

Re: Adult Vocational Teaching & Learning - Craft Skills

I am Director of Training for the Association of Master Upholsterers and Soft Furnishers and I teach their upholstery and soft furnishing qualifications at Stages 2 and 3 to self-funding students over the age of 18 years, from my private training centre in Hertfordshire. Due to the lack of good quality training centres around the country, I have students that often travel hundreds of miles to get to here i.e. Cardiff, Bristol, Ipswich, Peterborough and Brighton.

Upholstery is a craft skill, which research has shown takes 10,000 hours to perfect i.e. what was offered by the old-style indentured apprenticeships. There are no quick fixes or magic formulas that can be taught or learnt in a short space of time. Craft skills, like upholstery, have to be practiced, as much of it depends on eye, feel and judgement and these skills only come with lots of practice.

Therefore, good practical skills can only be learnt by hands-on practical work that is constantly assessed by tutors that have the relevant practical craft skills and experience themselves.

In my experience this is done through a range of teaching and learning techniques:

- Having a course that is structured to consolidate their learning and develop their individual craft skills.
- Practical demonstrations at each important stage that can be repeated as many times as is required by the individual student.
- Students being able to replicate the demonstrated process themselves.
- Students need to take ownership of their portfolio work. This is done in the form of the own "work bible" with photographic evidence at each stage of a process that the student can annotate as they feel necessary, plus notes, handouts and research. This is a valuable tool that they can then use and refer to once their course has been completed.
- Good, clear and informative handouts that mean students do not have to write copious notes.
- Presentations, group discussions and questions and answer sessions that interest and challenge their understanding.
- Visits to relevant sector businesses and museums etc: Wesley Barrell, The Geffrey Museum, The Warner Archive Collection, the V & A and various Stately Homes.
- Visiting speakers that talk about their work and experiences.
- Competitions for good quality and creative practical work that is sponsored by businesses in the industry: Heico Fasteners, Kobe Fabrics and Bute Fabrics.
- Finally, students need to know that their work is going to be assessed and verified by an experienced practitioner not just someone that knows the theory.

I have 75 students that attend my courses on a weekly basis, and I run my courses on this basis. Last year my students achieved 95% credits and distinctions for their work. Since starting my training centre six years ago 40% of my students have gone onto work within the

industry or have started their own small businesses, which I think is testament to this system of teaching working well.

Wendy Shorter FAMU

Director of Training & Past President of the Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers

Awarded a Heritage Crafts Association Trainers Award 2012

Awarded Outstanding Training Provider of the Year 2011 by Proskills and sponsored by the Scottish Government.

Winner of the Women in Furnishings Awards 2010: Inspirational Woman of the Year 2010

Winner of the Hertfordshire Training Centre of the Year 2008: Special Recognition Award

Wendy Shorter is the author of "Professional Soft Furnishings"

Members of The Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers and approved to delivery their qualifacaitons.

