

# How Handwork supports your child's growth and development

Handwork is an integral part of the Waldorf educational curriculum and philosophy which is based on educating the whole child: head, heart, and hands. Every subject is carefully attuned to the developmental level and needs of the children and their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

The handwork curriculum develops from one thread (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade knitting and crochet) to making the thread (3<sup>rd</sup> grade spinning) to bringing together plain fabric and embroidery stitches in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, to knitting in 3 dimensions ("in the round") in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades bring developing 3D patterns (for stuffed animals), hand sewing clothing or dolls, and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the handwork curriculum meets the history curriculum with sewing by machine and the industrial revolution. In fact, all through the grades, handwork has been supporting other subjects – making animals as the children hear fables in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade is just one example.

Working with the hands and developing fine finger movement is in itself a valuable exercise. It's well known now that finger dexterity builds brain synapses, and concrete thinking and problem solving in early years leads to enlivened abstract thinking in later years. Over the last 15 to 20 years, teachers have seen a remarkable decline in children's fine motor skills. At the same time, children have been playing more with precisely manufactured toys instead of uneven logs, stones, mud and sand, and of course, they have had far more access to online 'games'. These activities have limited the need for very subtle and intricate hand movements – and the need for imagination and creativity in turning something into something else – in other words imagining and inventing something never seen before. Precisely manufactured toys rob the children of their potential for creativity and inventiveness, imagining and calling into being something never seen before - such as a bridge made from mud and sticks, or a boat made from a curled leaf.



Handwork - making something beautiful, useful, or playful from the simplest and most basic of materials - is a vital tool for cognitive development, as well as preparing those fingers for playing a musical instrument, managing wood- and stone- working tools capably, for exact geometric drawing in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and for so much more. This fine finger movement (and nimble thinking) will also serve to prepare future surgeons and space engineers.

Children learn to perceive the world through their senses. First through movement, and then through listening and speaking, and then they are able to make 'inner pictures' in their imagination, picturing what could be, but is not yet manifested. All of these stages are supported by making beautiful and practical items in handwork. Handwork also offers a true sense of tangible accomplishment and efficacy; children can contribute in a real way to their household by making potholders for the kitchen, or a knitted toy for a new cousin. This affords them a valuable sense of agency and connection to their community.

Handwork is especially important in these turbulent, anxiety-ridden times and can be an effective antidote to the isolation and powerlessness of our current times.



Waldorf Handwork Educators  
[www.waldorfhandwork.org](http://www.waldorfhandwork.org)