

1 Skills, methods and materials

The idea of a full "fingerlooping suite" has taken several years to mature. All pieces fell into one picture in spring 2012, when I finally had both the skills and the inclination to do a major revamp of my fingerloop braiding materials. My aim is to create something that is beautiful to look at as well as sturdy and versatile as teaching aid.

1.1 Studying and teaching fingerloop braiding

I do medieval reenactment in the Society of Creative Anachronism. While our level of historical correctness varies a lot, the Society does encourage the practice of medieval and Renaissance arts and crafts - and by practice I mean both learning, practicing and teaching these skills. Thus it is not surprising that I started to teach basic fingerloop braiding soon after I'd learned it myself. At that time (in about 2004) I had taught in other fields, but not much in crafts, so in the beginning the process was as much about me learning to teach as me teaching others to braid.

For several years I taught and braided only sporadically. I was lucky enough to secure myself a copy of Speiser's Old English Pattern Books while visiting London a few years back, and in due course that procurement showed up as new additions to my collection of samples. Slowly I also started more systematic study of fingerloop braiding and now I feel that I'm beginning to understand some of the structures involved. This manifests itself in the braids that I've varied for my own purposes, either to reflect e.g. a certain coat of arms or to experiment with more modern fibers and colourings.

For years I also dreamt of a website on narrow wares. First it was just supposed to be about luceting, but then I realized that there isn't that much information online and even less in Finnish. I've been on the Internet and doing web pages since when the World Wide Web was just a toddler, and I've seen how many Finnish knitters and crafters have overcome their fear of computers when the need to share has been so compelling. Thus

going online was and is very natural to me, I just didn't get around to creating a website until an uninvited change in my life suddenly gave me the time and the injunction to get started. I didn't think I'd ever have a blog of my own, but when I had figured out that I had to get some kind of a content management system. WordPress turned out to be the answer, so <http://www.lucet.fi/> finally became both a blog and a more static website for sharing knowledge as well as experiments.

1.2 The sample braid collection

I've braided all of my samples myself. The oldest are from 2003 when I learned fingerloop braiding with the newly published *Tak V Bowes*, the newest I've braided in spring 2012. I do most of my practice braids in mercerised cotton as that is gentle on my fingers and doesn't stick on coarse skin like silk tends to do, but still has the bright colours and some of the sheen of silk. As my samples have been to several outdoor fairs where the conditions are sometimes dust and damp, it has also been an advantage that, being cotton, they can be machine-washed among the normal washing. In the beginning these samples were stored in a small pouch, but once the pile seemed to develop a life of its own, I transferred the samples to punched cards where they stay put, sewn on if needed.

My original samples had a small tag with basic info attached to them, but over the years the tags fell off and got lost, and I no longer recall exactly, which braid is from which book. When I had to add cards to the sample collection, I rearranged the braids by technique and difficulty and scribbled the notes directly onto the cards, sometimes with English text on one side Finnish on the other. Thus I can easily pick out the braids I want to show to a certain audience and turn up the correct language, too.

1.3 Computing skills

My aim with the whole project is to write and draw everything just once and then to use different elements to create different types of teaching materials. While I'm fairly experienced with an average office computing

and Internet environment, it is only through my job as Documentation Manager that I finally came into contact with a different, more abstract, level of computing that provided software that can do what I'm aiming at.

1.3.1

All of the materials, both the printed output and the interactive pdfs, are typeset in ConTeXt, a macro language based on the TeX typesetting language. The whole system is based on the idea that the contents and the layouts are separated. So instead of doing the layout on screen like in the desktop publishing programs, the layout file contains a *description* of the layout, e.g. margins and font sizes, and the layout is only applied when a file is compiled. This enables me to compile several totally different looking pdf files based on the same elements or components.

Another reason to choose ConTeXt is that it is very easy to use the same graphics and photos in the different languages. ConTeXt also enables me to keep the Finnish, Swedish and English texts together in a single file as I can use simple switches to pick the language I need - and for proofing, I can compile the whole thing and easily check that the instructions are the same in all languages.

ConTeXt is open-source multi-platform software and free for all except publishing houses that sell typesetting services. It comes with some public domain fonts, but with this project in mind I purchased the Lucida OpenType font set from TUG, the TeX User Group. Not only was it reasonably priced and fully scalable and legible in print as well as on screen, Lucida OT is a full font family that contained everything I needed for the project, even the Gothic style Lucida Blackletter.