ARP

Through the Needle's Eye:
Decolonial Approaches to Embroidery Teaching

Presented By:
Noor Khazem
Technician
Central Saint Martins

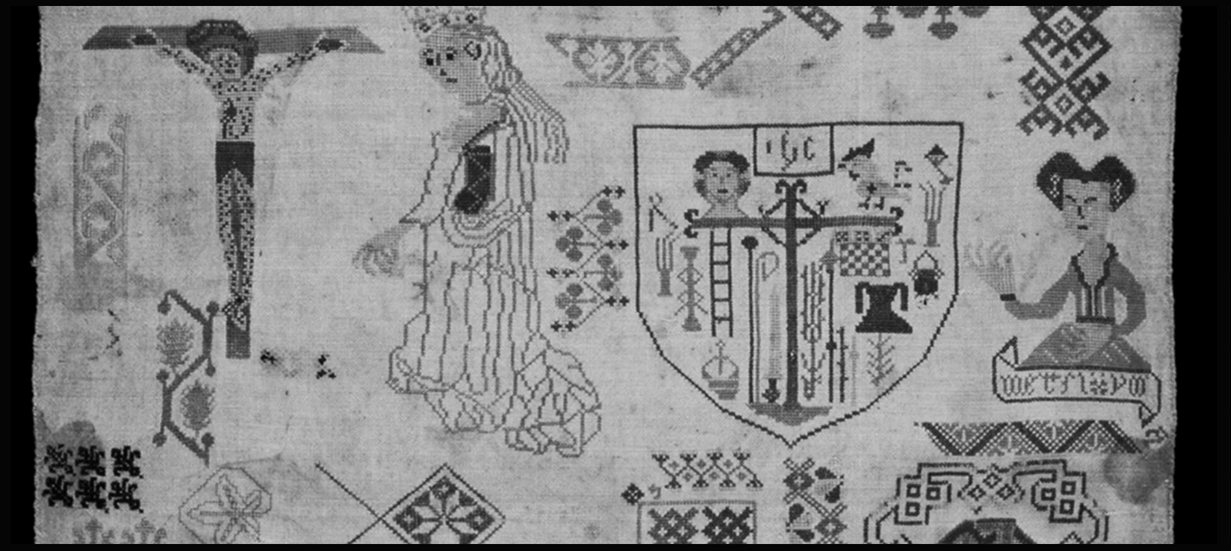


Al Khadr, Irq Al Fares / El-Khader, The Knight Branch | الخضر، عرق الفارس Stitch Pattern, tirazain.com

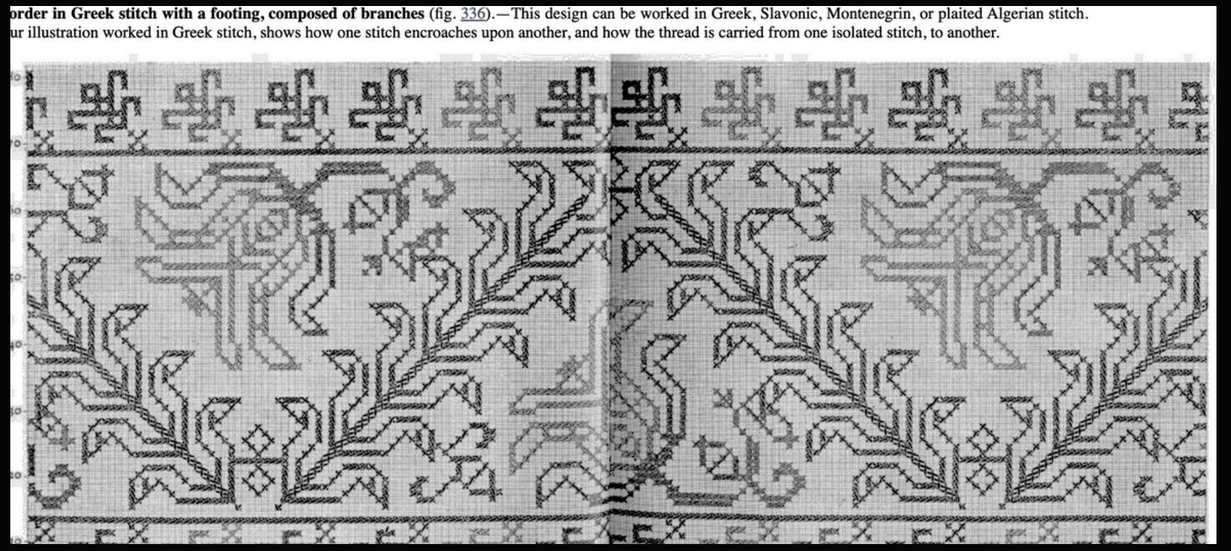
CONTEXT AND POSITIONALITY

CSM TECHNICIAN
SELFTAUGHT EMBROIDERY SPECIALIST
MA HISTORY OF ART STUDENT
ARAB DIASPORA

As a self-taught embroidery practitioner, I remain close to the student experience. Exposure to global embroidery traditions has led me to question the Eurocentric frameworks through which embroidery knowledge is produced and transmitted, and my role in sustaining them



Sampler, unknown maker, 1500 – 1550, Germany. Museum no. T.114-1956. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Given by Admiral Sir Robert and Lady Prendergast.



Dillmont, T. de. (1886) Encyclopedia of Needlework. Vienna: DMC. Image reproduced from Project Gutenberg. Available at: Project Gutenberg

RATIONALE

EDI Data at UAL highlights an alarming attainment gap:

Institution	BAME Students (%)	BAME Academics (%)	BAME Professors (%)	BAME Governors (%)	BAME Executives (%)	BAME Attainment Gap (%)
University of the Arts London	29.5	9.7	9.2	20.8	18.2	17.0

Findings

Key findings from the latest ERI report:

- The average B.A.M.E. representation among academics, professors, senior managers, professional services staff on lower grades, governors, and executives falls short of university student B.A.M.E. representation at all teaching levels.
- The average B.A.M.E. awarding gap (the difference between the number of White and B.A.M.E. students awarded first class or 2:1 degrees) is 12.3%, with some gaps of over 20% reported at several universities.
- For Black students, the awarding gap is even more significant, with an average gap of 19.3%. In 10% of universities the awarding gap is over 30%.

UAL. "Ethnic Representation Index." UAL, 29 Sept. 2023, www.arts.ac.uk/about-ual/equality-and-diversity/ethnic-representation-index.



Al Deek / The Rooster | الديك pattern, archived by tirazain.com

CONTEXT & SOCIAL JUSTICE

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?
WHAT INEQUITIES ARE BEING ADDRESSED?
WHOSE VOICES ARE INCLUDED?
HOW DOES MY RESEARCH PROMOTE CHANGE?

The works of Freire and Spivak have been key reference points throughout my Action Research Project journey, shaping both my methodology and critical perspective.

SOME OF THE most radical criticism coming out of the West today is the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject. The theory of pluralized 'subject-effects' gives an illusion of

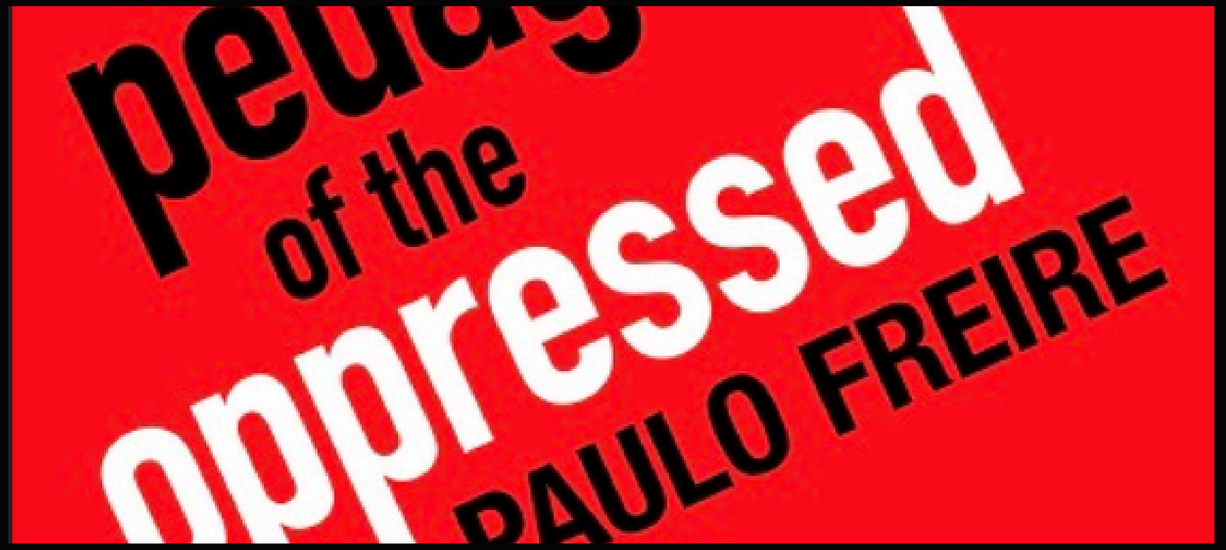
tive of imperialism be recognized as 'subjugated knowledge,' 'a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' (Foucault 1980: 82).

This is not to describe 'the way things really were' or to privilege the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of history. It is, rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one. . . .

on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) *can speak and know their conditions.* We must now confront the following question: On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?* . . .

The first part of my proposition - that the phased development of the

Spivak, G.C. (1988) 'Can the subaltern speak?', in Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (eds.) Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.



Freire. P (2005) Pedagogy of the Oppressed (50th anniversary ed.) Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. (Original work published 1968)

EMBROIDERY DEMO CONVENTIONS: INITIAL CRITIQUE

1. Exclusively using Anglo-American or European terms to describe methods and techniques, even if these techniques had other names and originated outside of these geo-cultural spheres

2. Perpetuating a 'West is Best' attitude by only teaching Anglo-American/European renditions of techniques, not even mentioning that others exist, thereby "conserving the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (Spivak, 1988:1) as well as censoring histories via omission (Macedo, 2005:16)

3. Attempting to create 'neutral' skill learning, teaching embroidery by making rows of stitches, dismembered from their context and meaning (Shaull, 2005:34)

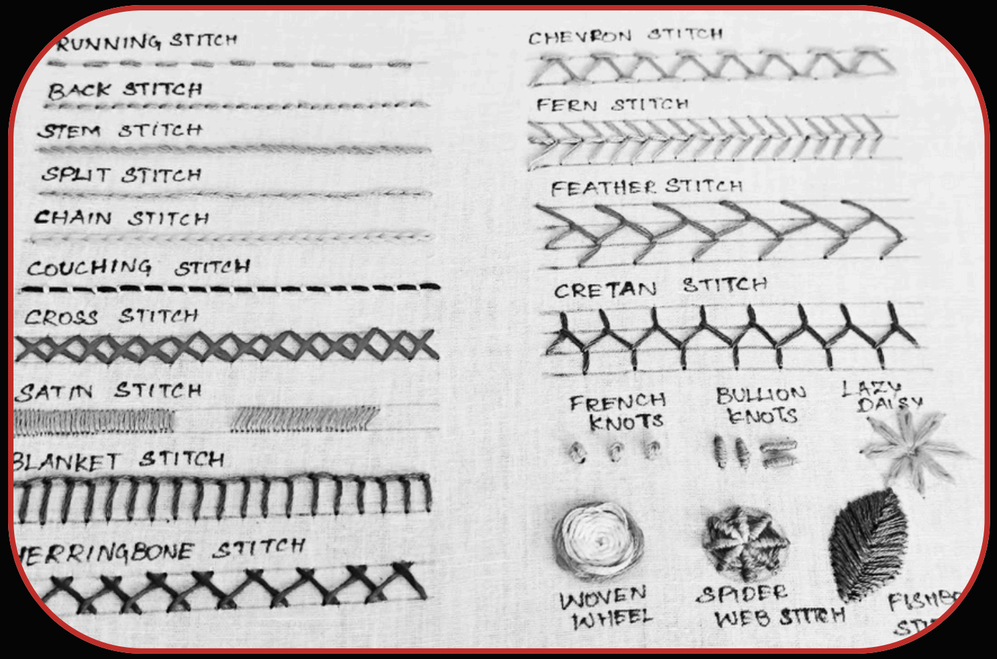


Image: Magnetichoop.com

Shaull, R. (2005) Foreword, in Freire, P. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum.

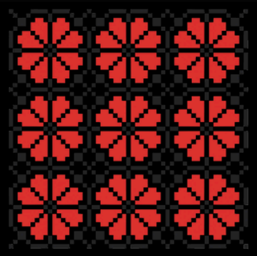
ARP: AIMS



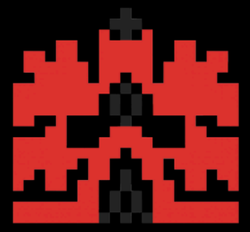
Al Ghazal / The Deer | الغزال



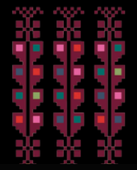
Shafrat / Razors (3) | شفرات



Qras Ward (Flower Discs) | قراص ورد



Shafrat / Razors (4) | شفرات



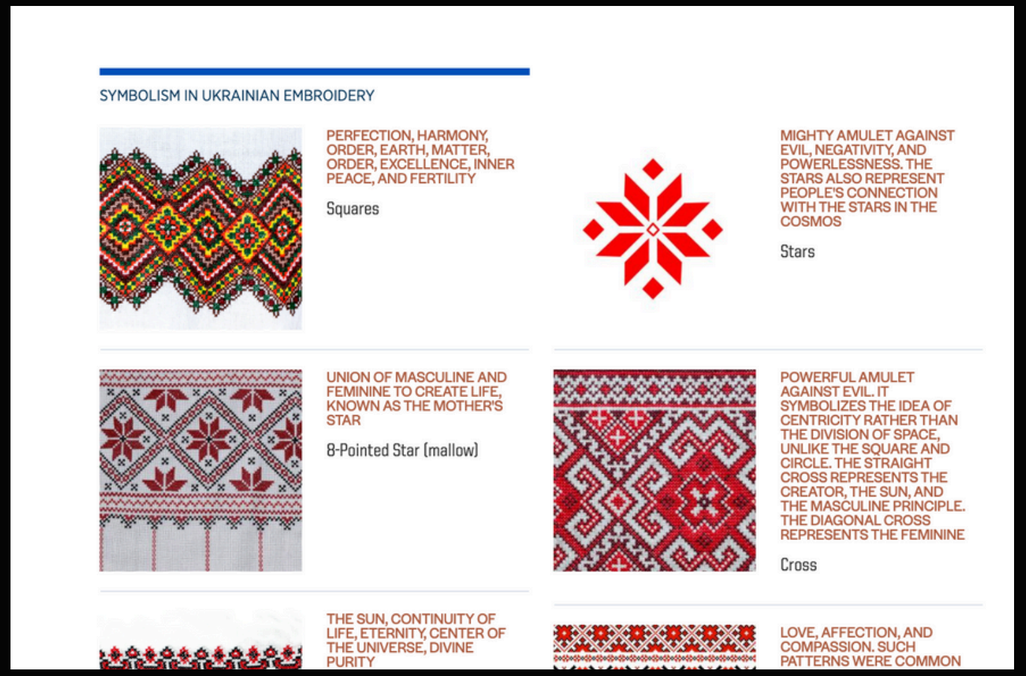






Palestinian embroidery archive: tirazain.com

Ukranian embroidery archive: https://crees.ku.edu/ukrainian-embroidery



> To conduct research which is led by the student voice

> To address embroidery demonstration practices that may perpetuate colonial narratives

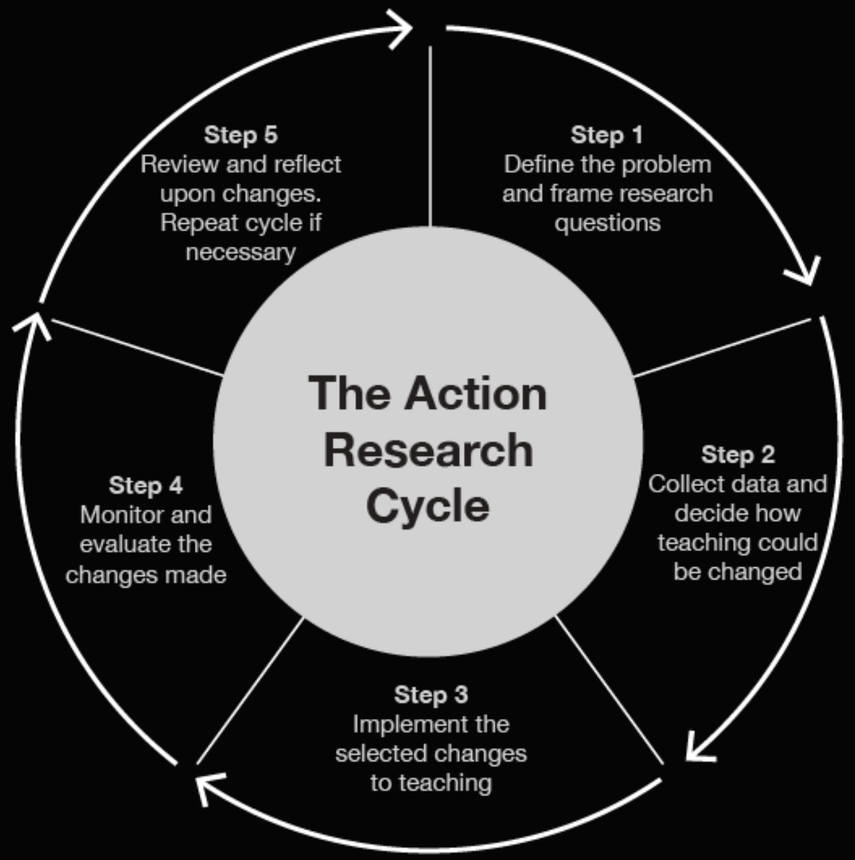
> To adapt changes according to student feedback

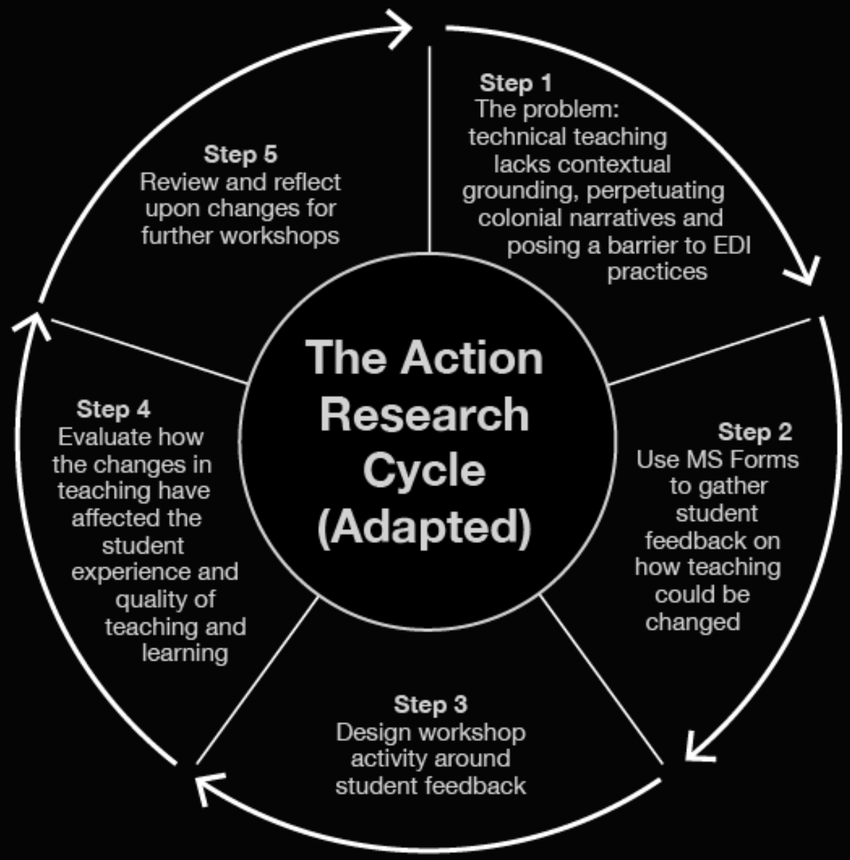
> To use academic material to inform this process

> To develop greater criticality and reflexivity in my teaching practice

RESEARCH STEPS

The Action Research Cycle was modified to accommodate the project timeline, incidentally supporting the decolonial research approach at the core of the ARP.





Action Research Cycle diagram adapted from McNiff and Whitehead 2009

RESEARCH METHODS

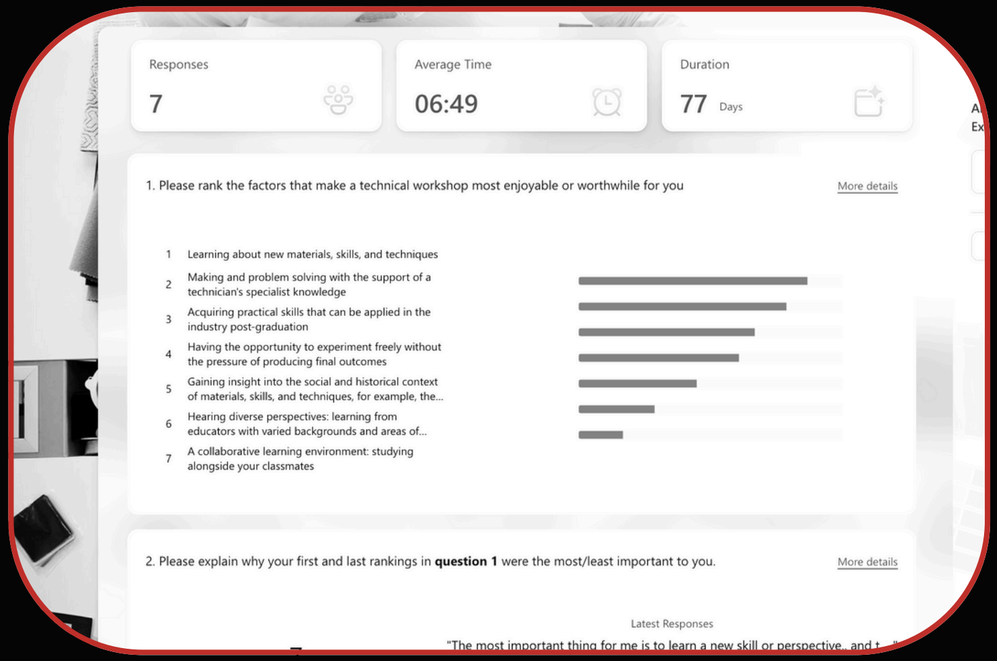
Data collection via:

> Microsoft Forms (Quantitative and qualitative data collection)

> Informal feedback gathering

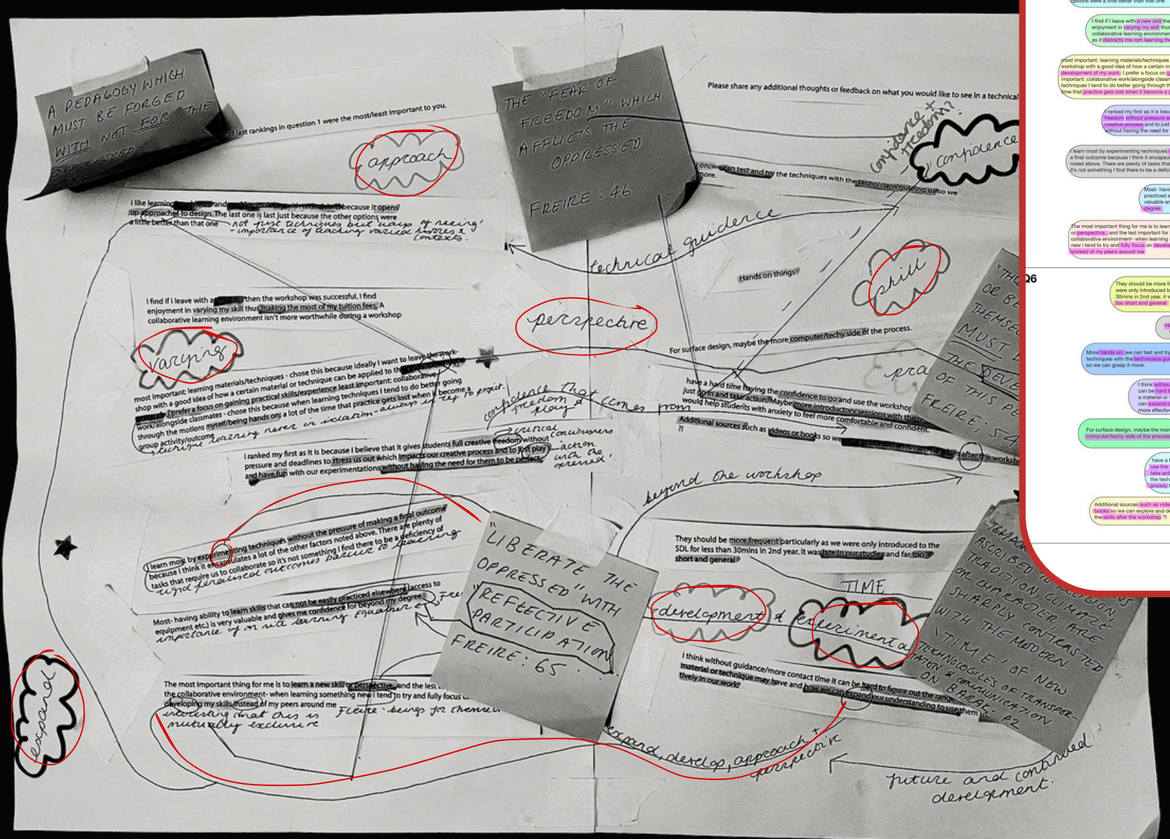


meme from redit via: r/memes

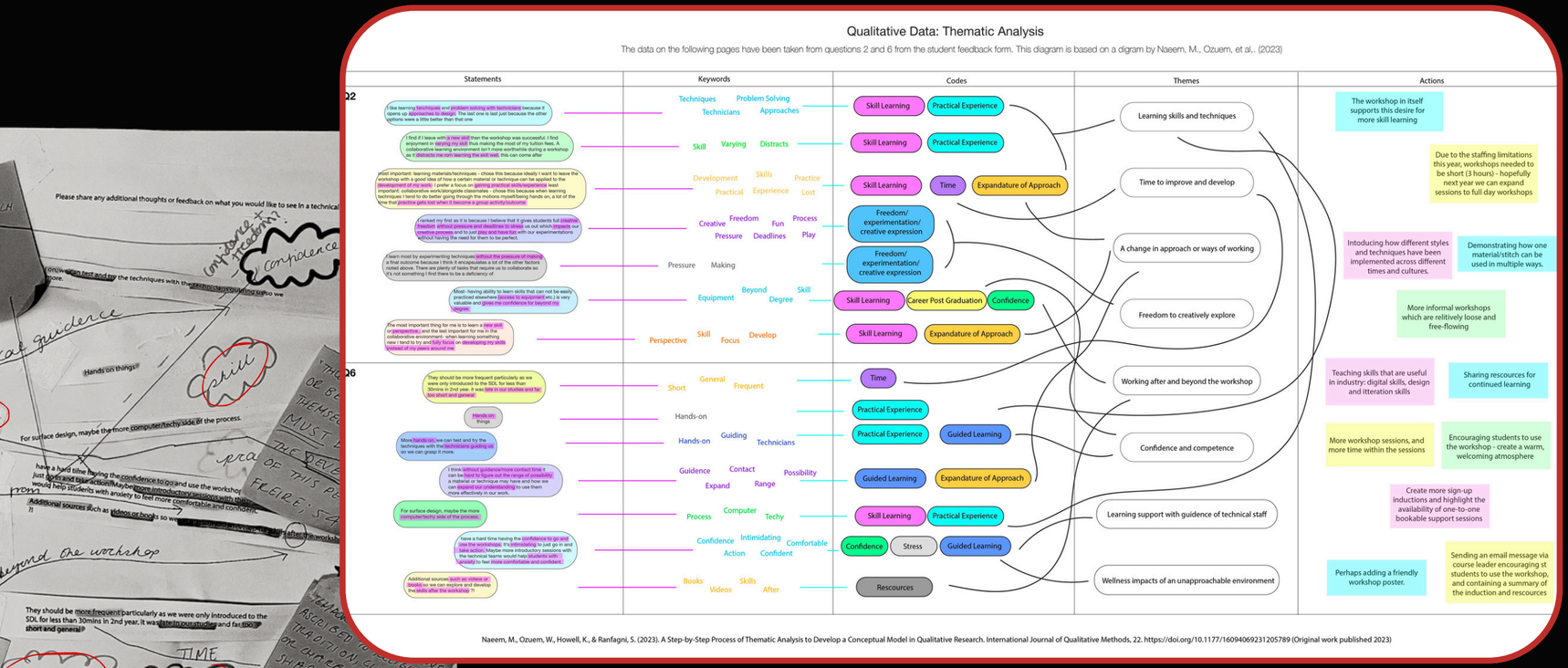


Screenshot of MS Forms Survey

RESEARCH METHODS:
ANALYSIS & REFLECTIONS



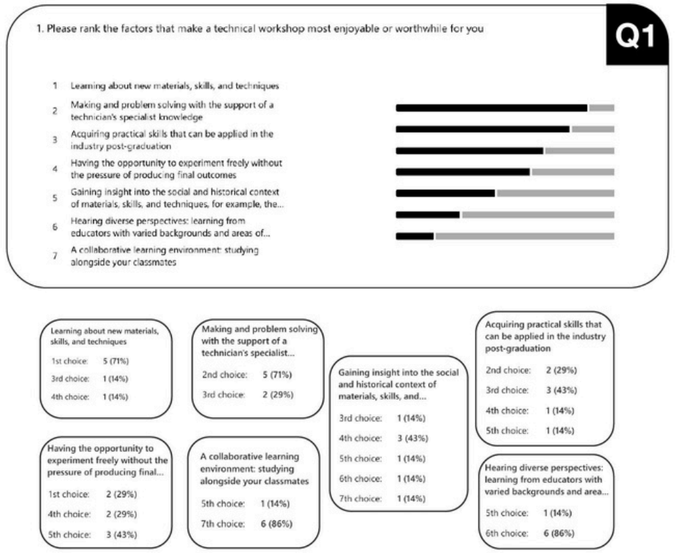
Creative Data Analysis Mind Map: Qualitative data



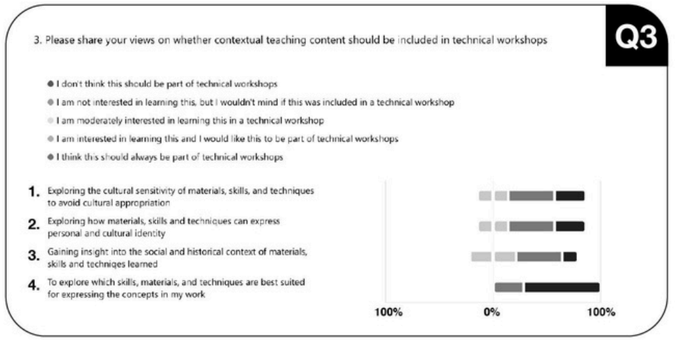
Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789 (Original work published 2023)

Thematic Analysis Diagram based on guidlines in Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Qualitative Research in Psychology

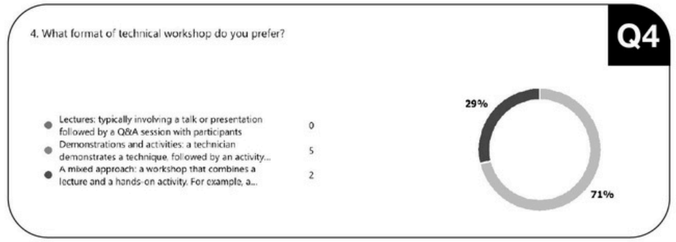
FINDINGS



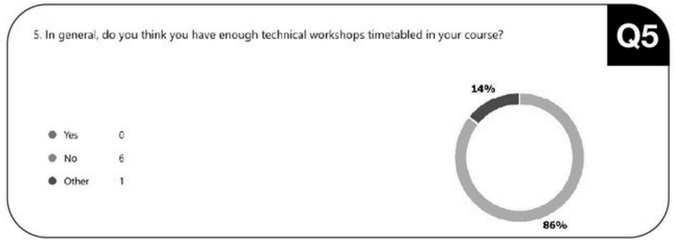
- 5 out of 7 students ranked item 1 as 1st.
- 5 out of 7 students ranked item 2 as their 2nd choice
- Item 3 and item 4 had the most varied rankings.
- 6 out of 7 students ranked item 7 as 7th (last) choice)
- Item 6 was consistently ranked between 6th and 7th by all students



- All students were at least 'moderately' interested in contextual technical teaching content
- All students were 'interested' in item 4, with most believing this should 'always' be part of technical teching
- All categories had at least one student expressing that any given item should 'always' be part of

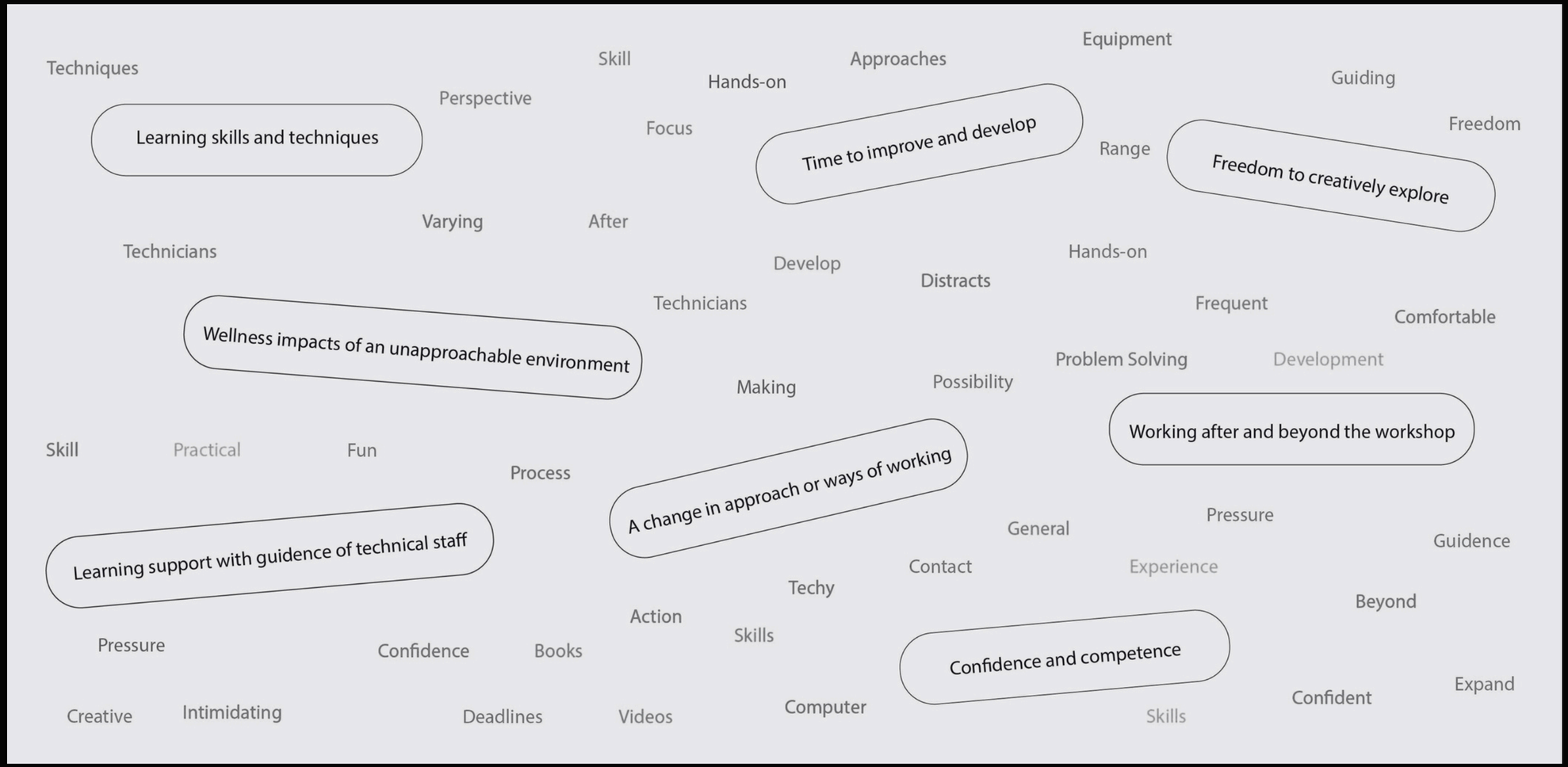


- 5 out of 7 students prefer demonstration based technical workshops
- 2 out of 7 students prefer a mixed approach to technical teaching



- 6 out of 7 would like to have more technical workshops in the curriculum

FINDINGS



Key words and themes taken from Thematic Analysis Diagram

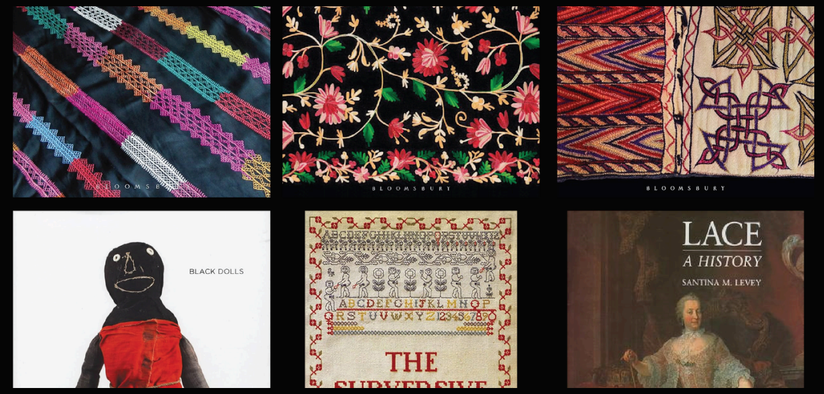
RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION



A presentation was created for a 'hybrid' delivery method. The slides directly responded to student feedback. This slide demonstrated how techniques have been adapted and adopted in various ways by different communities. It also describes the effect of colonialism on embroidery practices and how embroidery can be a medium to enact identity preservation.



Students were encouraged to create their own motifs that had personal meaning, or were significant to their projects. This resisted a "neutral" application of technique and encouraged students to impart their identity from the first stitch.



A wide range of globally and conceptually diverse resources were provided to students for reference during the workshop, and were disseminated after the workshop.

THE ACTION



The space wasn't well adapted for presentation delivery, and the table space was small. Although making for an intimate learning environment, this posed accessibility issues



Photos of "Stitching the Self" workshop taken by Thanseela Abdul Kabeer @thanseela.photography

THE ACTION





Photos of “Stitching the Self” workshop taken by Thanseela Abdul Kabeer @thanseela.photography

FEEDBACK

As my flexible working hours were allocated to other studies, I felt unable to organise PgCert tutor feedback; colleagues' and students' feedback proved essential throughout the project to inform the action research cycle.

Collegue 1
"a large screen to show the presentation you made and have it accessible for everyone to see/read the text"

Collegue 2
"very well put together workshop. I really enjoyed it!"

Student 1
"talking about the background of each stitch as we learn it would be interesting"

Student 2
"Thank you, this was really useful"

Hey [redacted]

It's always positive. The students really like both of you. A final-year student said they think you're both among the most helpful technicians in the college, always open and willing to give advice, support, etc.

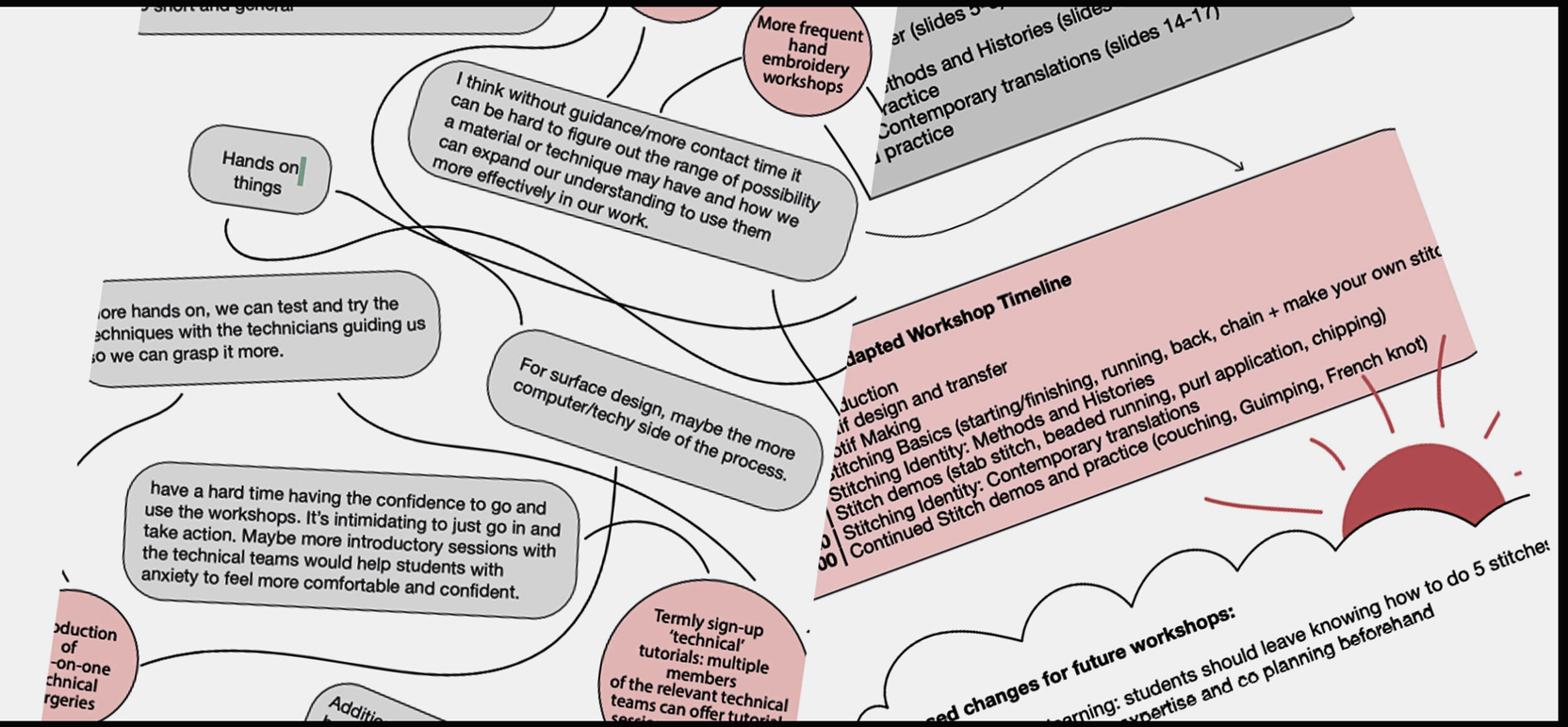
Regarding the workshop:

They said they really enjoyed the session and that it was nice to be there, working with you in a "chilled" environment and getting to know you better. They said having that session has given them more confidence to use the surface design lab, as they now know you both better and know the space. I think that's the most positive outcome of the workshop - giving them the space and time to be in there so they can return. The induction doesn't allow that time.

The hand-stitch work isn't coming through yet, but I don't think that's an issue we can fix given the speed and pace of the projects. We have seen quite a few push through with digital embroidery, and a positive aspect on the puppets project is that they can, if they choose to work at half-scale, do this at a more affordable cost, too.

Course leader feedback email

REFLECTIONS & REVISIONS



More structured skill-building
Introduce a clearer framework that covers how to start and finish embroidery, alongside five core stitches, to ensure all students leave with essential technical foundations.

Collective expertise
Actively draw on the diverse specialisms of the technical team, with each member teaching stitches drawn from their own practice, highlighting multiple approaches to embroidery.

Improved spatial setup
Reconfigure the room to include a larger central table and a bigger monitor, supporting visibility, demonstration, and collective learning.

Expanded making resources
Provide additional tools for transferring designs onto fabric to support experimentation and independent design development.



Photos of workshop taken by Thanseela Abdul Kabeer @thanseela.photography

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

Apart from achieving the initial project aims, the ART has produced the outcomes below

Open communication channels
The feedback flow between the course leader and students has strengthened

Decolonial Action Protocol
I have understood how to embed changes in to my work guided by decolonial academics and practitioners

Confidence
I have developed confidence not only in my role as a technician, but also as a staff member capable of initiating and directing change.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The ARP has been an eye-opening experience for my teaching practice, and the skills I have developed will continue to shape my work. The projects and workshops below represent opportunities to continue learning and to further evolve my approach.

Subversive Stitch Workshop

My first opportunity to experiment with activities conceived after the ARP: Chain stitch activity, and make your own stitch activity

Art for Resistance Anthology

Co-teaching on a workshop co-created with a second year fashion print student



Al Nafoora / The Fountain | النافورة pattern, archived by tirazain.com

THANK YOU.

29 January, 2026

ARP: Final Presentation

Presented By:
Noor Khazem
Specialist Technician
Central Saint Martins



Al Asafeer / Birds (1) | العصافير Stitch Pattern, digitally preserved based on documentation by Nabil Anani and Sliman Mansour, tirazain.com