



Threads Crossing the Warp

MODULE 11

The educational value of weaving and personal development



Partners



ΧΑΡΟΚΟΠΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
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WEAVING AND EDUCATION

Children are subject to a lot of pressure as regards academic achievement.

Little use of art in teaching is being observed in practice.

By introducing weaving in the teaching process, children can explore new realms of thinking.

Satisfaction, motivation and involvement in art can materialize thoughts into a product.

The process is of crucial importance because children use artistic means and methods to create a product.

Through weaving children can become familiar with the different types of fabrics and the way fabrics interact with one another, people and words.

SKILLS THAT CHILDREN CAN ACQUIRE:

1. Pattern and shape recognition (math skills)
2. Fine motor skills
3. Following directions
4. Patience
5. Creativity

PATTERN AND SHAPE RECOGNITION

The ability to recognize and predict patterns is essential mathematical and critical thinking skill. In math, the task of recognizing patterns involves predicting what number comes next in a sequence, or recognizing linear and nonlinear functions on a graph. Becoming skilled in number patterns, can prove useful in mastering other mathematical concepts.

But people can benefit from recognizing patterns in other areas as well, not just math. Patterns are often used by analysts to predict changes in the economy. A patient's medical history can be investigated through patterns. Artists and musicians search for and make use of patterns in their creations.

PATTERN AND SHAPE RECOGNITION

Humans have a natural tendency to recognize and form patterns. The drive to pattern-recognition and pattern-forming start being observed at an early age and follow people throughout their life, as it can be a spur to curiosity, discovery and experimentation.

Humans since an early age have the ability to copy, extend or create a pattern such as colored blocks: yellow, blue, yellow, blue.

PATTERN AND SHAPE RECOGNITION

For example, the activity of making bracelets with increasingly complex patterns requires that children sort, select and plan ahead to complete the process accurately.

Through such an activity the child is able to understand positions and direction, such as right-left, top-bottom, behind-in-front, between, under, over, etc.

Bracelet making is more than making a colorful accessory. It helps children to recognize and create patterns with shapes and colors. Practicing cognitive skills will benefit them when they grow older.

In addition, since this activity involves working with shapes such as triple hexagon and single rhombus, it helps children to become familiar with shapes that they'll encounter later in geometry.



FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Besides being able to recognize spatial relationships, creative handicraft activities can teach children fine motor skills.

For example, by means of this activity a child can learn to place all those tiny bands correctly and manipulate them with the hook. In order to hold the hook correctly, the child must be able to grip the hook with three. This tripod grip, is the same skill the child will need to hold a pencil correctly.

Even sorting the bands by color and attaching them to the correct pegs requires the use of small muscle groups in the hands and fingers, thus contributing to stronger muscles in these parts of the bodies.



FINE MOTOR SKILLS

The way the hook is held is known as a pincer grasp.

The looms require the use of both hands, which builds bilateral hand-eye coordination.



FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

Another important skill acquired through creative activities is the ability to follow directions.

Children can be given tasks that they can master, but only following directions from an adult, as the activity is challenging enough that children cannot do it themselves.

As the adult guides and supports, the child joins in the interaction and picks up mental strategies. As her competence increases, the adult steps back, permitting the child to take more responsibility for the task.

This form of teaching in education is known as *scaffolding*.

Attention is critical during this stage.



PATIENCE

Some handicraft activities are not quick or easy to create, thus requiring children to display patience.

Elastic-band loom bracelets, for example is such an activity that helps a child to learn patience. Sometimes children can spend an hour or more working on a bracelet, only to realize that they have made one small mistake and will have to unravel the entire creation and start it over again. It can be a very frustrating experience for children, but when they complete a bracelet, it is very rewarding!

The sense of accomplishment when a child completes an entire bracelet is a fantastic way to build their self-esteem.

CREATIVITY



Creativity is the ability to produce work that is *original* yet appropriate — something others have not thought of that is useful in some way (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007).

Creativity is a crucial aspect of a child's development.

By engaging in creative activities children can learn to explore self-expression. In turn such activities help children to grow mentally by allowing them to expand their ways of thinking, practice problem-solving skills and try out new ideas.

The looms might prove to be a fun and entertaining activity for children.

IMPORTANCE OF CRAFTS IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Uno Cygnaeus in Finland and Otto Salomon in Sweden were major leaders in the development of a systematic Sloyd model for school education. They emphasized the usefulness of constructing objects through formal educational methodology.

According to the founder of the Finnish school system, the main purpose in craft education is to practice hand–eye coordination, as well as to develop a general aesthetic sense. However, the inclusion of craft in the curriculum can be done mostly due to practical reasons: it is important that people are able to prepare the tools and artefacts needed in everyday life. After industrialization, craft teaching was rooted in learning the skills believed necessary for the success of a nation state.

IMPORTANCE OF CRAFTS IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Simultaneously, the learning objectives of the entire basic education system have been challenged, even all over the world.

Teachers are encouraged to provide more participatory learning tasks, as well as to include the pupils' own thoughts, ideas, emotions and sensations into the learning process while contextualizing them with a facilitative approach towards teaching.

Children's ideas can be accessed and expressed with art as educators attend to process and product using inquiry learning in early childhood education.

Enjoyment, motivation, and engagement in art can transfer thoughts into materiality with a product. Even so, the process is of great importance. Children can also use art to explore materials and think in active ways as they interact with things, art processes, people, and words.

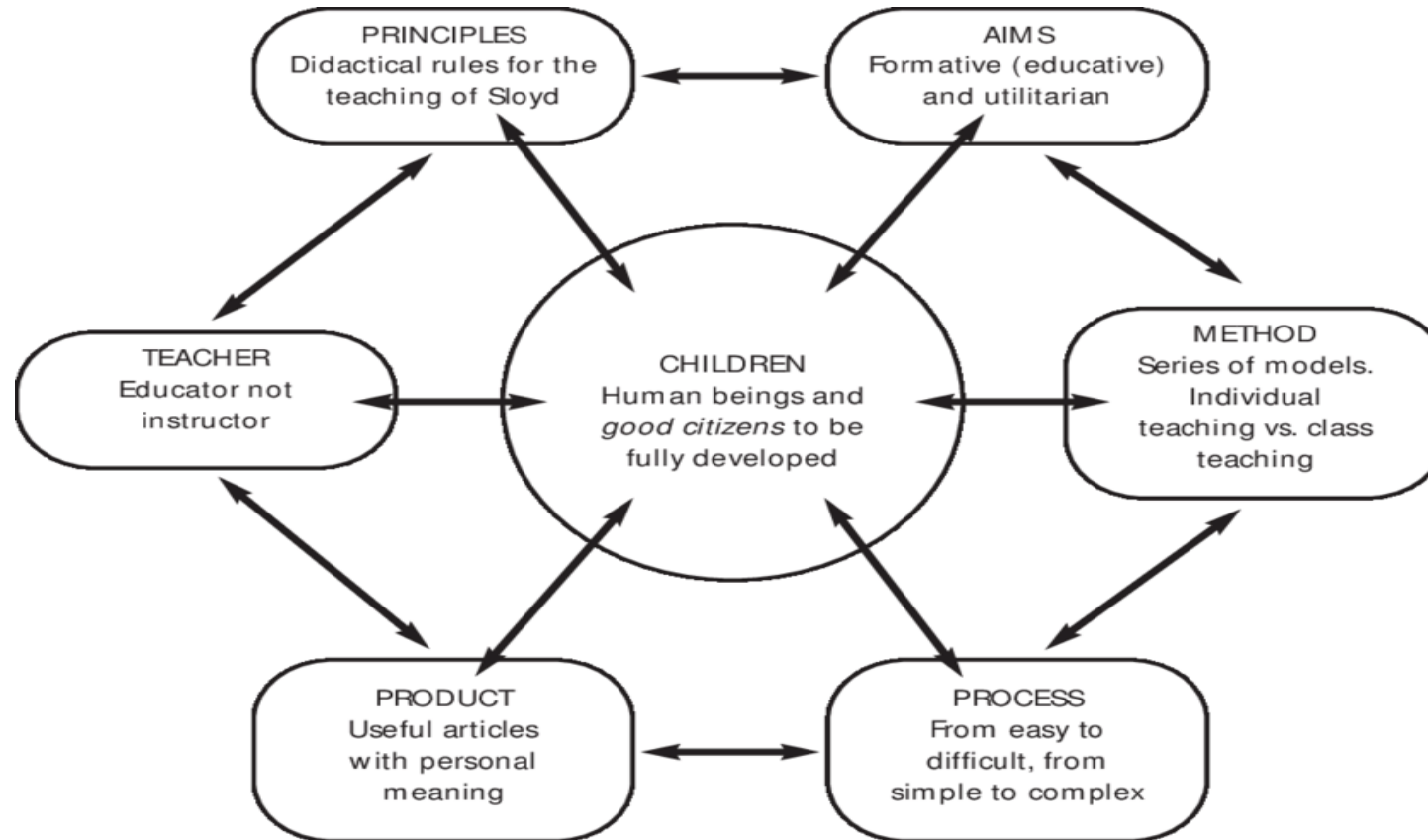
SLOYD PEDAGOGY

“Sloyd” pedagogical model emphasizes the use of school activities to produce useful and decorative objects.

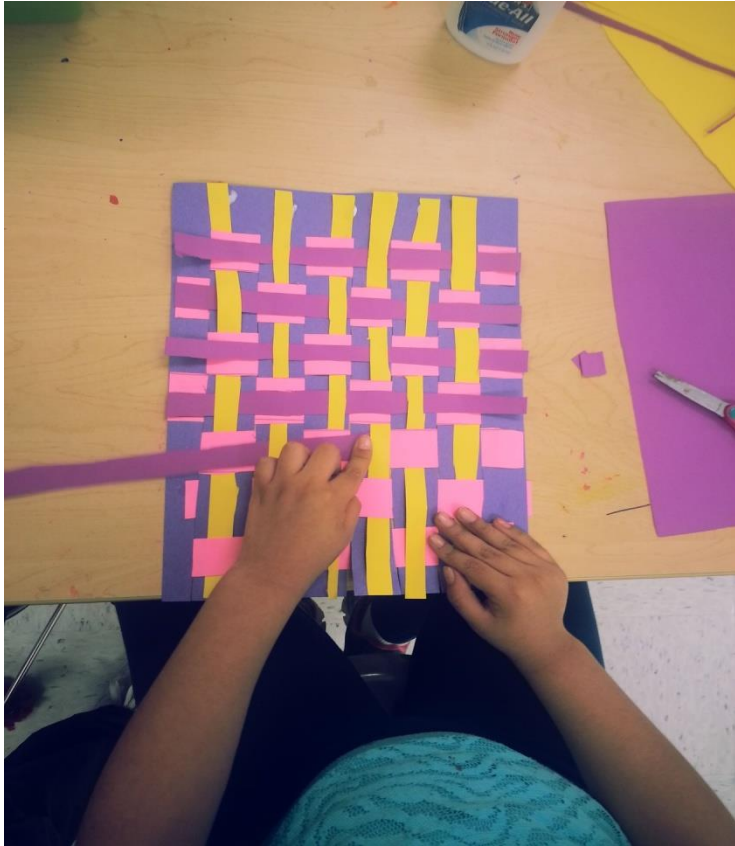
It is a pedagogical system of manual training which seeks to develop the child in general, through learning technical skills in woodworking or in sewing and knitting, and making useful objects by hand.

Scholars have embraced the concept of “sloyd” and integrated the concept into their own educational theory, according to which handicraft activities can contribute to the overall development of the child. He underlined the importance of teaching basic knowledge and skill in the beginning to enable more advanced stages in the development of the individual as a good citizen.

THE DIDACTIC SYSTEM OF SALOMON FOR SLOYD EDUCATION



IMPORTANCE OF CRAFTS IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM



CRAFT AS SELF-EXPRESSION

Craft as self-expression refers to that pedagogical model that combines craft education and art education. It is based on the concepts of a holistic craft process and expression of one's inner-self through different mediums, such as words, music, painting and so on.

In this kind of self-expressive process, children learn to recreate several details of their daily lives, thus are better able to come to terms with the demands and situations they face in their lives.

While accomplishing something successfully, a feeling of satisfaction arises which contributes to the individual's sense of uniqueness. It bolsters the pupil's identity as an independent actor and creates a positive self-image.

Self-expressive tasks that call for insight into different life situations and cultures, make children aware of the existence of a variety of different cultures and human experiences, and teach them to tolerate this variety. Finally, as a consequence of an improved self-esteem, craft as self-expression can increase the quality of life by adding a feeling of joy to their lives.

CRAFT AS SELF EXPRESSION

Craft as self-expression is brought about through the pupils' own, active self-expressive process . The teacher only acts the role of assistant and facilitator in this process.

In the teaching context, for instance, the teacher's role is to create an open and supportive atmosphere.

In this pedagogical model, self-expression, as well as creativity serve as criteria against which assessment is being made. The ultimate learning objectives are learning from the craft process, self-orientation and working, and also on emotional experience that are meaningful to the learner.



HANDWEAVING TRAINING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Handweaving helps people with disabilities to:

- Maximize and create the concept of individuality
- Bring out their true nature and become independent in their own ways
- Take positive steps, notice the meaning of being independent, and eventually visualize self-actualization.


Handweaving training involves opportunities and elements to reflect on ourselves, self-choices, and self-actualization.

HANDWEAVING TRAINING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Weaving is an activity for the sake of enjoyment deriving from the activity, as it doesn't involve the idea of failure. It is a big-picture thinking with no standards like something must be such and such, therefore, frayed or loosened threads or taking wrong steps can be an interesting effect that adds human warmth, rhythm, and personality.

Such thinking is useful for mental health care and gives a chance to experience that lead to self-acceptance and self-actualization, and is widely accepted by people with disabilities, as well as elderly people.

Combined with the ideas of improvement of QOL (quality of life) and normalization, weaving has become popular as an effective way to social inclusion, to reflect on oneself and as a means of self-expression that helps to become independent.

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- Weaving is a process which requires physical and cognitive abilities.
 - The process is expected to result in a tangible product for all.
 - Involvement in:
 - ✓ Creative work
 - ✓ Acquisition of new skills
 - ✓ Rewarding work
 - All of these lead to positive outcomes and an increase in the quality of life



Creative activities lead to an increase in the individual's well-being and contribute positively to his/her development.

WHO has defined well-being as the ability to realize one's potential, cope with stress and contribute to the society.

Participation in activities which contribute to an increase in one's well-being and feeling of satisfaction from life can result in:

- Lower level of psychological discomfort
- Reduced levels of depression
- Reduced anxiety
- Reduced stress
- Acquisition of new skills
- Increase in the expression of creativity
- Increase in social interaction, etc.

WEAVING AND FLOW STATE

- When under stress, individuals should find ways to cope with it. Repetitive movement patterns during the process of weaving may result in relaxing response, thus reducing stress levels.
- “Flow state” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1970)
- Flow can happen:
 - ✓ When a person is faced with a series of objectives which require adequate responses
 - ✓ When a person is completely involved to overcome the challenge
- Weaving possesses both characteristics.
- Individuals will make use of their mental and physical skills to the utmost to achieve something difficult but worthy and provide immediate feedback.
- It results in positive feelings and hope.

WEAVING AS THERAPY

- Occupational therapy: interaction of involvement in a meaningful activity with health
- Occupation- the main indicator of health and well-being
- Health depends on having the freedom to choose and a degree of control in everyday activities
- Participation in the activity of weaving makes people perceive themselves as:
 - ✓ Capable
 - ✓ Healthy
- Weaving becomes a meaningful activity which helps individuals regain a sense of control and return to normality.

WEAVING AS THERAPY

- Individuals use weaving as a way to:
- Distract themselves from chronic pain
- Relax
- Avoid closing oneself off
- The ability to get rid of negative thoughts helps individuals to retain a sense of control and achievement
- Through the activity of weaving they recreate a positive identity as a result of:
- Coping with pain
- Relaxation
- Improved quality of life
- Interaction with others.

THE BENEFITS OF WEAVING:

- Physiological
- Psychological
- Behavioral
- Social

WEAVING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

- Loneliness and social isolation play a crucial role on the health and well-being of individuals.
- Loneliness can result in an increased risk of:
 - ✓ Heart diseases
 - ✓ Suicide
 - ✓ Slow recovery from illnesses, etc.
- Collective feelings involve sharing tasks with a group.
- This leads to feelings of belonging, which in turn results in an increase in the quality of life and well-being
- Weaving groups can serve as places where people talk freely with each other and do not feel challenged by non-verbal communication

WEAVING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Crafts also provide a recognized way of reducing loneliness and social isolation, particularly among people living in rural or disadvantaged areas.

Group participation in activities such as weaving, is particularly effective at fostering:

- cooperation,
- a sense of self-concept
- a sense of social inclusion for children, adults, families and communities and across different cultures.

Engagement with the arts can also lead to greater prosocial behaviors within communities, including volunteering and charitable giving, and can enhance social consciousness.

Weaving helps build social cohesion and support problem solving skills through developing cognitive, emotional and social skills for constructive engagement with conflict, and by supporting empathy, trust, social engagement, collaboration and transformative learning, thereby producing more cooperative relationships

WEAVING AND SOCIAL DIMENSION

Despite the fact that crafting is done alone, it nurtures a feeling of togetherness and connectedness with family members, relatives, and friends. Resulting in visible objects, the crafts have symbolic meaning to family members. In addition to being considered concrete and visible evidence of kinship and love, crafting is perceived as strengthening family ties.

The fact that the product is very often made for the home or for some dear people explains why human relations make the process or the product meaningful.

WEAVING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES



WEAVING AND PHYSIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Chronic pain is multidimensional, involving a complex interaction between biological processes, a dynamic nervous system, and psychological and social issues.

Different studies speak for the positive effects of handicraft activities in alleviating pain and lowering stress. For example, some scholars have focused on the use of weaving and other arts as a means of therapy for women dealing with chronic illness and pain.

Women participating in the study point to the functions of art making as a distraction; a means for engaging the mind, body, and emotions; a relaxing activity; a way to avoid becoming self-absorbed; as well as a means for coping with the new onset of disability.

WEAVING AND PHYSIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Their remarks are in line with the findings of some scholars who found that textile art increases one's control over unwanted and intrusive thoughts. Variations on the themes of coping with pain, relaxation, quality of life, and giving back to others were almost universal among the women, suggesting that they were reclaiming a positive identity through creative occupation.

Even though studies of this kind mainly focus on weaving as a crafting activity, weaving activities can equally be used as an effective tool to manage pain by facilitating small changes, such as lowering stress levels, enabling relaxation.

WEAVING AND PHYSIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

Other forms of art such as dancing, crafts, and storytelling can also benefit patients and their relatives by teaching them strategies to be better able to manage cancer-related concerns. These strategies can find application even afterwards in their daily lives.

Therefore, the findings of some scholars come as no surprise, when they say that in a period of personal crisis, such as the case of a life-threatening diagnosis, individuals can take up creative occupations, due to their ability to help patients to regain a sense of control and normalcy in their lives.

Another study with cancer patients is a further example which proves the potential of creative activities to soothe pain. The work shows that participants with declining physical abilities and existential concerns learned to adapt and cope with their situation through creative activities. The practical implications of such findings can help shift from the negative focus in palliative phases of cancer to an understanding of how enriching aspects of life can still be maintained.

WEAVING AND PHYSIOLOGICAL DIMENSION

A number of studies have investigated on the positive impact that weaving may have on pain relief through the effect of bilateral patterns of hand movement on brain maps.

One of the scholars who has researched the psychological effects of weaving has pointed to the positive impact of automatic movements on rumination and the effect of the 'end product' on the reward system. While others have stressed out the positive effects of weaving on cognitive function through stimulation from color, texture and being creative.



WEAVING AND MENTAL HEALTH

- The number of people suffering from depression is on the increase.
- Weaving is a process which results in a product.
- For people suffering from depression, it can prove very helpful because it leads to feelings of achievement
- A rewarding system is enacted
- Weaving can be considered a relaxing activity, just like meditation

WEAVING AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Studies show that those participating in weaving activities report experiencing:
 - Improved quality of life
 - Self-efficacy feelings
 - Self-esteem
- According to Bandura, individuals experience an increase in self-efficacy by observing the successes of others which leads them into believing that, they too can attain success through persistence and effort.

KNITTING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Studies investigating the effects of knitting on mental health showed that repetitive movement promotes the release of calming serotonin, which in turn lifts mood and dulls pain. Making things with our hands activates different brain circuits to, say, office work. Two-handed movements across the midline of our bodies is recognized as using a lot of brain capacity, leaving less room for other issues.

Some scholars have even found that knitting can act similarly to several relaxation techniques, as the mind only focuses on a physical task, and serves as a distraction from other emotional or psychological concerns. The activity of knitting can also be compared to meditation as a relaxing activity due to its meditative components of sitting comfortably, counting and repetitive movements. As a result, the same alpha-wave pattern as meditation can be produced while knitting, helping a person to deal with depression and anxiety.



WEAVING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Different studies have identified the positive impact of social support in protecting individuals from the harmful effects of stress. The benefits of weaving “works” as an individual activity are enhanced by attending a supportive social group.

Communication, mutual learning, exploration and discovery are some of the benefits which derive by attending support groups. The relationship between weaving and the group appears to be synergistic. Weaving makes the group work. The person who experienced an ease in long term pain through knitting, weaving, while the group environment helped them by constructing a sense of meaning and purpose, by maintaining a connection to others.





WEAVING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Different studies showed that participants have enhanced relationships through teaching skills and giving gifts to younger family members, making friends with other weavers, knitters and establishing connections with the wider community through charitable donations of goods.

When people engage in group activities, they have better chances to connect with others, are able to express their own needs indirectly and identify where other people need support.

WEAVING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Through the creation of weaving groups, women create an identity group of their own, one which values hard-earned skill, practice, and social interaction.

Different studies show that the weaving group represents a non-threatening communication space. Communication theory states that good face-to-face and eye contact is essential for effective communication.

Prolonged or intensive eye contact can more readily invite response by increasing the engagement between speaker and listener.

However, when it comes to the context of a weaving group, eye contact is not so intense, as both the speaker and listener in the meantime are engaged in another activity.

Still, the weaving group represents the most acceptable communication environment where it is acceptable to avoid eye contact. The situation, which enables the speaker to 'be' with another but not have eye contact, can provide the space to speak and feel unchallenged, or judged by the facial and non-verbal reactions of others.

Participation in such an activity allows for private space within a social group.

WEAVING AND WELLBEING

From a psychological perspective, Huppert (2009) described wellbeing as a 'combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Well-being can refer to an individual's ability to realise one's own potential, cope with normal daily stresses and contribute productively to the society.

Engagement in the creative arts and crafts can have a positive effect on wellbeing positively as they promote motivation and self-esteem , a sense of self and positive identity, quality of life and personal growth.

A phenomenological study among older women in Crete which aimed at exploring the effects of making traditional arts and crafts revealed a sense of competence and achievement that comes from craft making and a sense of continuity of self in later life.

WEAVING AND WELLBEING

Some scholars have identified the role of creative occupations as a way for individuals to express their true inner self. From the review of literature, it can be concluded that engaging in creative arts occupations also enhances participants' perceived sense of control and choice, offering a form of self-expression, a sense of purpose and a means of coping with the negative consequences of the illness.

WEAVING AND WELLBEING

Arts and crafts which use fabrics as a medium cover a broad range of specific techniques that, through hands-on engagement with equipment and materials, result in the production and/or embellishment of fabric.

The effects of textile art making as occupation in women with chronic illnesses have been researched extensively in the work of some scholars. In addition, other scholars have offered insights into quilting as a skilled and creative occupation in a sociocultural context. Some have even pointed to the curative value of quilt making.

A study which investigated the effects of sewing among immigrant women in South Australia found out that sewing contributed to a sense of self and personal wellbeing, as it provided them with a link to their cultural traditions.

WEAVING AND WELLBEING

Studies have also explored the potential of weaving, spinning and dyeing to promote personal and social wellbeing, as activities which uncover the sense of self and collective sense of self that comes from engaging in textile making and creating textiles individually or in a group with others.

Although this body of work investigates a range of textile-related occupations, each of which incorporating different skills and techniques, as a whole it demonstrates how engaging in purposeful, skilled and creative textile making, alone or with others, can result to be a meaningful activity for participants, contributing to their quality of life and sense of wellbeing.

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