

# Thinking, Feeling, & Willing in Handwork

**Head, heart, and hands. Thinking, feeling, willing.**

These are common words used as catch phrases to say that Waldorf Education addresses all parts of the human being. We do not educate just for the head, and set the rest of the human being aside. Thinking, feeling, and doing (= *willing* or “*will forces*”) are all equally important in a well-rounded person.

Thinking, related to the head, is a wonderful part of each human being. We can think about all kinds of things, but without feeling some excitement or enthusiasm to put our ideas into action with our *willing* (*doing something with* our hands/limbs), these ideas come to nothing. I may invent a new gadget, I can be very enthusiastic, and my heart may race with excitement, but without putting in the work of careful planning, overcoming difficulties, and persevering with determination – using my will forces – nothing will actually happen.

The *will* in Waldorf education is not willfull and it’s not about wanting to. It’s about **doing**, taking action, setting something in motion in the real world. Handwork (and woodwork) are prime examples and the most obvious subjects that educate the will. Nothing happens if you simply think about, or just hold fabric, thread, and a needle. You have to be actively engaged, overcome setbacks and frustration, and persevere to the end. A great example of a young child’s will is when they learn to walk. They want to move across the room, they fall down, they get up, they trip, they collapse, but they don’t give up, they persevere and they keep getting up.

Some people move into activating their will forces primarily from an intuitive, feeling position, and some primarily from an analytical, thinking position. Somewhere in 3rd or 4th grade, children begin to make a shift in the way they activate their will forces and this offers teachers an opportunity to both strengthen each child’s natural *will* and provide balance. Ideally, a well-balanced person will be able to draw as needed on their thinking, feeling, and will forces when all are present and equally available.

A very helpful discussion of “feeling-will” and “thinking-will” can be found in our blog [Why we do What we do](#). Here, two ways to make a wooden spoon in 6th grade are described: the student who works from thinking-will is most comfortable sketching out the finished shape of the spoon with care and logical thought; the student who works mostly from feeling-will is most comfortable working in a less scientific and more artistic way to feel their way into the shape of the spoon, discovering the nature of that particular piece of wood as they work.

We may tend to think of the feeling-will as a younger child's approach, and the thinking-will as a next step. In fact, both approaches are equally valid, and teachers can and should attempt to balance these options within the children we teach, so they can draw on multiple ways of approaching a task. In this way, they will eventually be able to permeate their scientific thinking with artistic feeling, and permeate their artistic instincts with clarity and avoid leaning too far in one direction to the exclusion of the other.



### **How does this look in 4th grade embroidery and cross stitch?**

In approaching a task such as embroidery or cross-stitch, both clear, thoughtful planning and a refined feel for color and form are essential.

In embroidery, the thinking-will stitcher will plan and often prefer to use pre-drawn patterns; the feeling-will stitcher will “go with the flow” and make up the design as they go. At worst, the first example can look lifeless, and the second example can look random. At best, the first is carefully placed to serve the designated purpose; the second is lively and joyful.



In cross-stitch, a person working out of thinking-will is most likely to want to use mirror-imaging, 2- and 4-way symmetry (sometimes 8-way symmetry!!), and sew relatively intricate patterns with the need to count exact numbers of stitches (3 blue, then 2 aqua here and repeat — appropriately flipped — in the other 3 quadrants). The feel for color can often be lost in the mathematical calculations and focus on numbers. A person working more out of feeling-will is more likely to find balance, and not exact mirror imaging; they will feel their way through the movement of color and the sense of weight and levity in the colors. The sense of form and signaling the use of the item can often be lost as the sewer loses themselves in the color. Ideally, the thinking-will stitcher can incorporate an artistic sense of color, and the feeling-will stitcher can use some planning capacity. The teacher will help the students balance the two.



**Which is best: thinking-will or feeling-will? Neither and both!** Our goal is to balance these tendencies within each child so they can use both. Teachers must always be keenly aware of their students and their particular needs. It is possible, for example, that during a challenging math

morning block, students will need to relax and “breathe out” more into an artistically oriented handwork lesson. Perhaps if handwork follows painting, they will be ready for more thinking-oriented planning and design activities. In some settings, children may benefit from less analytical work as a balance to their daily experiences outside school, and the exact opposite may be true in other settings.

[https://www.waldorfhandwork.org/post/thinking-feeling-willing-in-handwork?postId=ece95533-e688-4739-93e6-9ca0fef110e6&utm\\_campaign=028e2d51-357e-4b44-a67c-7b907320d4a3&utm\\_source=so&utm\\_medium=mail&utm\\_content=b103addb-8eda-424a-988a-66b01b3d012b&cid=561532d5-fd25-4c33-9698-cd25b2ad8a28](https://www.waldorfhandwork.org/post/thinking-feeling-willing-in-handwork?postId=ece95533-e688-4739-93e6-9ca0fef110e6&utm_campaign=028e2d51-357e-4b44-a67c-7b907320d4a3&utm_source=so&utm_medium=mail&utm_content=b103addb-8eda-424a-988a-66b01b3d012b&cid=561532d5-fd25-4c33-9698-cd25b2ad8a28)