

From *the University to the Pluriversity?* A Reflexive Critical Literature Review of Indigenous Artisan Community Engagement in Decolonial Education and Knowledge Co-Production *with Design Programs in Latin America*

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Decolonization initiatives in design have sparked growing interest among academics worldwide. While these initiatives foster collaborative design with diverse communities in Latin America, their theories and practices often diverge significantly. How to critically integrate these decolonial models into learning processes and knowledge creation with other communities within the university? To address these questions, we undertake a reflexive critical literature review from an artisanal perspective, moving away from objective systems and standardized measurements of knowledge, integrating our experiences, and highlighting our concerns as educators and students from the Global South. This review highlights two key themes in decolonial studies literature: understanding power relations and the roles in knowledge production, and identifying prevailing ideas and practices in knowledge creation with other entities. Using this information, we establish a three-way conversation to examine the limits of neoliberal modern-colonial education within reflexive critical practice, drawing on our own experiences and positionalities.

Keywords

 decolonization

 industrial design education

 Indigenous artisan communities

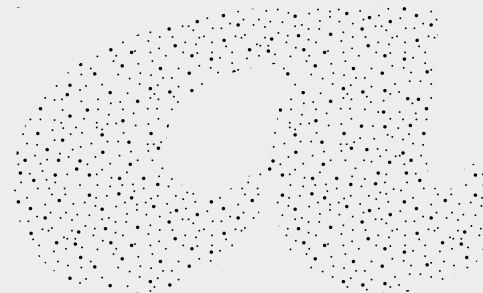
 reflexive practice

 knowledge co-production

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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK: INTRODUCTION

This article proposes a reflexive critical literature review focusing on educational design practices and the co-production of knowledge with non-academic knowledge traditions. We survey how Latin American scholars are integrating critical and decolonial ideals within industrial design education involving Indigenous and artisan communities, and its interplay with the discourses and agendas prevalent in Western academic institutions. The analysis is separated into two parts. First, we explain our observations from the literature review; second, we discuss the review results in a three-way conversation, focusing on critical reflections from our educational practice and emerging questions. We propose a reflexive review process, using an artisanal practice as an analogy (Figure 1), to move away from traditional objective-reviewing strategies. By introducing similes and metaphors as analytical alternatives (Light et al., 2024), designers and researchers can transform their methods and narratives about the realities they wish to enact (Daza-Cardona et al., 2021). This approach opens paths to recognizing our limits when working with other forms of knowledge and coexisting with divergent worlding practices (de la Cadena & Escobar, 2023).

To build on the knowledge other authors have gathered about the pitfalls of institutionalizing decolonial practices, we also believe it is essential to deepen the debate from other key disciplines that critically examine the co-production of knowledge and decision-making autonomy in technology creation. This

may help in understanding how modern scientific relationships between subject and object affect students (Daza-Cardona et al., 2021) during the production of knowledge and in educational practices, particularly when they engage with Indigenous artisan communities. We also explore how decolonial literature is discussed with students to frame such participation in context. Adding context provides a clearer picture of the colonial project in Latin American industrial design education, and on how some institutions are attempting a more pluriversal offering.

The three authors of this paper come from different origin contexts: Colombia, Mexico, and South Africa. Although our positioning varies—from having Indigenous ancestry to colonial heritage—and being from different genders, we see inequalities in the world around us and have tried to make use of our privileged roles in higher education to positively transform the institutions we work for. We also aim to creatively educate our students to transform the world that surrounds them. Our experiences both at personal and professional levels are varied; however, our reflections and comments are interwoven to form a shared vision of the educational practice we are part of. This article aims to inform design educational practices when engaging in the co-production of knowledge with others in at least two ways. First, by discussing the theories and practices from the literature, and second, by illustrating how to escape the common practices of modern sciences in today's academic communities through reflexive and analogy-based alternatives.

BACKGROUND

Legitimized conceptions of knowledge production in the Western world have been replicated in contemporary higher education institutions globally due to Western domination and colonialism (de Sousa Santos, 2021; Mbembe, 2023). These hegemonic discursive practices, interpretive frameworks, corporatist structures, and market dynamics have defined the boundaries for other knowledge and practices from groups that do not conform to dominant norms—for example, artisanal practices, informal productive and commercial practices, etc.

In design education, knowledge production follows a similar pattern: a dominant nature of legitimized knowledge and groups not conforming to these norms. According to Noel et al. (2023) and Kiem (2017), modern design education 'disciplines' design practices, defining the knowledge most suitable for achieving profitable outcomes in modern economies. To counter, decolonial studies seem to have profoundly influenced design in varied ways (Escobar, 2007, 2014; Lugones, 2021; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000), highlighting deceptive ethics in collaborative design with other cultures (Tunstall, 2023), prompting rethinking modern-driven rationale (Gutiérrez Borrero, 2022), proposing new modes of participation with other beings (Campbell & Rapitsenyane, 2023; de

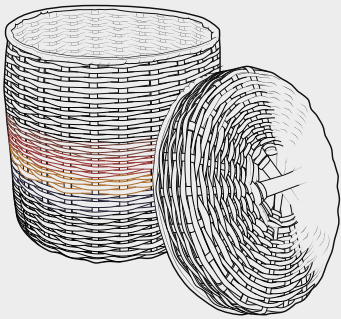


Figure 1: Literature review as an artisanal process. Illustrations inspired by an artisanal product, used to represent the literature review process. The product shown is a real example from the Quimbaya artisan store, crafted by Colombian artisans. Drawn by the authors.

la Cadena & Escobar, 2023; Tironi, 2023), and aiming to heal damage caused by purely rational problem-solving in projective practice (Albarrán González, 2020). Nevertheless, these decolonial approaches have faced significant barriers when encountering modern academia and their methods of knowledge production.

Schultz et al. (2018) additionally mention risks like using the field of decolonial studies merely to extract academic profits, thus “maintaining dominance over the production of knowledge by using these communities for their school projects” (p. 90). Similarly, Ansari and Kiem (2021) warn about decolonial thinking becoming mainstream in Anglo-European academies, and stress the importance of considering knowledge production on the margins of these institutions. Abdulla and Oliveira (2023) note that academics committed to the decolonial cause often face oppression within academies and propose ‘minor gestures’ as a strategy to navigate these oppressive schemes. As educators and design practitioners from the Global South, this situation prompts us to reflect on the consequences of decolonizing efforts on educational practices in design, and what this may entail for universities, academic departments, educators, and students—particularly contrasting in the Latin American context, where inequalities and socioeconomic gaps are significant. Based on de la Cadena and Escobar, how can we break free from “epistemic practices that make the world one, canceling the possibility of practices that diverge from the one-world worldview” (2023, p. 30)? To begin exploring the literature, we propose the following questions: How do authors address power-colonial relations and their roles in collaborative knowledge production through design practices? And, what are the prevalent ideas and practices authors consider when discussing the shared nature of knowledge construction among different entities in design practice?

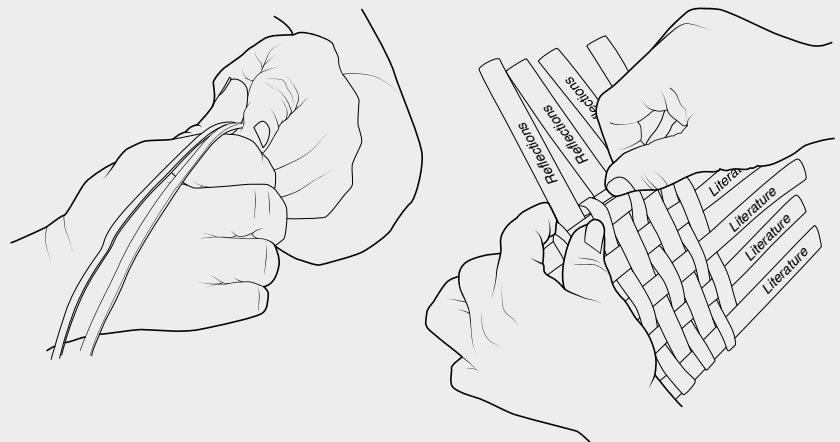
WOVEN REFLEXIVE CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW UNDERTAKEN BY DESIGN EDUCATORS (AS ARTISANS): METHODOLOGY

Our methodology is based on the analogy of weaving *guadua* (a native South American bamboo), likening the process to weaving ideas to create an artisanal product that adheres to quality ideals determined by the artisans themselves. This illustrates our literature analysis and reflexivity on educational practices at different levels. First, we can compare the workshop to a space for interrelational creation that follows its own rhythms, in contrast to the often rapid and sometimes decontextualized production of knowledge in modern science. Second, this flexible weaving resembles literature analysis, where each strip symbolizes concepts and ideas that are organized to deepen our understanding of decolonial practices in professional industrial design and design education (Figure 2). Third, this process requires a well-developed practice and experienced intuition, which can only be provided by the dexterity and judgment of master or senior researchers, serving as

an example for attentive apprentices (Figure 4). Fourth, the resultant woven sheet, due to its inherent flexibility, can be shaped in many ways and serve many purposes. Assigning a careful intention is then comparable to our endeavors in reflexive teaching practice, aiming to provide an informed and coherent educational practice, grounded in decolonial and pluriversal perspectives (Figure 3). This process can also be compared to a customized heuristic approach, where our shared experiences and positionalities as researchers, students, designers, and teachers are the fibers intertwined with the literature. Each question we pose acts as a guiding thread, helping us weave together our needs and concerns about the topic.

Reflexivity can be understood as a process (Wilkinson, 1988), a practice (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Öz & Timur, 2023), a strategy (Harding, 2013), an attitude (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006), or a commitment (Pihkala & Karasti, 2016) to turn to the self and analyze how our subjectivity affects the research processes and people we engage with, as well as how we are reciprocally affected by them. Several authors make a distinction between this reflexive approach and Donald Schön's reflective model, which has informed how designers make decisions during and about the process. Among these distinctions, the level of individual and collective commitment and responsibility of practitioners regarding their position within the process and in relation to other participants are particularly emphasized. Therefore, situating our positionality within this text is essential to fostering the critical reflexive exercise we propose with the metaphor (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Preparing and weaving ideas from literature. Illustrations of artisan process examples. Drawn by authors.



Light et al. (2024) offer a similar metaphorical approach using the concept of entanglement, employing reflexive practices among participants to promote a narrative that diverges from economic growth and expansionism in design projects. In this vein, our metaphor of weaving with *guadua* aims to open

pathways to new ideas about how we produce knowledge—whether through the practice and learning of new methods, listening to our academic peers in the literature, or through the inspiration and collaboration of voices outside the university. Each has its own logic and narratives about life and reality.

COMPREHENDING MATERIAL'S NATURE: METHODS

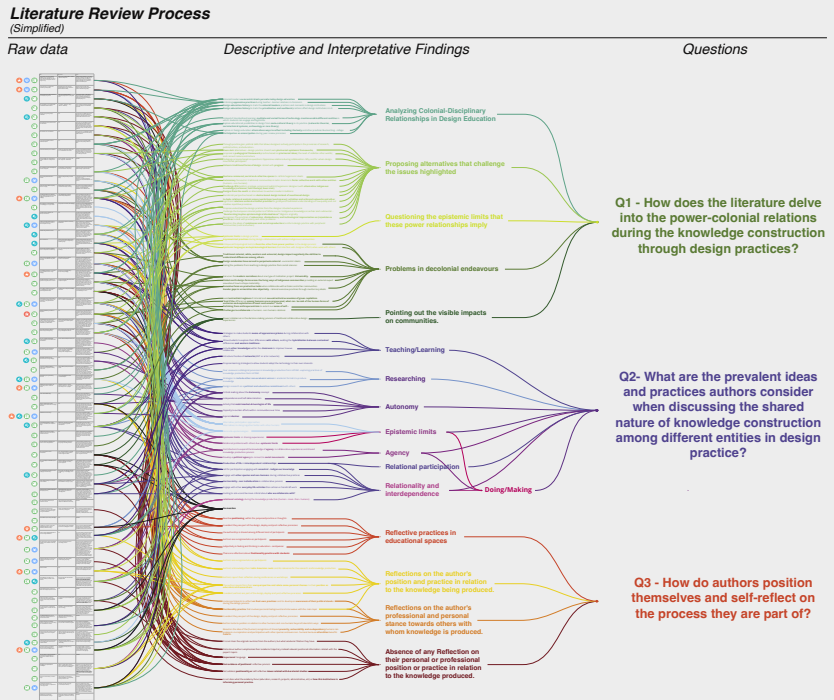
We used keywords in English and Spanish for the literature review: *decolonial/decolonial*, *decoloniality/decolonialidad*, *decolonize/Decolonizar-descolonizar*, *design/diseño*, *industrial design/diseño industrial*, *decolonial design/diseño decolonial*, *design education/educación en diseño*, *Latin America/América Latina*, *higher education/educación superior*. These words were sorted in different orders using search engines in Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and the most popular journals and databases for Latin American researchers in the design field. Special attention was given to the DRS (Design Research Society) and Latindex, as well as Taylor and Francis and Scopus databases, especially focusing on the journals *Diseña*, *Actas de Diseño*, and *Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios de Diseño y Comunicación*. We also included journals such as *Tapuya*, which also study technology design processes beyond traditional design. Based on our knowledge and experience in the Latin American context, we complemented this with 'non-academic' sources like podcasts and online communities aligned with the previously mentioned search.

The literature review was conducted in two phases: a descriptive phase and an interpretative phase. In the first part, we looked for characteristics that we considered relevant to describe the gathered information. In the second part, we aimed to respond to the research question, and to highlight trends and discussion points for our subsequent reflections.

Throughout the process, we explored 54 documents from Latin America, finding the highest number of publications from Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico, with fewer from Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. While Latin American authors developed 73 percent of the works, 27 percent had co-authors from the United States, United Kingdom, Finland, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany, Sweden, Canada, the Netherlands, and Spain. 48 percent of the works were in Latin American journals, the rest in Global North locations.

Regarding reviewed formats, we saw a predominance in traditional academic formats, with journal papers accounting for 57 percent, followed by conference papers at 19 percent, and conference proceedings at nine percent. In addition to these formats, book chapters and doctoral theses were identified, each including four percent of the total. To a lesser extent, complete books, podcast episodes, position papers, and workshops were present, contributing two percent each one.

Figure 3: Overview of one of the maps employed in weaving ideas from literature. Mind map structure used to collect and arrange ideas during the literature review. During the review, the main question was divided into three to facilitate our comprehension. Source: Author's own.



INTERPRETATIVE FINDINGS: WEAVING PATTERNS AND MOTIFS:

RESULTS

How do authors address colonial power relations and their roles in collaborative knowledge production through design practices?

Many authors have discussed colonial, modern, and Eurocentric ideas negatively influencing contemporary design education, as well as affecting our understanding of differences (Campos García, 2021; Hernández, 2021; Udoewa et al., 2023; Wong-Villacres et al., 2020). Some scholars link this influence to the oppressor-oppressed relationships, which are structural in many educational contexts, and often unconsciously internalized by individuals (Angelon & van Amstel, 2021; Mazzarotto & Serpa, 2022; Saito et al., 2022; Serpa, 2023). According to Trias Cornú (2020), Montes Cruz (2023), and Okabayashi and Loschiavo dos Santos (2022), several design academies have served to perpetuate Eurocentric and colonial ideals in both professional and educational design practices. In response to these challenges, various proposals have been put forward. Firstly, they prioritize historiographical studies that avoid narratives obscuring local actors and address the impact of privatization and neoliberal practices in Latin American design academia (Montes Cruz, 2020). Secondly, these proposals advocate for a pedagogy that develops political skills, empowering designers to actively engage in research, political activism, and educational processes (Serpa, 2023). Thirdly, they promote

practices that challenge unequal power dynamics in collaborative design processes (Mazzarotto & Serpa, 2022). Lastly, they suggest activities aimed at unlearning traditional design approaches associated with notions of progress (as stated by Botero in Salgado et al., 2024).

To address these structural problems, there is a growing trend towards embracing diverse worldviews and values, aligning with ideals of pluriversality to inform design practice. Echoing this sentiment, authors showcase their different abilities to recognize other forms of life using social sciences' tools (Botero et al., 2018); to connect with nature and culture through *sentipensar* (feeling-thinking) (Escobar, 2014; Fals Borda, 1984; Magos-Carrillo & Loredó-Cansino, 2022) and practices derived from ancestral knowledge through *corazonar* (reasoning with the heart) (Albarrán González, 2022, 2023; Ortega Pallanez, 2023), such as *Buen Vivir* and similar (Albarrán González, 2020; Sandoval Valle, 2022; Vargas Espitia & Quintero Bayona, 2021). Building on these concepts, Leitão (2020) and Bastidas Pérez (2023) recommend valuing desires over needs and focusing on the details of everyday life. Additionally, Pinto et al. (2022) and Cordeiro Marques Correa and Carvalho Cardoso (2022) propose analyzing subversive social reproduction practices, disobedience, and technological improvisation as forms of resistance or (re)existence.

Moving on, it is necessary to highlight some studies that point out the most common consequences of the creative labor disparity between designers, Indigenous artisans, merchants, and other people working in various institutions related to these activities. Some of the most frequent ideas focus on the economic disadvantage between artisans and merchants; the loss of identity and creative freedom; and the pursuit of craftsmanship as a progressive project in wealth generation (Frías et al., 2023; Martínez Osorio et al., 2020; Martínez Osorio & Castellanos Tuirán, 2023). While the authors advocate for decolonizing design and analyzing colonial power relations in knowledge co-production with other communities, observing these dynamics proves difficult due to the lack of further examination of the phenomena.

We noticed various efforts to promote critical self-reflection in the classroom. For example, the concept of reflective and reflexive practice has diversified to seek alternatives focused on collaborative work and the questioning of students for their positionalities and political stance (Hernández, 2021; Saito et al., 2022). While globally, positioning oneself in relation to shared knowledge production is growing in decolonial studies, in Latin America this practice deeply resonates with researchers' self-reflections on institutional politics and political participation (Albarrán González, 2020; Serpa, 2023; Torretta, 2023; Trias Cornú, 2020), and resistance through subaltern design practices (Pinto et al., 2022, 2023). These works encourage reflection on a political consciousness

that advocates for a relational ontology based on acknowledging our condition of vulnerability, precariousness, and co-dependence (Ávila, 2017).

There is also a significant trend showing how leaning toward relational practices affects the way we reflect within classrooms (Clark & Torretta, 2022). Most critical decolonial studies focusing on educational themes reveal authors' tendencies to engage more personally and closely with participants (Angelon & van Amstel, 2021; Torretta, 2023). This also translates into a more active role in collaborative fieldwork, engaging with others and reflecting on these interactions (Albarrán González, 2020; Clark & Torretta, 2022; Montes Cruz, 2020; Montes Cruz et al., 2023; Pérez-Bustos et al., 2022; Reina-Rozo et al., 2024). At the same time, there is an increase in the use of non-traditional academic formats like podcasts, and online workshops and discussions where designers collectively discuss alternative perspectives in design practice and education, beyond traditional academic formats.

What Are the Prevalent Ideas and Practices Considered by Authors when Discussing the Shared Nature of Knowledge Construction Among Different Entities in Design Practice?

'Autonomy' is an important concept in decolonial literature: various analyses are conducted based on *autonomía* (autonomy) and self-determination (Albarrán González, 2020). These include viewing autonomy as an activity that resists market-imposed logic (Bastidas Pérez, 2023), as the ability to sustain community efforts over time (Pinto et al., 2022), and the ability to express desires through products (Leitão, 2020). However, realizing autonomy is challenging when put into practice for designers. Montes Cruz (2020, 2023) invites us to contemplate and be aware of the colonial gaze that still persists in our ways of understanding reality, particularly when attempting to 'translate' other practices associated with diverse cosmologies.

'Relationality' is another prominent concept trend within decolonial studies on the continent. Arturo Escobar (2019) proposes understanding the term as strong or radical relationality, in opposition to a 'weak' relationality associated with a Western dualistic ontological perspective. Many authors resonate with these aspirations, seeking to expand Escobar's ideas of relationality based on a communal sense, reciprocity, and respect for the other (Albarrán González, 2023; Campos García, 2021; Gutiérrez Borrero, 2022; Udoewa et al., 2023). In this sense, relationality also connects with interdependence (Bastidas Pérez, 2023; Cordeiro Marques Correa & Carvalho Cardoso, 2022; Pinto et al., 2022), which aims to broaden human capacities to understand differences with other human beings, living beings (non-humans), and even inanimate objects. Firstly, most authors refer to relationality in terms of cultural and political differences between human beings

(Clark & Torretta, 2022; Ortega Pallanez, 2023). It makes sense for these experiences to emerge in contexts where knowledge construction engages with peripheral traditions (artisanal, Indigenous, or subaltern). Secondly, some authors advocate for an expanded relationality that includes other living beings (Ávila, 2017).

Then, finally, the concept of ‘agency’ has become increasingly crucial, as design practices have begun to emphasize collaboration with various participants, primarily to address negotiations between individuals. An example of this is the work by Garduño García (2015), which shows a conceptual influence from the social sciences and organizational theories. From a decolonial perspective, the concept of agency follows strong sociological and anthropological lines to explain the power dynamics involved in these processes, and to provide actionable points within design practices. In the literature, some works suggest expanding the need-based perspective of agency in design processes to include the capacity to express desires for well-being and change (Leitão, 2020), as well as the ability and necessity to take a political stance for the production and reproduction of social life (Pinto et al., 2022; Serpa, 2023).

REFLECTIONS ON THE CRAFTED OUTCOME: DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

The focus of this article is on advancing design education practices in co-producing knowledge with other traditions, by merging scholarly discussions with reflexive, metaphor-based practices. We aimed to build on the reviewed literature by resonating with and expanding upon the issues identified by other authors. Our approach acknowledges diverse positionalities, also informed by our experiences as researchers, teachers, and students from the Global South.

There seems to be an increased awareness of the importance of addressing the long-lasting impacts of colonization and the resulting coloniality of being (Quijano, 2000) embedded in design education and practice. Echoing the critiques regarding the decolonization of universities as highly commercialized and modern-colonial academic structures (de Sousa Santos, 2021; Mbembe, 2023), we can relate to how, as scholars, we are constantly being disciplined in our professional and educational practices. Different “technologies of government” (Zembylas, 2024, p. 175) also pervade the emotional, affective, and embodied dimensions of everyday life. This issue is evident in the vertical academic structures that rarely encourage debates challenging mainstream scientific knowledge or exploring alternative perspectives. Instead, they tend to reduce administrative frictions in the search for consensus, reinforcing political agendas aligned with dominant paradigms. The literature shows these forces are not just external but have been internalized as values, shaping individual identities and imprinting practices within academia. This can sometimes feel beyond our control, as seen

in the massification of education, which compels academics to teach large groups in standardized ways, forcing group learning and cramming knowledge into the limited time of academic semesters.

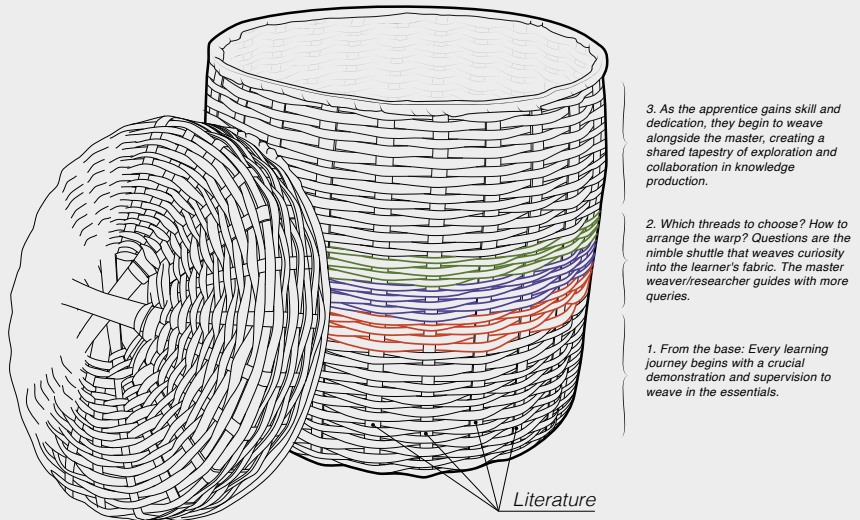
This situation challenges the Western design approach rooted in Bauhaus and the Ulm School, largely based on small-class, creative teaching—more akin to traditional artisanal workshops and practice-based experiences. In this context, we support initiatives like ‘Slow Education’ (ITCILO & ETF, 2022) and other relational, reflexive, and embodied practices aimed at decolonizing educational and everyday practices. While we celebrate the growing number of approaches in the literature, there remains a need to fully address the complexities of oppressor-oppressed dynamics within academic institutions that hinder reflexivity and critical thinking. This underscores the limitations of decolonial actions within institutions that still rely on the same academic scaffolding, remaining vulnerable to criticism from the decolonial perspectives we seek to embrace (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the interplay between our epistemic traditions, subjectivity, and academic performance, to take solid and informed positions in this context.

Reflexivity through metaphors contributes to the many types of self-reflection we have explored in this paper. We have discussed its potential to counter other kinds of narratives, nevertheless, its true potential lies in its contribution to decolonize the knowledge and practices of each of us, as teachers, supervisors, and students who aspire to co-exist within the university and outside in other communities. Embodied and reflexive practices can reveal neoliberal and modern-colonial patterns in individual subjectivity by recognizing alternative ways to co-exist in the world through different knowledge production practices. In this context, the literature review served as a crucial knowledge source. Our focus on the co-production of knowledge between industrial designers and Indigenous artisans led us to seek common metaphoric references, allowing us to self-reflect on our personal approaches through the lens of current decolonial scholarship.

Traditional artisans and Indigenous peoples offer many examples of how to work with nature’s diversity and living systems. As highlighted in the literature, this practical divergence is not rooted in production logics, but in the intricate relational entanglements among everyday practices, people, and other entities (Bastidas Pérez, 2023). From an educational perspective, we align with Pye (1978) and Dormer (1990), who view artisanal work as an activity that requires embracing risk and uncertainty, making the pursuit of knowledge through learning a profound and creative experience for the learner. Following Bastidas Pérez (2023), this activity also unfolds within a social, relational dimension of care and cooperation among participants. Therefore, fostering reflexivity through metaphors that resonate with these principles in collaborative contexts allows us

to transcend the neoliberal and modern-colonial limitations previously discussed. This operates in two ways: first, by recognizing our limitations as ingrained norms, we create opportunities to unlearn and relearn collectively for transformative change (Light et al., 2024); and second, by opening ourselves to a multiplicity of learning possibilities we can enact (Daza-Cardona et al., 2021)—and potentially co-exist with—the realities we want to entangle, beyond university knowledge.

Figure 4: Graphic representation of the artisanal literature review and reflections outcome. The basket symbolizes the design educational practice we want to shape. Source: Author's own.



As a result of this artisanal reflexive literature review, we also raise new questions: Are Indigenous artisans and other knowledge traditions interested in being recognized as 'legitimate' design knowledge producers in already precarious academic systems? How do we navigate the co-production of knowledge and advocate for processes of relational agency within and outside the limits of academic institutions? How can our ways of learning and constructing knowledge help to explore and legitimize diverse realities beyond those described by scientific knowledge? How do we accompany 'unheard' voices, like those of Indigenous artisans, without reproducing extractive and erosive practices? How do we decolonize design education from within modern-colonial institutions that reproduce hierarchies and oppression in knowledge production, without active and constant participation from the communities we engage with? While we do not have concrete answers to these new questions, we aim to contribute a new perspective for 'artisanal' academics as an alternative viewpoint from modern-colonial perspectives, and invite readers to take part in decolonial, positioned, reflexive, and situated efforts towards decolonizing design education. **D**

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