

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

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OPSOMMING

'n Beduidende hoeveelheid van Suid Afrikaanse kleding mode-ontwerpers is nie suksesvol in terme van besigheid strategiee wanneer hul in die industrie moet meeding nie. Besigheid strategie behoort meer in te sluit as om produkte te skep wat slegs die ontwerper se eie ontwerpstyl uitbeeld. Die verbruiker se behoeftes en verwagtinge behoort 'n integrale deel van 'n ontwerper se strategie te wees wanneer die ontwerpproses uitgevoer word. Terselfdetyd behoort die uniekheid wat elke ontwerper aan sy/haar kledingstukke bring ook as belangrik geag te word vanuit 'n besigheidsoogpunt, aangesien dit juis die ontwerper se mededingende voordeel kan wees. Hierdie studie handel oor 'n onderrig intervensie wat geïmplimenteer is by 'n terriere instansie, om studente aan te moedig om 'n ontwerpstrategie saam te stel wat die uniekheid van die student-ontwerper se styl integreer met 'n bepaalde eindverbruiker se vereistes. Hierdie integrasie is belangrik geag om uiteindelik mode kledingstukke te ontwerp waarby die verbruiker aanklank kan vind en die student-ontwerper 'n belangrike beginsel in die ontwerp disipline te leer naamlik empatie.

'n Aksie-navorsingsontwerp is geïmplimenteer waarin twee werkwinkels aangebied is, sodat daar eerstens 'n strategie rondom elke student-ontwerper se eie styl en doelwitte bepaal kon word en tweedens 'n bewustheid rondom die belangrikheid van verbruiker vereistes te kweek. Deelnemers aan die studie se refleksies is in 'n ontwerp joernaal aangeteken gedurende die projek en dit is geanaliseer om te bepaal of daar wel 'n bewustheid gekweek is. 'n Visuele analise is ook gedoen van die deelnemers se konsep-illustrasies om vas te stel of die beskrywings en temas wat gekies is van bepaalde kleinhandelaars se webtuistes ooreenstem met deelnemers se temas wat gebruik is in hul ontwerp strategiee. Verder is die ontwerp illustrasies ook geanaliseer om vas te stel of die illustrasies met die deelnemers se ontwerpstrategiee ooreengestem het. Die bevindinge van hierdie studie dui daarop dat die intervensie wat implimenteer is wel bewusteid geskep het onder die studente wat deelgeneem het aan die studie. Dit is nogtans duidelik dat die sintese van idees die grootste uitdaging gebied het vir studente en dat sintese kan verbeter met oefening. Aanbevelings word gemaak in hierdie opsig vir lektore in die ontwerp veld om hul studente te bemagtig om uiteinlik meer aanpasbaar te wees in die hoogs kompeterende mode industrie.

ABSTRACT

Many South African fashion designers are unsuccessful in terms of business and 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 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 to still address. 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.

Key words: fashion design education; awareness; user-centred design; designer authenticity; design strategy; consumer value.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion design students need to develop technical design skills, but also cognitive levels 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 authenticity and creativity of the designer (Kuutti, 2011:23). Nevertheless, many South African fashion designers are unsuccessful in terms of business and strategy, by creating products that express their own artistic design style that does not always meet specific consumer requirements (Tselepis, 2013:4). 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), acting 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; Friedman, 2012; Keiser & Garner, 2008:6). 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, 2009:97; Mertler & Charles, 2010:4; Norton, 2009:3). Findings resulting from the baseline assessment indicated that students entering the second year of study often lack awareness in terms of design strategy and synthesising 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 integrate 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 that 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 the research findings. Lastly, final thoughts and recommendations for teaching in the field of fashion design for target consumers are suggested.

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, 2006:107). However, design is not only a knowledge-intensive intentional activity, but also involves creative expression (Mitcham & Holbrook, 2006:107), which reflects the emotion of the creator and should evoke emotion in the consumer (Fiore, 2010:8). Art on the other hand, although also encompassing strategy, takes on a highly personal approach to express the creativity of the artist (Kuhn, 2002:4). 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; Haupt, 2013:16; Mitcham & Holbrook, 2006:107). 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, 2010:8-12). Nevertheless, the authenticity (originality/self-expression) of the designer may provide a 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, 2015:64). The question arising 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, 2009:6). Benjamin (cited in Bendix, 2009:7) characterises the elusive nature of authenticity as fundamentally an emotional and moral quest, which Bendix (2009:8) 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, 2015:64). Hargadon and Bechky (2006) further emphasise the importance for creatives (such as fashion designers) to continuously reflect and adjust design ideas, in search for 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 (2011:23) 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 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 (Fiore, 2010:12; Strydom, Petzer & De Meyer, 2015; [Stonehouse & Snowdon, 2007](#)). This contribution could be developed through a user-centred design approach. Ideally, fashion designers should have a distinct style or differentiating factor (Aspelund, 2010:3; Faerm, 2010:78,79) that is aligned to the value they create with their products or services. 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 (Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014; Bai, Choi, Tan, Au, Raymond & Zang, 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 (Fiore, 2010:6,7; Hekkert, 2006). Fiore and Kimle (1997:45-47) 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, 2010:33,34). Nevertheless, in

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

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

Place Figure 1 here

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 become 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) [device and implement a teaching intervention to stimulate awareness by facilitating the alignment of 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, 2009:97; Mertler & Charles, 2010:4; Norton, 2009:3). 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 integrate designer style and consumer requirements, on a second year level as a starting point before real improvement can 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. To improve upon the teaching approach of the first cycle (De Wet, 2016), in this study, student perspectives were included, to gain deeper insights and enhance the trustworthiness of possible subjectivity of the lecturer's reflections on the effect of the action.

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 (Mertler & Charles, 2010:4; Norton, 2009:3). This paper only reports on the implementation of the teaching intervention and reflection on whether awareness was indicated in student's design approach following the action, so that their strategy: 1) includes the ability to communicate their own 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 own purpose with consumer requirements, to develop a design strategy for the project.

Operationalisation of the project

A group of thirty-three second year fashion design students were 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 fifteen 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 lectures' role in these assessments 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 is 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 resulting from the baseline assessment that were addressed in this study. 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, follows thereafter.

TABLE 1: OPERATIONALISATION OF THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE PHASES

Place Table 1 here

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 following 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 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 was colour-coded to assist in identifying recurring themes, as suggested by Munro (2014:64). 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 2014:64).

Key words were further identified in each participants' 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 demonstrate the synthesis of the designer's authentic style and consumer requirements, coherently 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, 2006:8; Rose, 2012:16, 107). To this end, the visual analysis of the illustrations was conducted according to an assessment sheet with criteria. 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 descriptions of meaning and feeling of the themes on the websites of a chosen retailer, relate to the identified key words of the themes used in participants' written design strategies,

- 2) the combined application of design principles and elements in the concept design illustrations, visually reflect 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 reflects 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. designer authenticity and consumer requirements integrated, within the context of this paper, result in the principle of meaning (symbolism) and feeling (emotion). To this end, the visual analysis set out to assess the overall coherence between design strategy, applied design principles and elements to create meaning and feeling, and consumer requirements.

Scatter grams were used as support in the assessments to establish links and determine the strength of connections between each participant's written design strategy and the achieved meaning and feeling expressed in the concept design illustrations. A scatter gram is typically used to establish a relationship and the strength of the connection between two variables (Wegner 2007:77). 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 (2006:109-111) and De Vos (2003:351,352) 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) creating 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' team debriefing meetings to discuss the progress and enhance the integration of the project components were voice-recorded for record keeping purposes, 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 design processes and the business aspects of fashion design, and 5) reflections were supported with literature from various disciplinary sources (Au et al, 2004; De Wet, 2016; Dorst, 2011; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006).

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.

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

Place Table 2 here

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 (Choi, Ko, Kim & Mattila, 2014; Bai, Choi, Tan, Au, Raymond & Zang, 2014; Tselepis, 2013:4). 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 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.

TABLE 3: DESCRIPTORS OF INTERVAL LEVELS SCORES OF THE CONCEPT DESIGN ILLUSTRATION ASSESSMENTS PRESENTED IN TABLE 4

Place Table 3 here

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.

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

Place Table 4 here

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 suggest 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 (De Wet, 2016; Dorst, 2011).

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 remain 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 not only due to the two implemented workshops, but also through 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 only two workshops. To this end the teaching approach should be process-driven, requiring attentiveness and flexibility from educators to identify and address students' needs and gaps as they are encountered during the design process.

In conclusion, enabling students to consider products from the perspective of the consumer **presents** an invaluable teaching strategy **to improve the design contribution of student-designers, which other** fashion design educators **may want to** pursue and adapt to their situations. Challenging students to design products that are out of their so called "comfort zone" could enhance their possibility for success from a business perspective. In this regard the author of this paper commends the view of Frank Chimero (a renowned multi-disciplinary designer) who coined the phrase: "people ignore design that ignores people".

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TABLE 1: OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE PHASES

BASELINE/FIRST ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE		
Key aspect addressed in cycle two, which resulted from the baseline assessment	Key recommendation addressed in cycle two to improve the teaching approach that resulted from the baseline cycle.	
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.	
SECOND ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE		
Action research phase 1	Methods	Strategy of the lecturer
1. Implementation of teaching intervention	Workshop 1: Objective of workshop: To stimulate awareness of the designers' own purpose in order to relate to authentic design.	Self-awareness: for students-designers to become aware of their personal strengths
Outcomes of workshop 1	Methods applied in workshop 1	
1) To identify five character strengths 2) To formulate own purpose statement by incorporating the identified character strengths and passion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Guidance structure for students to complete (help sheets). 	
	Workshop 2: Objectives of workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to create awareness of target market requirements, and to facilitate the integration of own purpose with consumer requirements, in order to create value to the consumer. 	
Outcomes of workshop 2	Methods applied in workshop 2	Empathy: for students-designers to assume the perspective of the consumer
1) To describe the requirements of the target market.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PowerPoint presentation concerning marketing. Consumer science theory on needs, expectations and minimum product requirements. 	
2) To integrate personal strengths and target market needs and expectations into a design strategy. 3) To formulate a design purpose statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sound-boarding sessions for students to share their reflections and communicate strategies. Guidance structure for students to complete (help sheets). 	
Action research phase 2	Methods	
2. Reflection on the effect of the teaching intervention to stimulate awareness	Participants': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> design purpose statements, reflections documented in their journals and assessment results of concept design illustrations. 	Seeking for indications of awareness

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.	<p>“...it made more sense as the exercises went on...”</p> <p>“...I was struggling a bit but managed to figure it out...”</p> <p>“...the presentations helped me understand what I need to focus on...”</p>
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.	<p>“... I was only really able to figure out the kind of consumer by going to the store...”</p> <p>“... it was difficult at first, but visiting the store made things easier because I saw the kind of clothing offered to people...”</p> <p>“...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...”</p>
3. What was your biggest challenge of the process?	Synthesis/ integration of both aspects of the strategy.	<p>“... 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...”</p> <p>“... to align my ideas with the target market...”</p> <p>“... 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...”</p>
4. What was the value of the workshops to you?	<p>Importance for a designer to consider the consumer.</p> <p>Indications of internal locus.</p>	<p>“... in order to be successful as a designer, you have to always be aware of the consumer you design for...”</p> <p>“... for a product to succeed the designer must be able to align himself with the customer...”</p> <p>“... to work independently and solve design problems...”</p> <p>I got the chance to get out of my comfort zone...”</p>

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	Crafty, unique, different feel
	Descriptors of assessment interval levels for retailer A		Descriptors of assessment interval levels for retailer 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	

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

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

