

## BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN: A TEACHING STRATEGY TO FACILITATE AN ALIGNMENT OF THE CREATIVE DESIGN PURPOSE OF A FASHION DESIGNER AND THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE CONSUMER

Lee AJC de Wet\*

### ABSTRACT

Many South African fashion designers are unsuccessful in terms of business and design strategy, by creating products that express their own artistic design style without sufficient consideration of specific consumer requirements. The argument is made that fashion design education that neglects the consumer in the design process could set students up for such failure. This paper reports on the second application of an action research cycle to implement an improved teaching approach. The teaching approach included an intervention to stimulate awareness of the need for a fashion designer to integrate the designer's style with target market requirements as a strategy to produce authentic, relevant products that can add value to the consumer. In order to reflect upon and evaluate the effect of the action to stimulate awareness, data were obtained from participants' written reflections and design purpose statements, as well as assessment results of completed concept design illustrations. The findings of the study indicated that, with the exception of one case, all the participants were able to attain levels of awareness, as was demonstrated in the assessment results of the design illustrations, which represented the visual expression of a participant's design strategy. Nevertheless, the ability to synthesise ideas was identified as a major challenge still to be addressed. It is clear from the findings, though, that the strategic principles and process facilitated through the teaching approach and the subsequent recommendations for refinement present a viable opportunity for fashion design educators to pursue and adapt to their situations and needs.

— *Mrs AJC de Wet\**

Department of Fashion Design  
University of Johannesburg  
Cell: 072 3822587  
Tel: +27 (0)11 559 1070  
Fax: +27 (0)11 1610  
E mail: leed@uj.ac.za  
\*corresponding author

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received 23 June 2016

Revision received 30 September 2016

#### Keywords

fashion design education, awareness, user-centred design, designer authenticity, design strategy, consumer value

### INTRODUCTION

Fashion design students need to develop not only technical design skills, but also cognitive skills to analyse, evaluate and synthesise, in order to effectively communicate a creative expression (Au et al, 2004). Within the context of design as a professional practice that sets out to conceive and produce novel ideas and products, a successful design is often associated with the authenticity and creativity of the designer (Kuutti, 2011). Nevertheless, many South African fashion designers are unsuccessful in terms of business and design strategy, by creating products that express their own artistic design style, which do not always meet specific consumer requirements (Tselepis, 2013). This challenge possibly relates to the application of a designer proxy approach, whereby the designer is considered the creative genius who is central in the design process (Dorst, 2011), and acts as the ambassador for his/her designs. On the other side of the spectrum is user-centred design that revolves around the aspired value (needs and expectations) of the consumer (Boztepe, 2007; Keiser & Garner, 2008; Friedman, 2012). Fashion design students should therefore ideally be facilitated to develop a design strategy that meets consumer requirements but also encapsulates the authenticity of the designer.

This paper reports on the second application of an action research cycle that forms part of a larger cyclical process of intervention and refinement to develop a teaching approach to enhance fashion design students' practice during the conceptual phase of the design process. The implementation of interventions in action research is often used in education to improve a

situation and to determine the effectiveness of an action (Hien, 2009; Norton, 2009; Mertler & Charles, 2010). Findings from the baseline assessment indicated that students entering the second year of study often lack awareness in terms of design strategy and the synthesis of information and ideas (de Wet, 2016). In response, in this study, a teaching intervention was devised and implemented to stimulate awareness of the need for a fashion designer to align his/her own creative design purpose and consumer requirements, to add value by producing relevant products that also reflect the authenticity of the designer; both sides of the coin.

The following discussion first provides a review of relevant literature and starts by presenting design as a consumer-centred strategy and activity. Thereafter, the role of authenticity in design is deliberated. This is followed by a discussion concerning the designing of consumer value through relevant fashion designer services and products. Figure 1 then consolidates this information in a diagram to illustrate the implemented teaching strategy. This section concludes with the research question and objectives of the study. Following on from this section, the research design and methods are discussed, followed by the presentation and discussion of findings. Lastly, final thoughts and recommendations are suggested for teaching in the field of fashion design for target consumers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Design as a consumer-centred strategy

From the perspective of a user-centred (consumer-centred) design approach, design is a goal-oriented intentional or purposeful activity to solve problems strategically within the context of a particular consumer (Mitcham & Holbrook, 2006). However, design is not only a knowledge-intensive intentional activity, but also involves creative expression (Mitcham & Holbrook, 2006), which reflects the emotion of the creator and should evoke emotion in the consumer (Fiore, 2010). Art, on the other hand, although also encompassing strategy, takes on a highly personal approach to express the creativity of the artist (Kuhn, 2002). Therefore, a designer who does not create consumer value can be viewed as an artist focusing on personal creative expression.

Design as a user-centred strategy entails more than creative expression, since design strategy implies that intent is created (Anderson, 2003;

Mitcham & Holbrook, 2006; Haupt, 2013). In this regard, the intent of the design (for example, a concept garment design) should at least involve the satisfaction of consumer needs (Stonehouse & Snowdon, 2007), which have to be analysed on different levels, such as sensory, aesthetic, symbolic and emotional needs (Fiore, 2010). Nevertheless, the authenticity (originality/self-expression) of the designer may provide uniqueness or a distinctiveness to the designs when the consumer selects a product during the decision-making process (Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014; de Wet & Tselepis, 2015). The question that arises is, what role does the designer's authenticity play in a strategic user-centred design approach?

### The role of authenticity in design

The concept of authenticity is often associated with the creator's own/real artistic or creative expressions (Bendix, 2009). Benjamin (cited in Bendix, 2009) characterises the elusive nature of authenticity as fundamentally an emotional and moral quest, which Bendix (2009) relates to a result of cognitive reflexivity of an individual (in this case the fashion designer-student). Reflexivity, from a design perspective, implies that an individual should turn inward to reflect in an attempt to conceptualise original design ideas that express the individuality of the designer (de Wet & Tselepis, 2015). Hargadon and Bechky (2006) further emphasise the importance for creatives (such as fashion designers) to continuously reflect and adjust design ideas, in search of the most relevant solutions. Reflexivity in this paper is viewed as an important dimension of authenticity and the argument is therefore made that the authenticity of the designer can contribute to a designer's competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Kuutti (2011) concurs that authenticity is a non-negotiable ingredient of the design process that should be developed like any other design strategy, for a designer to also express his/her own creative design purpose. This development of designer authenticity has specific implications for fashion design education. Furthermore, it is important to point out that from a design perspective, 'fashion design' without the authenticity of the designer and only strategy to satisfy consumer needs can technically not be viewed as fashion 'design', but rather product development. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge that the designer's authenticity should be developed in fashion design training/education as a component not only of creative expression, but also as a factor contributing to

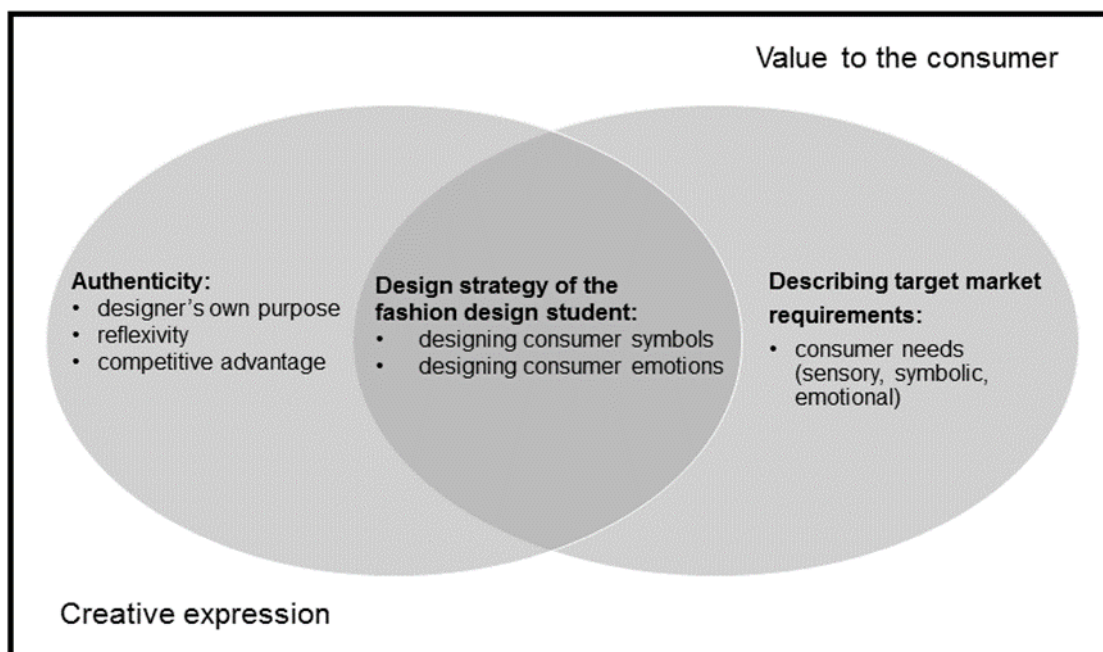
competitive advantage in the marketplace. A teaching strategy intended to enable students to align to the aspired value of the consumer might start with the designer's creative purpose and authenticity, but will not end there.

**Designing consumer value with fashion designer products**

A fashion designer can add value when consumer requirements are met or consumer expectations regarding products are exceeded (Stonehouse & Snowdon, 2007; Fiore, 2010; Strydom, Petzer & de Meyer, 2015). This contribution could be developed through a user-centred design approach. Ideally, fashion designers should have a distinct style or differentiating factor that is aligned to the value they create with their products or services (Aspelund, 2010; Faerm, 2010). This value of the designer should, however, be visually communicated for consumers to clearly recognise. From a business perspective, such a value-adding strategy should align to consumer requirements (Bai, Choi, Tan, Au, Raymond & Zang, 2014; Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014). Nevertheless, the aspired value that the designer intends with products needs to be communicated in a way that also encapsulates the designer's perspective. One way to capture and communicate value and a distinct designer style or differentiating factors can be through a strategy that focusses the design intention

around the requirements of a specific brand or niche market retailer.

Hekkert (2006) asserts that designing products to meet requirements that relate to consumers' cognitive symbolic and emotional needs can be viewed as a design strategy. One should therefore acknowledge that designers have the ability to create value-adding products that not only become meaningful symbols to consumers, but can also evoke some intended emotional responses in consumers. In this regard a designer can manipulate sensory design elements of products purposefully through the application of design principles (Cayol & Bonhoure, 2004) to create resonating symbolic attributes (Hekkert, 2006; Fiore, 2010). Fiore and Kimle (1997) present some dimensions of symbolism that can guide students in 'designing' relevant symbolism. Symbolic dimensions include: reality (representation of "what is"), fantasy ("what could be") or entertainment ("seeking or finding something new, unusual, unexpected, or challenging") (Fiore & Kimle, 1997:45-47). Indirectly, a designer can also create emotion, as it results from the combination of sensory and symbolic aspects, and can relate to dimensions of: pleasure (good, preferable, liked), dominance (feeling of being unrestricted or in control of a situation) or arousal (feeling-state varying from sleep to frantic excitement) (Fiore, 2010). Nevertheless, in order for students to understand design



**FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM PRESENTING THE IMPLEMENTED TEACHING STRATEGY TO SUPPORT THE ALIGNMENT OF FASHION DESIGNERS' CREATIVE DESIGN PURPOSE TO CONSUMER REQUIREMENTS**

implications and develop a value-adding strategy, it is important to analyse and interpret target market requirements early in the design process.

The argument is made that while the designer has a creative design purpose that should not be ignored, and is separate from the consumer, he/she is inseparable from the value that needs to be contributed to the consumer. Therefore, fashion design training that neglects the consumer requirements in the design process could set students up for failure. The guiding question of this research was, therefore, how can a teaching strategy stimulate awareness of the coexistence of these two aspects in order for fashion design to adopt a user-centred approach that also encapsulates the authenticity and creative design purpose of the designer? In response to this question, the objectives of the study as they relate to the applied phases of the action research cycle were to:

- 1) devise and implement a teaching intervention to stimulate awareness by facilitating the alignment of a designer's creative design purpose and consumer requirements, and
- 2) reflect upon the effect of the action by assessing whether awareness was indicated in students' design approach following the intervention, in order to offer recommendations for further refinement of the teaching strategy.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

### Research design

This study applied an action research design that followed a qualitative methodological approach in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data. The continual cyclical process of intervention and refinement of action research is often used in education and training to improve a situation and to determine the effectiveness of an action, based on experience and reflection by the researcher (Hien, 2009; Norton, 2009; Mertler & Charles, 2010). The inquiry concerned the second application of an action research cycle that implemented an improved teaching approach and addressed students' lack of awareness regarding design strategy, as identified in the baseline assessment (de Wet, 2016). To this end, the study focussed on first stimulating awareness of a design strategy to align designer style and consumer requirements on a second year level as a starting point before real improvement

could be expected to take place in students' design work. Therefore, the intention was not to assess participants' design work for improvement, but rather whether the teaching intervention was successful in stimulating awareness that was previously lacking. Furthermore, as suggested in the first cycle (de Wet, 2016), to improve the teaching approach, in this study, participants' perspectives were included in the reflections on the effect of the action, to gain deeper insights and enhance the trustworthiness of possible subjectivity by the lecturer (researcher).

The larger study followed four generally acknowledged phases of an action research cycle, namely: planning (problem identification and reviewing informing literature), acting (devising and implementing an intervention), observing, and reflecting upon the effect of the action for refinement for future application (Norton, 2009; Mertler & Charles, 2010). This paper only reports on the implementation of the teaching intervention and reflection on whether awareness was indicated in students' design approach following the action, so that their strategy: 1) includes the ability to communicate their own design purpose in writing and 2) is aligned to a specific target market's requirements in order that value could be added to the consumer through the designs. To this end the intervention comprised two workshops offered to facilitate: 1) workshop one: the identification of student-designer's own purpose, and 2) workshop two: identification of the target market's requirements, as well as the synthesis of designer purpose with consumer requirements, to develop a design strategy for the project.

### Operationalisation of the project

A group of 33 second year fashion design students was involved in the research project that incorporated a project-based approach, integrating two Creative Design modules that worked as a unit and a Business module. The project brief provided students with an option of two prominent South African niche fashion retailers to choose from as the target market for their design work. These retailers were intentionally chosen, since the assessors and moderator involved in the project were familiar with their merchandise and represented both target markets, in order to contribute to the validity of the assessments of the design work. The design modules focussed on design development and illustration of two concept

garment designs that express the authenticity of the student-designer within the context of the chosen consumer. The Business module supported the Design modules by means of the implemented intervention to facilitate an alignment of these two aspects. Although it was compulsory for all students to complete the project as an assessment, data for this paper were collected from 15 students who willingly participated in all aspects of the intervention, since participation in the study was voluntary.

To reiterate the application of the principles facilitated through the workshops and guide design development, the Design module lecturers (including the author) maintained close contact with the students throughout the duration of the project. Formative assessment sessions were included to encourage reflexivity during the process of design development and for lecturer feedback. During these sessions, students had the opportunity to present the progress of their individual projects and verbally motivate how they aligned their concept designs to the consumers of their particular retailer. The lecturers' role in these assessments, as proposed by Hargadon and Bechky (2006), was primarily to probe and propose possible alternative solutions as triggers when needed. In this regard the intention was for students to consider (reflect and adjust) the suggestions made and then apply their own interpretation in their projects.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical requirements were met by first acquiring written permission from the relevant institutional research committee to proceed with the enquiry. Reporting of general themes in anonymous reflective notes of participants was permitted by the committee. In this regard, only the most common reflections made by participants on their perspectives, with no references to specific students, are reported in this paper. Furthermore, upon initiating the project, students were made aware of the research intention of the teaching strategy and that participation was voluntary and would be anonymous. Lastly, students taking part in the study signed consent forms, agreeing that the information generated from this project could be used for the purpose of this paper.

The operationalisation of the intervention that the team of lecturers implemented in an integrated project-based teaching strategy is presented in Table 1. The table first includes the

key aspects addressed in this study resulting from the baseline assessment. The objectives, as they relate to the two action research phases reported upon in this paper, with specific intervention methods applied and strategies by the lecturer for each phase, follow thereafter.

### **Research methods**

The objectives of this study, acquired in the action research phases of implementation and reflection on the effect of the intervention, each required specific qualitative research methods and data analysis. Since the perspectives of both the lecturer and participants were considered in the reflections to evaluate whether awareness was stimulated, multiple methods were implemented, which are discussed next.

Participants' perspectives on the teaching approach and process were obtained from written reflections documented in journals of their views on the effect of the project on their design strategy, which were guided by four provided questions to address. The guiding questions for the reflections are presented in Table 2. Participants also had to formulate and communicate in writing their own design strategy, as an integrated design purpose statement. The purpose statement comprised perspectives on personal designer style (authenticity) and target market requirements of the chosen retailer. Consumer requirements included an interpretation of the meaning (symbolism) and feeling (emotion) of design themes obtained from the retailers' websites, which the intended garment designs needed to portray to the consumer. The reflective journal was therefore a tool to support the synthesis of own purpose and the requirements of the target market so that a design strategy could be developed that encapsulated distinct designer's style within the context of the retailer's brand strategy. To further facilitate a synthesis of ideas into a workable design purpose that encapsulates both these aspects, participants shared their reflections and communicated their strategies in two sound-board sessions, supported by help sheets to complete, shortly after the workshops.

The lecturer's perspective on whether awareness was stimulated through the intervention was informed by the following considerations: 1) participants' written reflections documented in journals on their perspectives on the implemented teaching approach, 2) participants' written design

**TABLE 1: PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

<b>BASELINE/FIRST ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE</b>		
<b>Key aspect addressed in cycle two, which resulted from the baseline assessment</b>	<b>Key recommendation addressed in cycle two to improve the teaching approach that resulted from the baseline cycle.</b>	
Students' lack of awareness regarding design strategy	Inclusion of students' perspectives to gain deeper insights and enhance the trustworthiness of the subjectivity of the lecturer in the reflections.	
<b>SECOND ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE</b>		
<b>Action research phase 1</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Strategy of the lecturer</b>
<b>1. Implementation of teaching intervention</b>	<b>Workshop 1:</b> <b>Objective of workshop:</b> To stimulate awareness of the designers' own purpose in order to relate to authentic design.	<b>Self-awareness:</b> for students-designers to become aware of their personal strengths
<b>Outcomes of workshop 1</b> 1) To identify five character strengths 2) To formulate own purpose statement by incorporating the identified character strengths and passion.	<b>Methods applied in workshop 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Johari Window was applied to support the exploration of personal attributes: students had to ask people who know them well to identify personal strengths that they may be unaware of.</li> <li>• Guidance structure for students to complete (help sheets).</li> </ul>	
	<b>Workshop 2:</b> <b>Objectives of workshop:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to create awareness of target market requirements, and</li> <li>• to facilitate the integration of own purpose with consumer requirements, in order to create value to the consumer.</li> </ul>	<b>Empathy:</b> for students-designers to assume the perspective of the consumer
<b>Outcomes of workshop 2</b> 1) To describe the requirements of the target market.	<b>Methods applied in workshop 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PowerPoint presentation concerning marketing.</li> <li>• Consumer science theory on needs, expectations and minimum product requirements.</li> </ul>	
1) To integrate personal strengths and target market needs and expectations into a design strategy. 2) To formulate a design purpose statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound-boarding sessions for students to share their reflections and communicate strategies.</li> <li>• Guidance structure for students to complete (help sheets).</li> </ul>	
<b>Action research phase 2</b>	<b>Methods</b>	
<b>2. Reflection on the effect of the teaching intervention to stimulate awareness</b>	Participants': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• design purpose statements,</li> <li>• reflections documented in their journals and</li> <li>• assessment results of concept design illustrations.</li> </ul>	Seeking for indications of awareness

strategies (purpose statements), and 3) completed assessment sheets with captured final results of the concept design illustrations that visually reflect the synthesis of the two aspects of the design strategy.

### Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify prominent recurring themes emerging from the participants' reflections on the effect of the project on their design approach, which

suggested awareness. The raw data were colour-coded to assist in identifying recurring themes, as suggested by Munro (2014). Recurring information was categorised and later interpreted by drawing on debriefing sessions with the various lecturers involved in the project and relevant literature to derive and confirm interpretations (Munro 2014).

Key words were further identified in each participant's design purpose statement relating to the intended meaning and feeling of a theme

to be expressed in the garment designs. These key words were later used in the assessments of the concept design illustrations to consider a participant's ability to associate the communicated design strategy with relevant design solutions that coherently demonstrate the synthesis of the designer's authentic style and consumer requirements for a viewer to recognise. Table 4 presents the identified key words to describe participants' communicated design strategy. The assessment of the concept design illustrations was conducted by both design lecturers, guided by their extensive design practice and teaching experience. The final results of the concept design illustrations were also moderated by the Business module lecturer to further enhance the confirmability and validity of the obtained marks.

Visual analysis was used as a technique to assess the completed concept design illustrations. Visual analysis is a scholarly assessment method that is typically applied to critically analyse, interpret and evaluate visuals for a specific purpose, according to set criteria (Helmets, 2006; Rose, 2012). To this end, the visual analysis of the illustrations was conducted according to criteria on an assessment sheet. The criteria were based on dimensions to assess the illustrations for their sensory and symbolic expression of a participant's design strategy. The criteria as they relate to the visual analysis process included phases to determine whether:

- 1) the identified key words of the themes used in participants' written design strategies, relate to the descriptions of meaning and feeling of the themes on the websites of a chosen retailer,
- 2) the combined application of design principles and elements in the concept design illustrations visually reflects the synthesis of designer authenticity and target market requirements, as communicated in the design strategy, in terms of:
  - i. visual expression of designer authenticity/style, reflecting participants' views of own style as presented in their journals,
  - ii. alignment of sensory design principles and elements to create meaning and evoke feeling, to meet target market requirements,
  - iii. coherence between the applied sensory design principles and elements, their symbolic meaning and the evoked feeling to represent the design theme, and
  - iv. integrated designer authenticity and

consumer requirements, within the context of this paper, result in the principle of meaning (symbolism) and feeling (emotion). To this end the visual analysis was guided by principles of alignment, as proposed by Kolmos (2009), to assess the existence of coherence and logic and mutual support between all aspects: the design strategy, applied meaning principles and elements to create meaning and feeling, and consumer requirements.

A scattergram, which is typically employed to establish a relationship and the strength of the connection between two variables (Wegner 2007), was used as support to establish connections between each participant's written design strategy and the achieved meaning and feeling expressed in the concept design illustrations. Table 4 in the findings and discussion section presents key words to describe participants' communicated design strategy and final moderated concept design illustration assessment results.

#### **Credibility, dependability and confirmability of the data**

Mouton (2006) and de Vos (2003) suggest some strategies that were applied to ensure that the qualitative data and final reflections presented in this paper are credible, dependable and confirmable. The measures taken include: 1) the creation of a clear audit trail that comprises of analysis sheets of participants' reflections, scatter graphs to support the visual analysis for the assessment of the concept design illustrations, and assessment sheets with criteria to assess the concept design illustrations, 2) the lecturers involved in the student project are experts in their respective research fields in order to integrate the expertise for the purpose of the assignment, 3) lecturers holding team debriefing meetings to discuss the progress and enhance the integration of the project components were voice-recorded to return to, if needed, 4) to ensure that objective unbiased views are reflected, the assessed concept design illustrations were moderated by the Business module lecturer, with a doctoral degree in her field of expertise that relates to design processes and the business aspects of fashion design, and 5) reflections were supported with literature from various disciplinary sources (Au et al, 2004; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Dorst, 2011; Bai, Choi, Tan, Au, Raymond & Zang, 2014; Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014; de Wet, 2016).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Objective 1: Creating awareness regarding the importance of consumer requirements in a design purpose

The first objective of the intervention was to create awareness in participants so that alignment of designer's creative design purpose and consumer requirements could be facilitated. Table 2 presents the guiding questions for the reflections, the identified themes, as well as the most prominent excerpts from participants' reflections that demonstrated awareness of the importance for a fashion designer to align a design strategy to an intended consumer.

From Table 2 it is apparent that as a result of the intervention workshops, participants seem to understand the concept of the two aspects of the design strategy and that it is necessary to first know their personal core strengths as a designer, the target market, and then need to synthesise the two. The reflections indicate that participants initially found it difficult to identify their own purpose and who the target market is,

but mostly managed to do so as the process unfolded. Synthesising own purpose with consumer requirements was identified by all participants as the most challenging part of the process. The findings presented in Table 2 nevertheless indicate that an awareness of the intended design strategy was stimulated as a start on a second year level. Participants realised that in order to become successful designers, they cannot only design conceptually and within own aesthetic preferences and style, but rather need to design with intention and incorporate the perspective of the consumer in their strategy. However, in order to conclude on the collective effect of the intervention, the findings relating to the second objective of the study should be considered.

### Objective 2: Consider whether awareness was evident in participant's concept designs

Table 3 provides the key to how the concept design illustrations were visually analysed for indications of awareness. To this end, the assessment focussed on determining the coherence between the communicated design

**TABLE 2: THEMES IDENTIFIED IN PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIONS THAT DEMONSTRATED AWARENESS**

Questions	Themes identified in participant's reflections	Most prominent supportive excerpts from participants' reflections
1. Were you able to identify your own purpose?	Participants struggled at first but managed to identify own purpose as the process unfolded.	"...it made more sense as the exercises went on..." "...I was struggling a bit but managed to figure it out..." "...the presentations helped me understand what I need to focus on..."
2. Were you able to identify who your target market is and what your target market wants?	Doing a physical store visit is important to help get a real-life sense of who the target market is and what they would require in a product.	"... I was only really able to figure out the kind of consumer by going to the store..." "... it was difficult at first, but visiting the store made things easier because I saw the kind of clothing offered to people..." "...initially I chose one of the stores based on what I liked, but when I dug deeper into the target market, I saw it would be difficult to design something that meets what they want..."
3. What was your biggest challenge of the process?	Synthesis/ integration of both aspects of the strategy.	"... synthesis wasn't easy. I had to think carefully of what would be appealing to my target market and put in something of myself so that my product is unique..." "... to align my ideas with the target market..." "... take into consideration who I am designing for, while also keeping in mind that the designs have to reflect me as a designer... finding the balance between the two was hard..."
4. What was the value of the workshops to you?	Importance for a designer to consider the consumer.  Indications of internal locus.	"... in order to be successful as a designer, you have to always be aware of the consumer you design for..." "... for a product to succeed the designer must be able to align himself with the customer..." "... to work independently and solve design problems..." I got the chance to get out of my comfort zone..."



**TABLE 3: DESCRIPTORS OF INTERVAL LEVELS OF CONCEPT DESIGN ILLUSTRATION RESULTS APPLIED IN TABLE 4**

Interval levels	Meaning required by retailer A (obtained from website)	Feeling required by retailer A (obtained from website)	Meaning required by retailer B (obtained from website)	Feeling required by retailer B (obtained from website)
		Elegance	Earthy feel	Escape
	<b>Descriptors of assessment interval levels for retailer A</b>		<b>Descriptors of assessment interval levels for retailer B</b>	
0 > 3	No or very limited links to meaning of elegance/ earthy feel are evident in the concept designs		No or very limited links to meaning of escape/ crafty, unique, different feel are evident in the concept designs	
3 > 5	Limited links to meaning of elegance/ earthy feel are evident in the concept designs		Limited links to meaning of escape/ crafty, unique, different feel are evident in the concept designs	
5 > 7	Some/good links to meaning of elegance/ earthy feel are evident in the concept designs		Some/good links to meaning of escape/ crafty, unique, different feel are evident in the concept designs	
7 ≥ 10	Excellent links to meaning of elegance/ earthy feel are evident in the concept designs		Excellent links to meaning of escape/ crafty, unique, different feel are evident in the concept designs	

strategy, the retailer’s required meaning and feeling of a theme, and the applied sensory and symbolic design elements of a concept design illustration. The final assessment scores ranged from 1-10, with 1 as the lowest and 10 being the highest score. The assessment scores were grouped in intervals of three, with 0 > 3 being the lowest and 7 ≥ 10 as the highest interval.

The identified key words to describe participants’ communicated design strategy (in terms of meeting target market requirements through intended meaning and evoked feeling) and the final moderated assessment results of the concept design illustrations are presented in Table 4 below.

The assessment results presented in Table 4 suggest that although the assessment scores of participants vary, there is an indication of coherence between intended and achieved meaning and feeling, in relation to the target market requirements, which indicates awareness. The assessment results presented further demonstrate a stronger coherence with the requirements of retailer B than retailer A. This could imply that participants related better with retailer B and were therefore able to align their strategy more effectively. In the cases where coherence was less evident, participants may have found it difficult to ‘leave their comfort zones’ and assume the perspective of the target market. The assessment results nevertheless indicate that, with the exception of one case, all the participants were able to attain levels of awareness. By implication, the applied focus to achieve coherence points towards the advancement of cognitive levels of analysis,

evaluation and synthesis (Au et al, 2004), as a student starts responding to design problems by thinking strategically (Dorst, 2011; de Wet, 2016).

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Considering the findings of the combined perspectives of participants and the researcher, it is clear that awareness was stimulated through the teaching approach, since participants understood the need to design strategically within the context of the consumer in order to become successful in business as a fashion designer. However, it is also evident from the findings that while a mind shift may have been indicated, the ability to synthesise ideas and concepts remains a significant challenge for students, which still needs to be addressed. In this regard there is no quick solution to the problem. Continuous practice may nevertheless enhance students’ competence to integrate consumer requirements with their own design style during the conceptual phase of the fashion design process. Students first need iteration of their own process and then of the target market requirements process for synthesis to take place more effectively somewhere in between these two aspects.

Although the findings of the study suggested that the workshops were successful in stimulating awareness, what educators in this field need to understand is that students require constant repetition of and assistance with synthesis. It is also important to emphasise that the success of this study was due not only to the two implemented workshops, but also to

**TABLE 4: PARTICIPANTS' DESIGN STRATEGY AND CONCEPT DESIGN ILLUSTRATION ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

Participants	Design Strategy of participants (key words obtained from design purpose statements)		Design illustrations expressing the design strategy (design principles and elements)		Niche market retailer A or B
	Meaning (communicated by participants)	Feelings (that participants aimed to evoke)	Meaning expressed	Feeling expressed	
P1	Sophistication	Feeling smart	5 > 7	5 > 7	A
P2	Make a statement	Individualism	5 > 7	5 > 7	A
P3	Imagination	Creative	7 ≥ 10	7 ≥ 10	A
P4	Simplicity	Unusualness	5 > 7	5 > 7	A
P5	Encouragement	Strength, boldness	3 > 5	3 > 5	A
P6	Exclusivity	Stylish	5 > 7	5 > 7	A
P7	Leadership	Sophistication	7 ≥ 10	5 > 7	A
P8	Unique, Flowy, loose	Eccentric	5 > 7	5 > 7	B
P9	Uniqueness	Creativity	5 > 7	5 > 7	B
P10	Non-conformity, self-expression	Adventurous	5 > 7	5 > 7	B
P11	Simple	Humble, stylish	5 > 7	5 > 7	B
P12	Hands-on, practical	Comfortable	7 ≥ 10	7 ≥ 10	B
P13	Motivate, inspire	Confidence	5 > 7	7 ≥ 10	B
P14	Uniqueness	Free-spirited, comfortable	7 ≥ 10	7 ≥ 10	B
P15	Empowering	Comfortable	5 > 7	5 > 7	B

persistent probing and questioning by the lecturers involved throughout the duration of the project to encourage a constant reflective mode. Since students at this level of study often do not naturally reflect during the design process, facilitating reflexivity should be an important consideration in a teaching strategy, in order for students to find the most relevant design solutions (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006). Clearly, assisting students to develop reflectivity in their design process, requires more than just two workshops. It requires careful planning and managing of all components and stages of a project and for lecturers to be attentive and flexible to identify and address students' needs and gaps as they are encountered during the design process.

The limitations of this study relate to the nature of action research as a developmental process. In summary, the limitations concern the fact that the impact of the intervention on participants' entire design practise could not be assessed at this stage. This study involved an early action research cycle that focussed on creating awareness only. However, more than awareness is required, and a following intervention therefore needs to focus on developing and implementing a tool to support the application of the principles facilitated in this

study, in order to constructively improve students' design practice and resulting end-products. Creating awareness can be seen as an initial step of a work in progress, as part of a larger action research process.

In conclusion, enabling students to adopt a design approach that also considers products from the perspective of the consumer, presents an invaluable teaching strategy and opportunity for fashion design educators to pursue and adapt to their situations. Challenging students to design products that are out of their so-called "comfort zone" could enhance the possibility to add value to the consumer and so also success from a business perspective (Bai, Choi, Tan, Au, Raymond & Zang, 2014; Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014). In this regard the author of this paper emphasises that strategising design concepts without the consumer in mind, does not fully embrace the intention of design.

## REFERENCES

- ANDERSON, ML. 2003. Embodied cognition: a field guide. *Artificial Intelligence* 149(1):91-130.  
 ASPELUND, K. 2010. *The design process*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York. Fairchild.  
 AU, J, TAILOR, G & NEWTON, EW. 2004. Model of design process of Hong Kong fashion

- designers. *Journal of Textile and Apparel Technology and Management* 4(2):1-4.
- BAI, Y, CHOI, TM, TAN, J, AU, RW & ZANG, Y. 2014. *Searching for authenticity in fashion design and art collaboration (FDAC)*. *Leonardo* 47(2):179-182.
- BENDIX, R. 2009. *In search of authenticity: the formation of folklore studies*. USA. University of Wisconsin Press.
- BOZTEPE, S. 2007. User value: Competing theories and models. *International Journal of Design* 1(2): 55-63.
- CAYOL, A & BONHOURE, P. 2004. User pleasure in product concept prospecting. *Theoretical issues in Ergonomics* 5(1):16-26.
- CHOI, H, KO, E, KIM, EY & MATTILA, P. 2015. The role of fashion brand authenticity in product management: a holistic marketing approach. *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 32 (2):233-242.
- DE VOS, AS. 2003. *Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- DE WET, AJC. 2016. An educational tool to encourage higher level thinking skills in the selection of images for fashion design mood boards: An action research approach. *International journal of fashion design, education and technology*. Available on line. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17543266.2016.1173236>. Accessed 21 April 2016.
- DE WET, AJC & TSELEPIS, T. 2015. *Whose creative expression is it anyway? A conceptual framework proposed to facilitate an ethical creation process of fashion design mood boards*. Paper presented at the seventh International Design Education Forum of South Africa (DEFSA), Midrand Graduate Institute and Vaal University of Technology, 3-4 September, Midrand, 61-66.
- DORST, K. 2011. The core of design thinking and its application. *Design Studies* 32:521-532.
- FAERM, S. 2010. *Fashion design course*. London. Quarto.
- FIORE, A.M. & KIMLE, P. 1997. *Understanding aesthetics for the merchandising and design professional*. New York. Fairchild.
- FIORE, A.M. 2010. *Understanding aesthetics for the merchandising and design professional*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York. Fairchild.
- FRIEDMAN, K. 2012. Models of design: envisioning a future design education. *Visible language: envisioning a future design education* 46(1/2):132-153.
- HAUPT, MC. 2013. *The cognitive dynamics of socio-technological thinking in the early phases of expert designers' design processes*. PhD thesis. Pretoria. University of Pretoria.
- HARGADON, AB & BECHKY, BA. 2006. When creations of creatives become creative collectives: a field study of problem solving at work. *Organization Science* 17(4):484-525.
- HEKKERT, P. 2006. Design aesthetics: principles of pleasure in design. *Psychology Science* 48(2):157-172.
- HELMERS, M. 2006. *The elements of visual analysis*. New York: Pearson Education.
- KEISER, SJ & GARNER, MB. 2008. *Beyond design: the synergy of apparel product development*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York. Fairchild.
- HIEN, TTT. 2009. Why is action research suitable for education? *VNU Journal of Science, Foreign Languages* 25:97-106. Available on line. URL:[http://tapchi.vnu.edu.vn/nn\\_2\\_09/b4.pdf](http://tapchi.vnu.edu.vn/nn_2_09/b4.pdf).
- KOLMOS, A. 2009. *Management of change: implementation of problem-based and project-based learning in engineering*. Rotterdam. Sense.
- KUHN, A. 2002. *Family secrets: arts of memory and imagination*. London. Verso.
- KUUTTI, K. 2011. *out of the shadow of simon: artefacts, practices, and history in design research*. Paper presented at the Doctoral Education in Design Conference, 23-25 May, Hong Kong, 23-25.
- MERTLER, A. & CHARLES, CM. 2010. *Introduction to education research*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. London. Pearson.
- MITCHAM, C & HOLBROOK, JB. 2006. Understanding technology design. In JS Dakers (ed.), *Defining technological literacy. Towards an epistemological framework*. New York. Palgrave Mac Millan.
- MOUTON, J. 2006. *Understanding social research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- MUNRO, A. 2014. *Research methods in the arts: a guiding manual*. Pretoria: Tshwane University of Technology.
- NORTON, L.S. 2009. *Action research in teaching and learning: A practical guide to conducting pedagogical research in universities*. New York. Routledge.
- ROSE, G. 2012. *Visual methodologies. An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.. London: Sage.
- STONEHOUSE, C. & SNOWDON, B. 2007. Competitive advantage revisited: Michael Porter on strategy and competitiveness. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 16(3):256-273.
- STRYDOM, E, PETZER, DJ & DE MEYER, CF. 2015. A Multidimensional customer value model for the high fashion retail industry. *The Retail and Marketing Review* 11(2):111-131.
- TSELEPIS, T. 2013. *The development of an entrepreneurially oriented design model for the South African small business that offers custom-made apparel*. PhD thesis. Pretoria. University

of Pretoria.

WEGNER, T. 2007. *Applied business statistics:*

*Methods and excel-based applications.* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

Cape Town. Juta & Co.

---