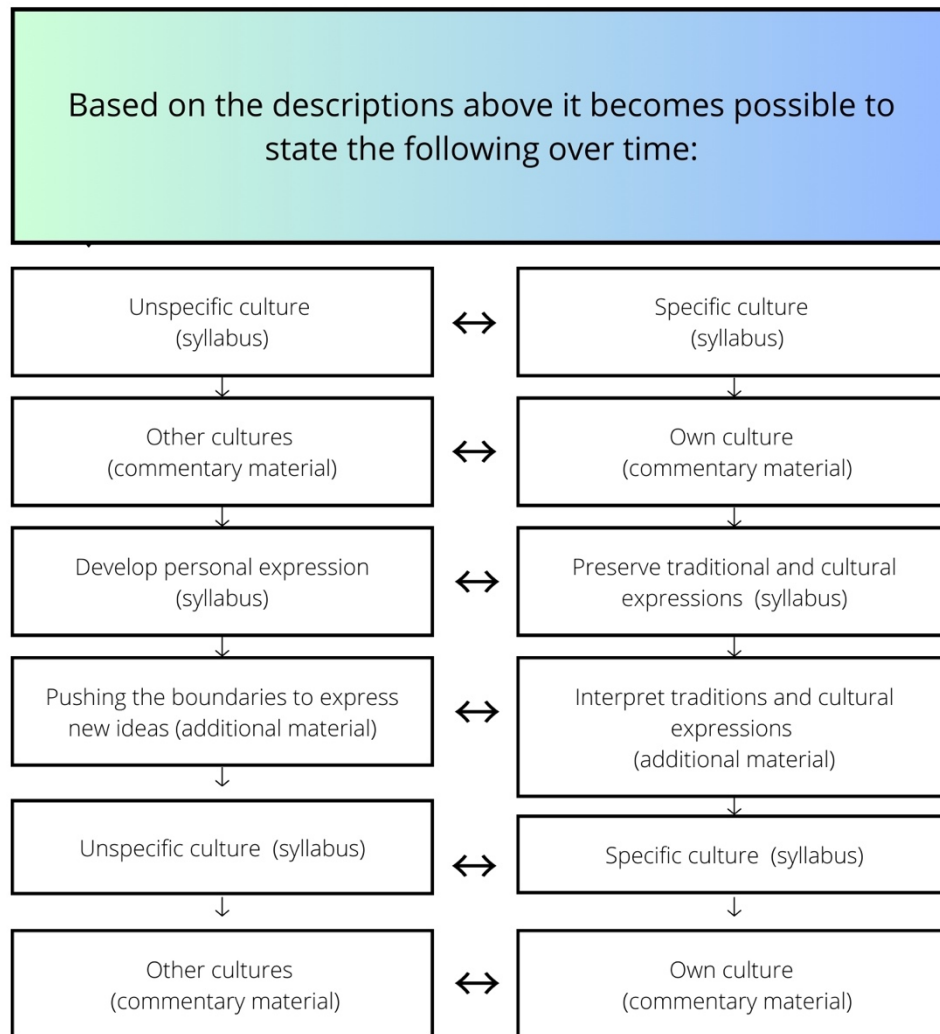


Chart 2. Columns: Each box represents a specific conceptual aspect related to culture in the different educational documents.

Arrows (↔): The double sided arrows between the boxes illustrate the tensionfield in within each educational document.

Vertical order: The vertical order shows how these relationships are thematically structured over time.

Conclusion Culture Node

We can see that the field of tension between nonspecific and specific cultures remains through all the syllabuses, and that the specification concerns vary. At the same time the field of tension between one's own and other cultures appears in the commentary material as well as in the last syllabus from Lgr22. Overall, it becomes obvious that there is an uncertainty what the node/notion *culture* means, and which culture is included when it is framed as its *own*, *other* and/ or *different*.

Spinning New Threads: Discussion and Further Thoughts

The aim of this study was to illuminate how ideas regarding teaching and learning in and about aesthetic and cultural expressions in sloyd emerged in the chosen steering documents. Above we have shown how some ideas have maintained over the years, and how others have interrogated with and challenged them, within and between different kinds of steering materials. It becomes clear that different ideas exist in parallel, which explains why teachers are confused, and might find specific parts of sloyd teaching challenging. Aspects of knowledge that are reflected in written steering documents have varied over time, and it has become obvious that the formulations could have an impact on opportunities for expressive acts in creation of sloyd (objects).

The way expression is positioned by the nodes *aesthetics* and *culture* could be categorized as following:

- social, collective, traditional, coded/norm-bound, value-laden
- subjective, individual, essential, innovative
- posthumanist, material
- constructivist, communicative, linguistic
- educational, pedagogical, experience-based, learning
- unspecified –general, universal, distant/infinite
- specified - important, clear, delimited, particular
- other - exotic, different, alien, external
- own - personal, familiar, internal

These different views could have some consequences for pedagogical practice. Sloyd teachers must relate to a variety of formulations about expressions that appear in curricula and support materials over time, overlapping and (re)constructing lingering pedagogical ideas. The differences between pedagogical ideas that emerge in curricula vs. support material have different lines of development and differ significantly in terms of meanings. One of the most important challenges for a sloyd teacher involves balancing expressions such as collective or subjective, expressions essential in sloyd objects or students - or emanating from traditions. In addition, teachers must relate to culture as an unspecified expression, which leads to alienation and distancing in relation to the mentioned and specified cultural expressions, which then appear as clear, important, and delimited. When cultures are named, boundaries are created. If culture is viewed as *other*, it may appear exotic, different, and strange, while the other extreme *own culture* might appear as a personal and familiar option. But how can teachers comprehend and categorize what is supposed to be the students' cultures, in developing personal expressions and idioms in sloyd?

Language creates understanding (Burr, 2015), and by formulating language in policy

documents in a particular way, a specific understanding is shaped, and other perceptions are excluded. Investigating policy documents as discourse (Ball, 2006) is a way to grasp policy texts as a frame of reference and a way to create a common understanding that allows certain objects to be formed (Burr, 2015). Through the method (Iversen, 2014) we have used, the different meanings of the central concepts of *aesthetics* and *culture* were made visible, and related to the different views of expression.

In the threads of pedagogical exploration, unraveling aesthetic and cultural expressions in sloyd reveals a delicate balance. Borg (2001) emphasizes that creative work can be linked to developing as a human being if the right conditions are provided. “Both children and adults can work with their own hands to express a vision of themselves, their own possibilities, their own wonder about the world around them and their own growth” (Borg, 2001, p.180). While *personal freedom* in creativity is discussed as being potentially limited by guidelines or structures, there is also an underlying aspect of anxiety associated with creating something “from within oneself” (Borg, 2001, p.179). To achieve a pedagogical balance between what students can or should express and what is taught poses a challenge for teachers. The question is, which attention structures (Homlong, 2013) become important in a specific context? Individuals interpret the world differently based on their experiences and goals, creating a safe space with the prerequisites for education given in the curriculum and support materials, with the goal to develop students’ personal idiom/expression in sloyd, seems distant. Rephrasing the act of expression to *meaningful expressions* could unlock numerous opportunities and spare students from the burden of revealing their identities in an environment not conducive to such actions. This should be investigated further.

References

- Ball, S. (2006). *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. Routledge.
- Borg, K. (2001). *Slöjdämnet: Intryck - uttryck - avtryck* (PhD dissertation, Linköping University Electronic Press. <https://doi.org/10.3384/diss.diva-143165>
- Borg, K. (2016). *Tema slöjd: Nordisk forskning, bedömning och läroplaner* (16; Tilde). Umeå Universitet. https://www.umu.se/globalassets/organisation/fakulteter/humfak/institutionen-for-estetiska-amnen-i-lararutbildningen/tilde/rapportserie/tilde_16.pdf
- Broman, A., Frohagen, J., & Wemmenhag, J. (2013). *Vad är det man kan när man kan tillverka ett uttryck i slöjdföremål?* Forskning om undervisning och lärande, (10), 6–28. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-132766>
- Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. Routledge.

- Fauske, L. B., & Haakonsen, P. (2023). *Tekstilaktivitet anno 1960 i lys av ansvarlig kreativitet : Mellom skapende krefter og virkelighetsnære oppdrag*. Techne serien - Forskning i sløjdpedagogik och sløjdvetenskap, 30(2), 67–87.
<https://doi.org/10.7577/TechneA.4883>
- Frohagen, J. (2016). *Såga rakt och tillverka uttryck: En studie av hantverkskunnandet i slöjdämnet* (Licentiate dissertation, Institutionen för de humanistiska och samhällsvetenskapliga ämnenas didaktik, Stockholm University). Retrieved from <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-134311>
- Hartman, S. red. (2014) *Slöjd, bildning och kultur. Om pedagogisk slöjd i historia och nutid*. Carlsson Bokförlag.
- Hartman, S. (2021). *Slöjd, bildning och profession*. Techne serien - Forskning i sløjdpedagogik och sløjdvetenskap, 28(4), 149–164.
<https://doi.org/10.7577/TechneA.473>
- Homlong, S. (2006). *The language of textiles: Description and judgement on textile pattern composition*. (Avhandling?) <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-7216>
- Homlong, S. (2013). *Like or dislike: Aesthetic judgements on textile patterns*. Proceedings from the 2nd International Conference for design Education Researchers, Oslo, Norge, s. 731–742. <http://konstfack.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:624982/FULLTEXT01.pdf27>
- Iversen, L. (2014). Presenting the iterative curriculum discourse analysis (ICDA) approach. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 36(1), 53-71, DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2013.830959
- Jeansson, Å. (2017). *Vad, hur och varför i slöjdämnet : textillärares uppfattningar om innehåll och undervisning i relation till kursplanen* (PhD dissertation, Umeå universitet). <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-130419>
- Jørgenesen Winther, M., & Phillips, L. (2000). *Diskursanalys som teori och metode* (1:22). Studentlitteratur.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985/2008). *Hegemonin och den socialistiska strategin. Gläntan produktion /Vertigo förlag*. (Original work published 1985)
- Swedish Agency for School Development. (2007). *Slöjd: en samtalsguide om kunskap, arbetssätt och bedömning*. [Sløyd: A conversation guide on knowledge, Working Methods and Assessment]. Liber Distribution.
- Mäkelä, E. (2011). *Slöjd som berättelse: - om skolgång och estetiska perspektiv*. (PhD dissertation, Umeå universitet, Institutionen för estetiska ämnen i lärarutbildningen). Retrieved from <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-46764>

- National Agency of Education. (2001). *Syllabuses 2000, Compulsory School*. Fritzes.
https://gupea.ub.gu.se/bitstream/handle/2077/30769/gupea_2077_30769_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- National Agency for Education. (2011). *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and School-Age Educare 2011*. Norstedts Juridik.
- National Agency for Education. (2022). *Curriculum for Compulsory School, Preschool Class and School-Age Educare Lgr22*. Norstedts Juridik.
- Swedish National Agency for Education. (2000) Grundskolan, Kursplaner och betygskriterier. [Compulsory School, Syllabuses and Grading Criteria]. Fritzes.
- Swedish National Agency for Education. (2008). Kursplanen - en riktlinje. Lärare om kursplanerna i svenska, samhällskunskap och kemi. [The Syllabus - A Guideline. Teachers on the Syllabuses in Swedish, Social Studies, and Chemistry]. (310).
- Swedish National Agency for Education. (2011a). Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet. [Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class, and School-Age Educare]. Norstedts Juridik.
- Swedish National Agency for Education. (2011b) Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i slöjd. [Commentary material to the syllabus in sloyd]. Grundskolan.
- Swedish National Agency for Education.]. (2015). Slöjd i grundskolan. En nationell ämnesutvärdering i årskurs 6 och 9. [Sloyd in Compulsory School. A National Subject Evaluation in Grades 6 and 9]. Fritzes.
- Swedish National Agency for Education. (2016). Slöjdens estetiska och kulturella uttryck - Inspiration för slöjdundervisningen. [Aesthetic and cultural expressions – inspiration for sloyd teaching]. Wolters Kluwers.
- Swedish National Agency for Education. (2022a). Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet. [Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class, and School-Age Educare]. Norstedts Juridik. <https://www.skolverket.se/getFile?file=9718>
- Swedish National Agency for Education.]. (2022b) Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i slöjd. [Commentary Material on the Syllabus in Sloyd]. Grundskolan.

About the Authors

Carolina Ekman is a PhD student in pedagogy at Södertörn University, Stockholm. Her dissertation project, titled Sloydtopia, explores sloyd education with a particular focus on aesthetic and cultural expressions as teaching content. She has presented parts of her work at the NERA Conference, the INPE Doctoral Colloquium, as well as several events at Södertörn

University.

Dr. Cecilia Ferm Almqvist is a Full professor of education and music education at Södertörn University, and a visiting professor in education at Gothenburg University. She graduated in 2004 with a phenomenological thesis about teaching and learning interaction in music classrooms. Her widely spread philosophical and empirical research focuses on democracy and inclusion in diverse arts educational settings.

Marie Hållander is an associate professor of Education at Södertörn University, Stockholm. She graduated in 2016 with the thesis *Det omöjliga vittnandet*, which was also published in 2020 in a re-written version as *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies – Through the Lens of Agamben* by Palgrave Macmillan. She is also a published author and have written the books *Tjänster i hemmet* (2013) and *Stubbrötter* (2023).

International Journal of Education & the Arts

<http://IJEa.org>

ISSN: 1529-8094

Editor

Tawnya Smith
Boston University

Co-Editors

Kelly Bylica
Boston University
Rose Martin
Nord University
Laurel Forshaw
Lakehead University

Jeanmarie Higgins
University of Texas at Arlington
Merel Visse
Drew University
Karen McGarry
College for Creative Studies

Managing Editor

Yenju Lin
The Pennsylvania State University

Associate Editors

Betty Bauman-Field
Boston University
Amy Catron
Mississippi State University
Christina Hanawalt
University of Georgia
Diana Hawley
Boston University
Heather Kaplan
University of Texas El Paso
Elizabeth Kattner
Oakland University
Mary Ann Lanier
Groton School
Allen Legutki
Benedictine University
Alesha Mehta
University of Auckland

Leah Murthy
Boston University
Hayon Park
George Mason University
Allyn Phelps
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Erin Price
Elizabethtown College
Natalie Schiller
University of Auckland
Tim Smith
Uniarts Helsinki
Yiwen Wei
Virginia Commonwealth University
Zahra Bayati, Helen Eriksen & Gry O. Ulrichsen
Solmaz Collective

Advisory Board

Full List: <http://www.ijea.org/editors.html>

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).