



# **Stitches of Self:** Restorative textile-based approaches to define the lived experience

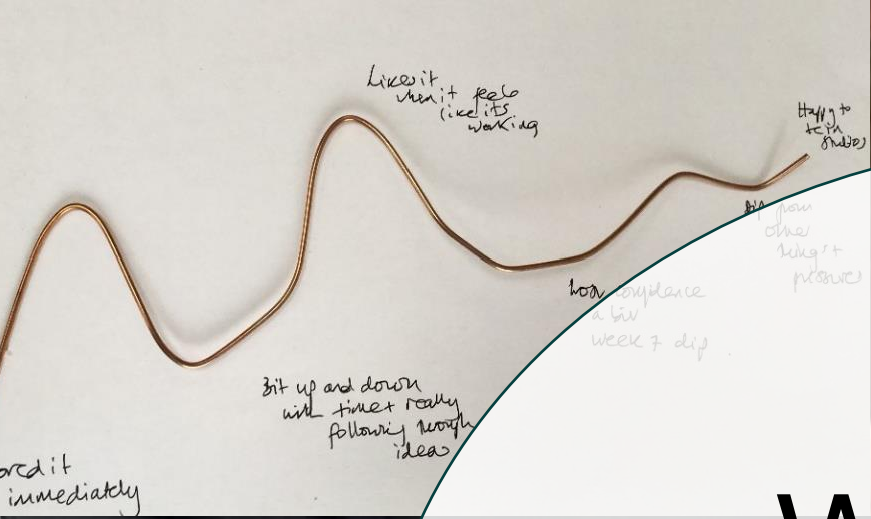
Dr Suzy Tutchell  
University of Reading



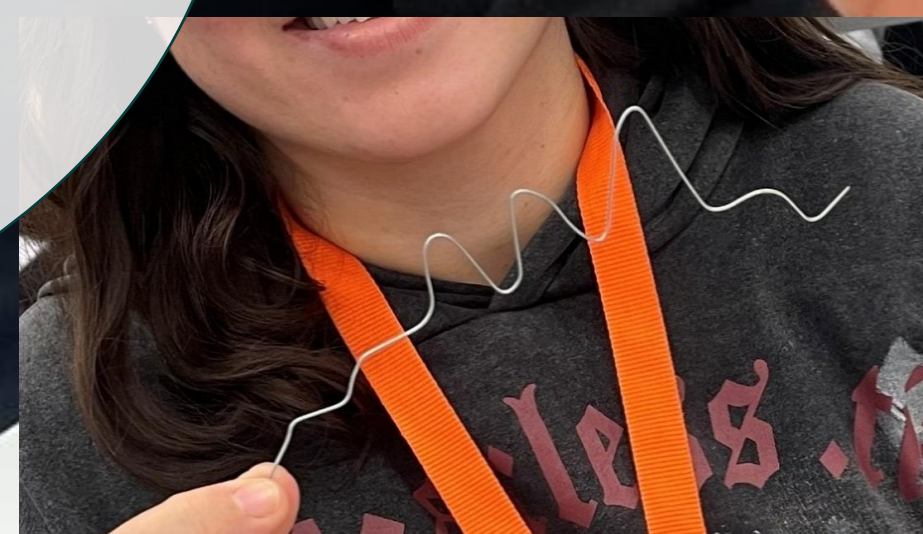


“Sensory immersion  
enables a more inclusive  
and responsive approach  
through a felt vitality”

(Rousell & Hickey-Moody, 2021, p. 82)



What is the story of your week so far ?





Creative  
Thinking :

Convergent  
vs. Divergent  
Reasoning  
Skills

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Fluency

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Flexibility

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Originality

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Elaboration

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Empathy

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Intuition

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Risk Taking

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Curiosity



## Refugee women's group

- Disentangle from assumptions as a 'collective'
- Individual stories tend to be 'invisiblized or used as a script' (Gatta et al., 2024, p. 13)
- Going beyond migratory status
- Telling stories in non-linear ways that acknowledge 'ongoingness and disruption' (Vercllyte, 2021)

### The Battle of Life





# University students

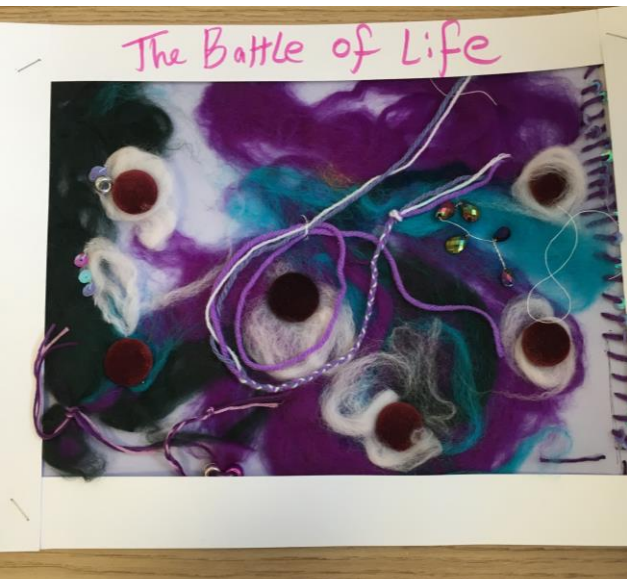
- Automaton culture (Gregory et al., 2020)
- Self-narration ignored or undervalued
- Stories of identity; presence and vitality (Rappaport, 2013)
- Interpersonal and intersubjective relevance



# Commonalities of both

- Listening to and valuing individuality
- Understanding of who we are; past, present and future
- Sense of belonging and voice
- Social and educational responsibility (Gatta et al., 2024)
- Safe spaces
- **Rippling into the future**





## Current story

***Stitches of Self*** was a year-long, inclusive, **textile-based** research project exploring how **somatic, sensory, and non-verbal** creative practices, grounded in theories of embodiment and empathy, could support individuals in **expressing stories of resilience and identity**.

Working with teacher education students, the project created safe, listening-friendly spaces where art-based approaches enabled meaningful expression, disclosure, and shared understanding.




# Evolving aims of the research:

- **Restorative creativity:** To use textiles as an embodied medium for expression to safely explore narratives between the verbal and the unsaid.
- **Educational and social impact:** To consider sensory/haptic research methods as a tool to amplify voices and nurture empathetic listening.
- **A response to need:** To accommodate the complexities of trauma, transition, and resilience through an empathetic educational response.
- **Collaboration and safe spaces:** To explore safe spaces where dignity, hope, and kindness are central.

# Textiles: an empathetic embodied medium

- Using hands and movement to explore, experiment in a non-conventional way (Mandour, 2024)
- Materiality of object: subjectivity and embodiment (Holmes & Hall, 2020)
- Embodied forms of empathy and change through body (Dos Ventos etc, 2024)



“To harness a medium through which to ‘speak’ powerfully about intimate, everyday stories”

(Unravel, Spring 2024)



# Empathetic embodied approach

## **Empathy: Moral imagination**

- Cognitive – understanding
- Affective – feeling
- Responsive – listening

(Cooper, 2013; Greene, 1995; Head & Kaur, 2024; Loue, 2022)

## **Embodied: Sensory imagination**

- Somatic – of the body
- Affective – consciousness
- Relational – spatial connections

(Faella et al., 2025; Gatta et al., 2024; Puoti et al., 2025; Shapiro, 1998)

**To extend your experience and imagination to sufficiently grasp the world of others as a human possibility (Greene, 1995)**

# Methodology – in a safe space



## **Participatory**

- Individual
- Social
- Interactive

## **Sensory**

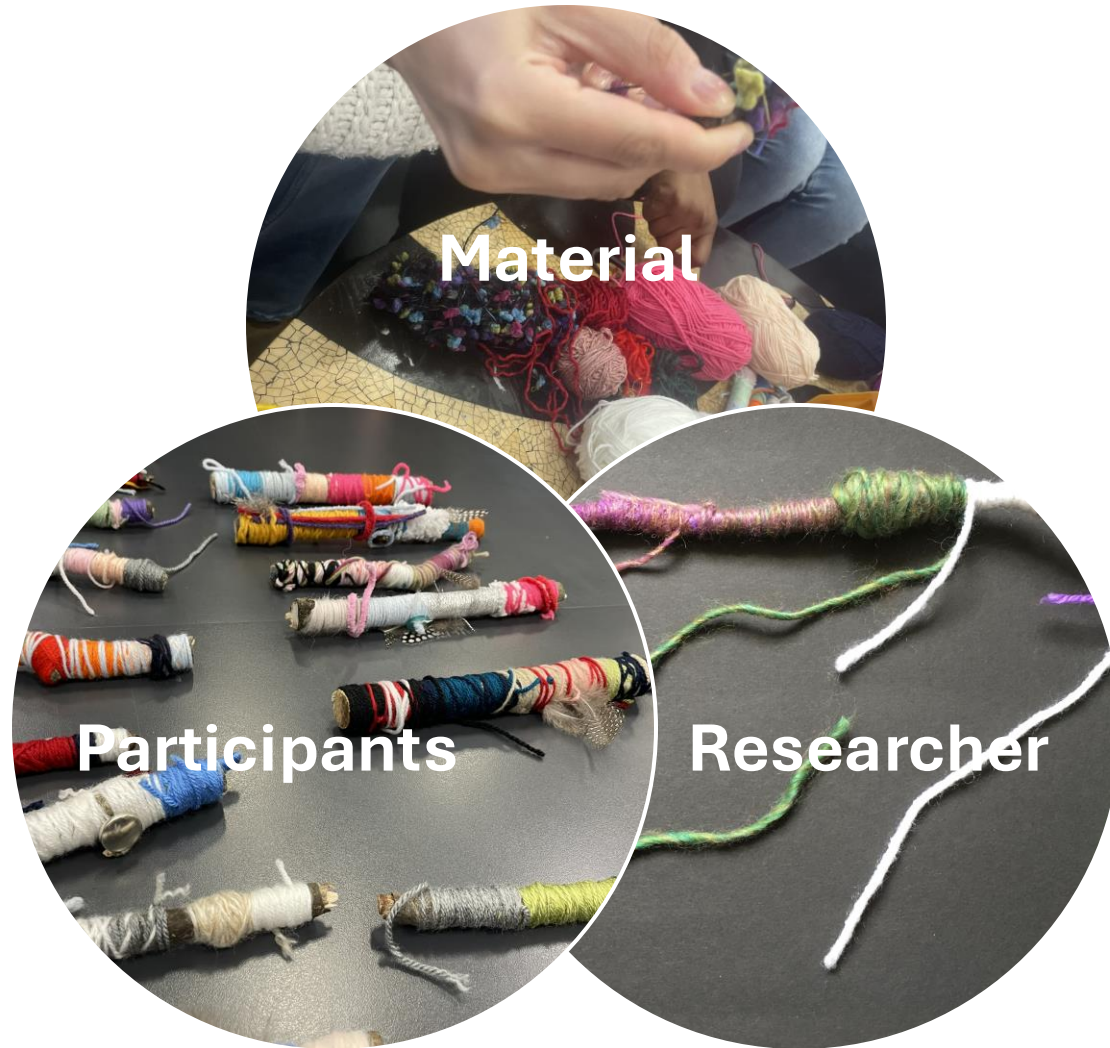
- Visual/tactile
- Symbolic
- Aesthetic

## **Performative**

- Somatic
- Circular/rhythmic
- Iterative

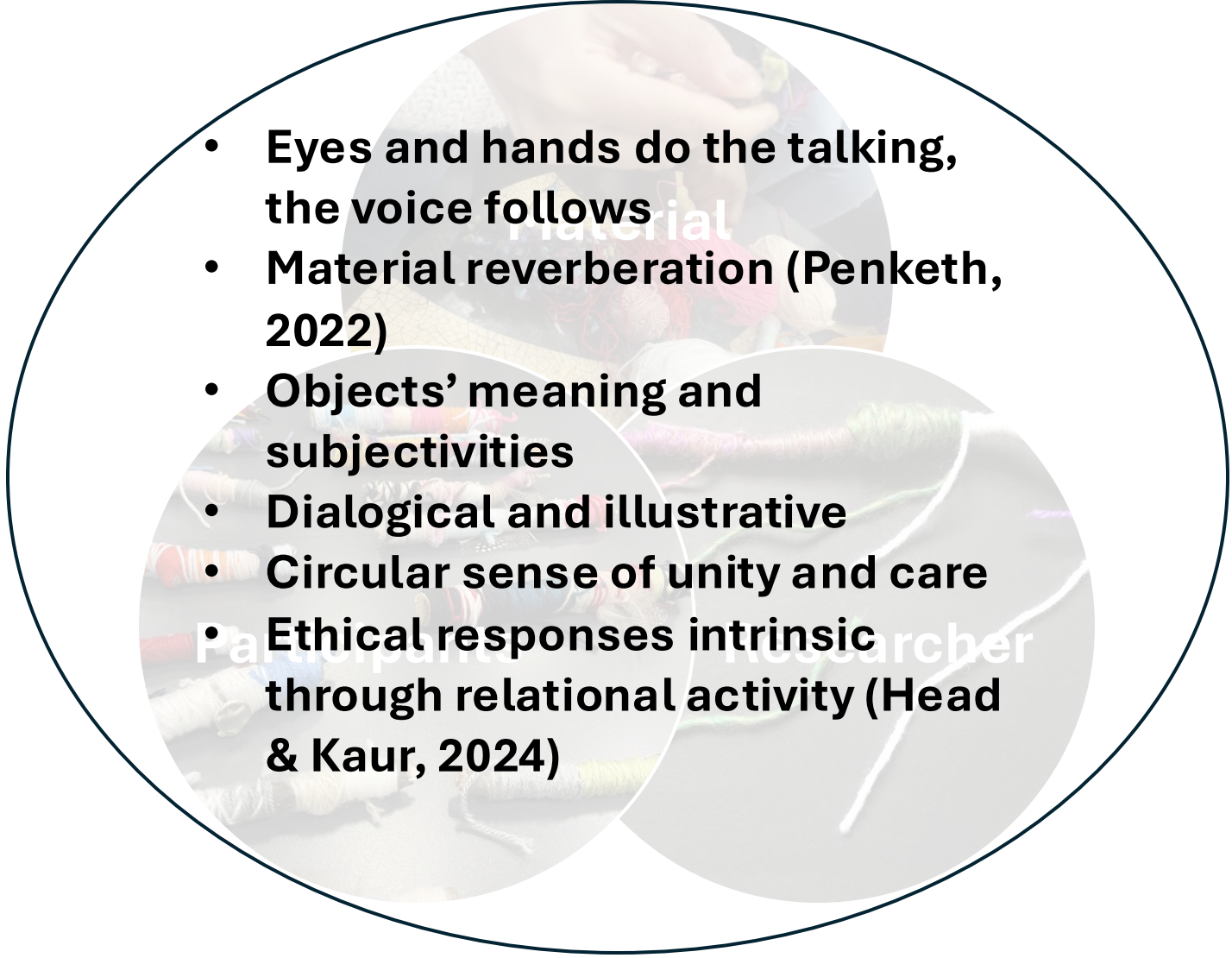


# Material relationality – a reflexive and ethical circle



**“A triangulated empathetic bond” (Keen, 2006, p.221)**

# Material relationality – a reflexive and ethical circle

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- **Eyes and hands do the talking, the voice follows**
  - **Material reverberation (Penketh, 2022)**
  - **Objects' meaning and subjectivities**
  - **Dialogical and illustrative**
  - **Circular sense of unity and care**
  - **Ethical responses intrinsic through relational activity (Head & Kaur, 2024)**

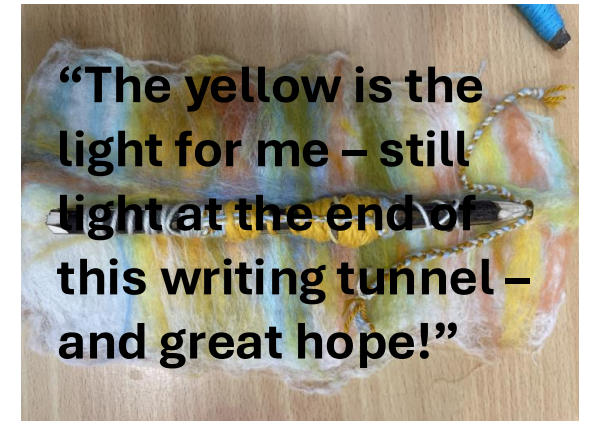
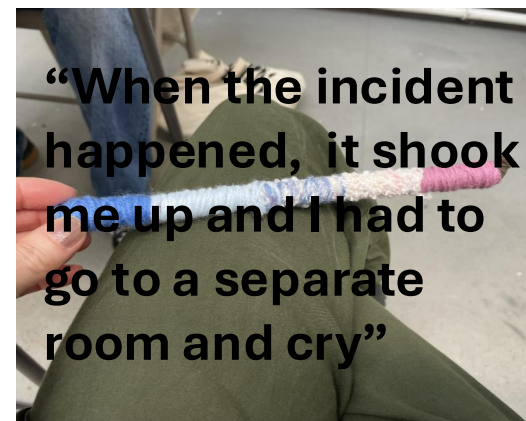
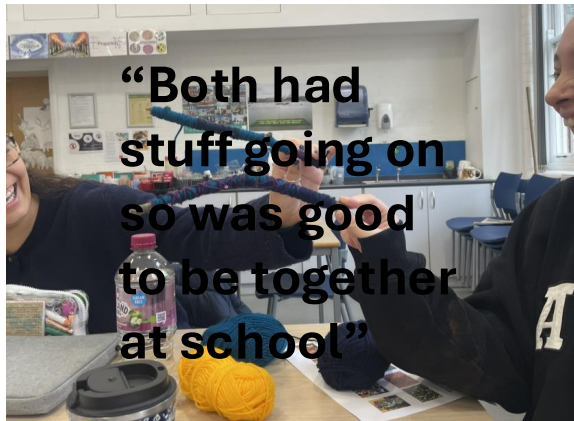
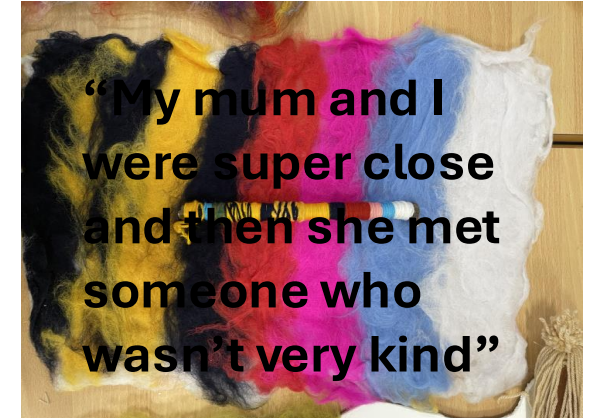
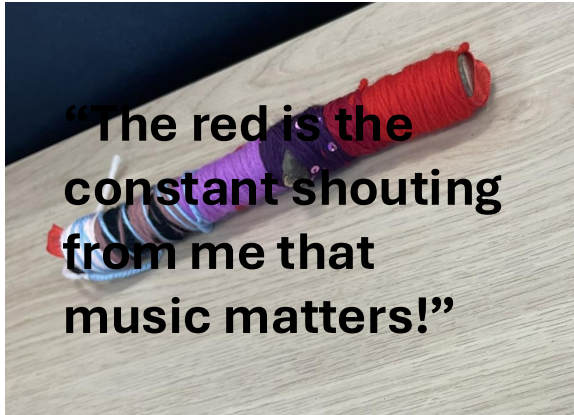
**“A triangulated empathetic bond” (Keen, 2006, p.221)**



# Participants:

- 11 MA Education students
- 11 PGCE Secondary students
- 4 EdD students
- 12 Y2 BA Primary Education students
- 8 EYPT students

# A gallery of production . . .



These techniques offered a ‘middle ground’ to reveal and uncover deeper aspects of lived experiences and perceptions (Sweetman, 2009).



# A gallery of production . . .



Immersion, as researchers, in the gallery of the data

# Analysis

- Stories didn't 'emerge', they unfolded and unravelled from the embodied approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Leigh & Brown, 2021)
- 'Images and narratives may belong to a world of things that we feel we know about – immensely and conventionally – but the connections between them can be clouded by our subjectivities and often remain unrevealed by our reading.' (Mannay, 2015, p. 63)
- Where appropriate, the creation of images can be followed by opportunities for participants to explain their responses (Leitch, 2008; Rose, 2015)



- Balancing work/life/studies
- Confidence building of knowledge and learning
- Happy - social and peace
- Stressful, lost and lonely
- Making progress – thinking forward
- Leaving home, leaving country, missing people
- Homesickness
- Family and loved ones
- Aesthetic choices
- Life's adventures
- Making transitions
- Hope
- Difficult circumstances



- Reflective, retrospective
- Back stories
- Time to talk and debrief
- Emotional outlet
- Individual time and space
- Social time and space
- Listening and responding
- Sharing and relational
- Conviviality

# Stand outs

- Affective 'aura'
- Safe reciprocal space – sensory details of the environment (Pink, 2009)
- The circular and rhythmic motion as part of each moment, encircling, layering, gaining momentum – care and sometimes healing
- Perspectives are intrinsically rooted in the material and embodied practice – deep multilayered and dense self-narration
- Agency
- Unexpected and profound moments (for all)
- Hope – recurring colours and tendrils of possibilities
- Humour, conviviality and kindness (REUK)
- Aesthetic resilience

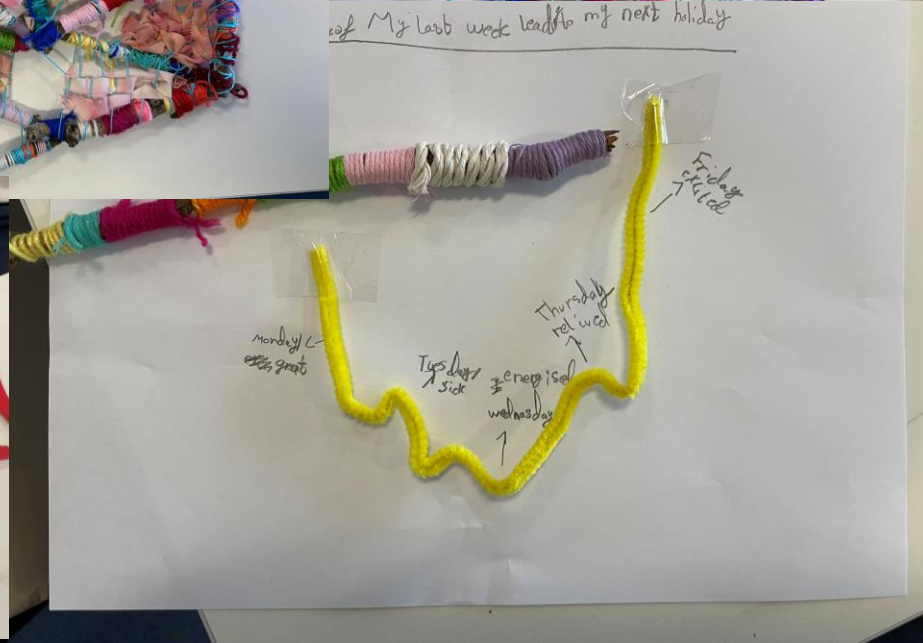
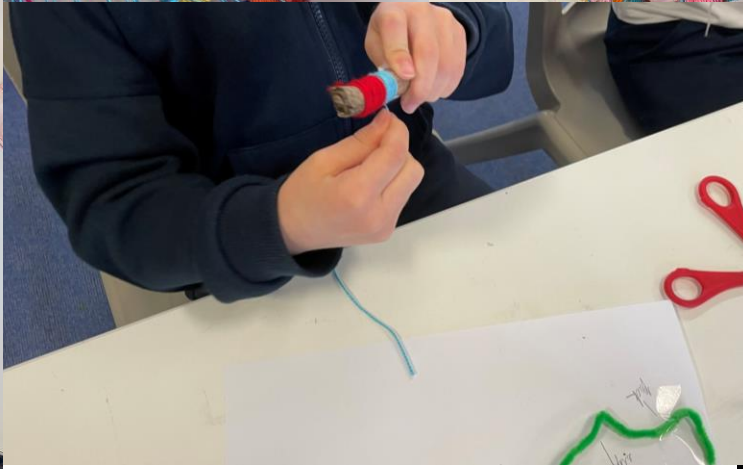
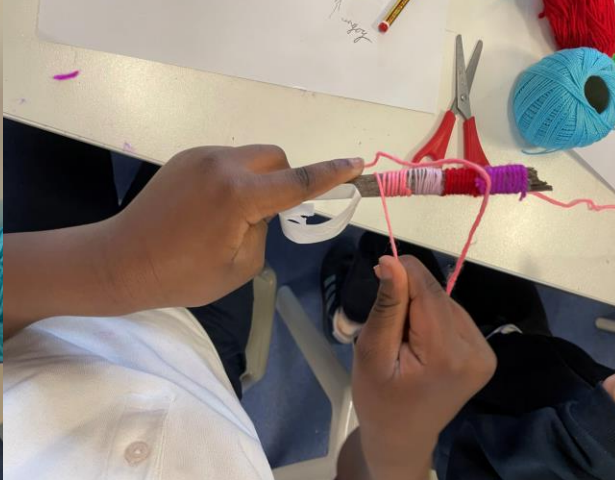


# Rippling into the future . . .

- Time to talk
- Relational and interpersonal activities - tools of agency
- Empathetic listening and 'generous thinking' (Fitzpatrick, 2019. p. 54)
- Facilitate safe space collaborations that bring together diverse standpoints
- **Seduce others!**









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