

First of all I want to say welcome to everyone and thank you all very much for coming to this seminar. I am very happy to see how many people are here today – from different parts of Europe and also from different parts of our community. I am happy to see so many who are willing and interested to participate in this discussion

How do we improve our vocational education system, in Iceland and in Europe – and specifically on the agenda to day, our creative education in connection with textile and drawing skills?

As mentioned in the program we Icelanders are not adding enough value to our exports. If educational standards in Iceland are compared to the combination of export goods we are not using our brainpower well. I am no expert in this field. But as I understand this we are not in bad company altogether. Another country with similar ratio is Norway. The explanation for Norway, maybe somewhat simplified, is that the nation exports a lot of oil. Our explanation is similar in many ways – we have natural resources. And apparently it is true that if nations have natural resources they do not use their brain–power as well. MYND

The Danes on the other hand, who have less natural resources, exported in the year 2006 2.143 million Euros worth of furniture while we exported 770 millions worth of fish. This is of cause no news – I remember having heard this as a child in school. But I had never grasped the size of this fact and what it meant.

Can we do better? Do we not have possibilities in Iceland that are of interest and value and could be used in more resourceful ways? Are consumers not getting more knowledgeable of how they impact the world around them? Will green policies not affect the way we are running our economy and our resources?

Education is not only about how to help students to become valuable workers. Education should also help a person to grow and develop his feelings, senses, personality, emotions, and expressions.

And education should make a lasting impression on the student. To do this there must be many different possibilities within the education system so a person will be able to find a way of interest where one can actually use all the senses in different ways.

It is a known fact that the dropout rate in upper secondary school in Iceland is one of the highest in Europe – When I last checked it was 30%. And according to the fiscal laws of Iceland in 2010 the ration of academic subjects in upper secondary schools was 83%.

Wanting to address all these issues I have mentioned we sets out, the Reykjavik School of Visual Art seven years ago with a pilot project called knowhow1. And two years ago another project, based on the previous one was accepted by Life long learning program of the European Union. The total budget of the application was (three hundred and seventy two thousand Euros (372.000) that made several things possible:

Collaboration between schools, companies and the Icelandic ministry of education.

To establish two new 2-year study-lines in drawing and textiles based on the Knowhow methodology of tactile learning - of which I will speak more of later.

Also to use as a tool - the European Qualification Framework (EQF) to make the education in these field in the different countries comparable and therefore making a link possible between level 5 and level 6. This creates mobility within the formal school system and helps students that have finished the first two-year in Iceland to continue their education within the partner schools and with an additional year of two to finish a BA or a BA honours degree.

Also a very important by-product of the project was to establish a platform between the six schools participating where students and teachers have been able to exchange experience and ideas.

And the partners in the project are;

The Reykjavik Technical College (IS)

Which is the largest upper secundary school in Iceland with 2000 students in 11 different departments.

The University of Cumbria (UK)

With 14.000 students on BA and MA level and a range of subjects including the Arts -Drawing, Textile, Ceramics, Fine Art, Graphic Design and Photography – Health Education and Social Sciences.

The Heriot-Watt University (UK)

The School of Textiles & Design is one of eight academic schools and institutes within the Heriot-Watt University. The textile and design school offers Bachelors, Masters and PhD level study for over 600 students. The research team from Heriot Watt, that participated in the Knowhow project has displayed some of their work here in front of the lecture room.

The Bergen National Academy of the Arts (NO)

has three departments and offers studies on BA & Master level and the school is also included in the national Norwegian Artistic Research Fellowship program which offers education on PhD level. One of the departments in the school is specialized art that includes the subject areas Photography, Printmaking, Ceramics and Textiles, where focus is on materials and methods.

The VIA University College (DK)

VIA University College offers a Bachelor Degree in Textile Design. The school is a part of TEKO, which is the largest design and business school within fashion and lifestyle in Scandinavia with 1100 students.

The Reykjavik School of Visual Arts (IS)

Is by far the smallest school in the project with around 120 full time students and around 400 part time students enrolled each year.

Associated partners are:

The computer games manufacturer, CCP, which is one of the leading computer games, companies in the world (IS), now employing over 600 people.

STEiNUNN Sigurðardóttir, textile designer and manufacturer, who has worked with international labels such as, La pearl, Calvin Klein and Gucci.

And finally the ministry of education culture and science in Iceland.

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The starting point of all this was the first knowhow I mentioned before. Here are some of the people that participated in the project. There we researched methods of teaching and learning with in art schools that deal with the act of making things. The project analysed the tacit understandings of learning and teaching within studio context, exploring the notion that the very act of making is intrinsic to effective and meaningful lifelong learning. And how the making and the thinking are indeed inseparable parts of the creative process.

A part of the final outcome of the first know how project was a curriculum; Forming clay and creative composites that we have been running in collaboration with the Technical college in Reykjavik since 2007.

And this curricula and the methodology that came out of the first project we transferred to the second project Knowhow2. This means that the methods from knowhow and the model of the curriculum for Forming were used as a template for the new departments.

Briefly said the most important part of the knowhow methodology are:

1)

To give the students the skills that make it possible for them to develop their ideas and express themselves through the materials and methods that each discipline demands.

For example during the knitting class of Steinunn Sigurðardóttir the student's developed their perception of nature and of different manmade objects through the action of knitting. It was not that they sat down and decided what feeling they wanted to express or what idea they wanted to transmit – the process, the thinking, the observation, the expression was

made directly through the act of knitting, the knitting-skill and was a way of creating something new.

Here we can see where a student is using a part of a car as her inspiration and a self-portrait from a student where her hair was as reference.

Of course this is only one part of the creative process. One also has to be able to step back and review what has been done, what is interesting, what should be thrown out and what is worth continuing with.

But this first part, to find many interesting possibilities is not a realistic one unless the skills are available. A limited amount of skill-set will limit the imagination. But creative skills will open new doors and a perception that is valuable and interesting.

One could argue that it is possible to go overboard on the skill factor. That wanting to use the skills in ways that are more like decoration or a way to show off the skills. That is not necessarily an interesting creative process. And in the end can also limit the imagination.

2)

To make links between different places, sectors and people within our society in Iceland and also with partners and institutions abroad.

Also to link theory and practice.

This means that we always try to get different opinions, ideas and process on board in every course. To collaborate with companies or people with different skills and knowledge. To cross borders – so to speak, between fields and countries.

For example to have a skilled craft person teach as well as someone who might know little about the process but more about the history and background of product design.

An example is the project that is on display in the back room where two teachers, a product designer and a ceramic designer collaborated with a

Khala, a 150-year-old manufacturing and design company in Europe. The outcome is what you see there in the back and these products were all made here in Iceland, based on traditions and history from this old company in Germany. MYND The products were then exhibited as a part of the company's profile at DMY which is a big design venue in Europe held every year in Berlin.

Also this project that the drawing department participated in last year where they worked with the students from the creative writing class in the University of Iceland on stories and illustrations. And this was later displayed at the University.

And finally to teach theory and studio courses in direct and interactive contact. This is a project a student turned in after a course in Phenomenology. The content of the course was the basic elements of our existence; fire, earth and air and also our memories that connected the elements to the individual. The students kept a diary during the course but the final project was not written output but a visual one where the students translated the theory into the materials – the baking with the fire, the earth with the corn and the air with rising of the dough – and an old chest that the student had from her grandfather.

It is our experience that by linking as many different fields and different kinds of knowledge and expertise together we are adding energy into the studies that are of vital importance.

3) and finally

To make every semester independent from the previous one. Each semester forms a unified whole where all the different parts of the studies are linked.

This means that theory, the source of inspirations, the materials and methods, the companies and museum visited, the teachers and lectures and visitor are all tied in into a core subject. This makes it possible to form an interesting dialogue between different parts of the education so each part is strengthening the other.

Example:

First semester in Forming – clay and creative composites called Roots. Students do research on Icelandic materials and clay; they visit many local ethnic museums and the National Museum. They have visits from geologist and anthropologist; they use primitive firing methods, like RAKÚ and they dig clay directly out of the pit.

To have each semester as a standalone module means that focus and energy are shifted each semester recharging the energy and if needed the number of students. And that is an important factor when we are teaching small groups like we have – to keep the numbers of students consistent.

So this methodology called knowhow we have discussed with our partners and developed with their expertise knowledge during the project. And this process we have also implemented to our new study lines.

The others ingredients in the new curriculums where: MYND

1)

The European qualification framework and the national qualification framework - The other schools curriculums. All sorts of benchmark statements and descriptions – that where in some cases VERY ACCURATE

And I must say the Scottish system does not leave much uncertainty anywhere!

And also an important factor

2)

Seven small researches from all the partners on needs of sector.

I will not go into any details on the procedures of the project. Just explain briefly the main outcomes.

Firstly it was important to compare the National Qualification Framework of each country and the curriculums from each school to find a common ground for the arts, to agree on the ground rules – so to speak – or to use the official language - how we would describe the qualifications framework for the two disciplines across the different countries; in Drawing and in Textiles –.

It was decided first to make a general description for the visual arts.

This coincided with two other projects the Reykjavik School of Visual Arts was involved with;

a development of a framework in connection with the implementation of the new national laws on upper secondary education that came into place in 2008. The framework for the visual arts was done with support from the ministry of education and in collaboration with the Iceland Academy of the Arts and the upper secondary school in Garðabær.

Secondly I was asked by the ministry of education to develop with partners from 4 schools and art disciplines in Iceland to make a general framework for the arts for upper secondary schools that would work for all the different art disciplines; fine art, dance, music, textiles, multimedia art...

Of course all these frameworks had to fit together and since it mostly originates from the same tool – the European Qualification Framework – it did fit!

Well... after all this I sort of felt as the biggest bureaucrat ever to have stepped inside an art school. But a draft was introduced and accepted at a partners meeting in Bergen.

A second important phase of the project was to make sector analysis and collect material with information from companies, from the school system and others on future direction and needs of industry. And also to talk to students who had finished their education and where looking for new educational possibilities.

The analysis was done in different ways in each institution and the outcomes are available at the web page of the project – Knowhow2. I do not have time to cover these researches here. Maybe Benjamin and Steinunn will talk – at least partly on what they see is needed.

Just to mention a few interesting factors that came out of the research:

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Heriot Watt. Found out that...

Over 50% of textile companies in Scotland are 'micro companies'
Employing less than 10 employees

- Almost 70% of companies have recognized that design is key to company global competitiveness

And

The Technical College found out that the numbers of students studying visual art in upper secondary education had increased from 100 students in the year 1997 to 1200 in the year 2009. But possibilities for them to continue to next level had not increased much.

At this time another fact also became apparent: students studying arts and culturally related subjects on tertiary level in Iceland were three times fewer than they are in the United Kingdom.

Well finally to cut the story somewhat short!

A draft curriculum was introduced to partners and to the ministry of education in Iceland in the spring of 2010. Based on that we received permissions to go a head from the ministry and from the two different occupational councils, in printing and graphic media and in craft and design. We received 100 applications 24 places in Drawing and in Textiles.

A final version was presented to the partners in the project was introduced last June. But the curriculums are not finished. Alternations and implementation are still being worked on. The Core issues of Icelandic Education which, are Reading in a broad sense, Creativity, Welfare, Equality, Sustainable development and Democracy, These need to be implemented and a final version will be submitted to the ministry of education next spring.

Having said that I know a curriculum is never finished – and should not be. There is always something coming up that can improve and add a dimension to the studies. MYND. A good proof of this was a project

drawing students were invited to participate in this fall. They were invited to make visible memories of Alzheimer patients. And what an inspiring and practical learning process this proved to be. It is likely that we will make a project similar to this one a part of the set curricula for drawing department.

So enough of said. As a part of this presentation I thought it would be useful to hear views from two students that have finished the first year of our curriculum. First I want to welcome Orri Snær and then Helga Aradóttir.