RE-FORM: A MODERN LOOK AT THE TEACHING OF PRACTICAL FASHION SKILLS

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Introduction

The act of teaching as described by the *Oxford Dictionary* (n.d.) is "to help somebody learn something by giving information about it." Although I believe teaching is far more nuanced, the description is technically correct and describes two key components, the "helping" (teaching) and the "information" (resources). When Gravells (2013) discusses teaching resources, she states that they should stimulate learning, add impact and promote interest in the subject. In my experience as both a teacher and a student, I have found that resources for practical fashion skills do not achieve these goals. I find it interesting that when speaking on the future of tailoring Dines et al. (1949) posed the question, "What, then, are the prospects for the bespoke tailoring trade in the years to come? Are they likely to be such as will make that trade appeal to young people as an attractive career?" This was in response to what he saw as threats and great changes in his industry with off-the-shelf ready-to-wear. I see parallels in his dilemma and where we are today, with many of our teaching resources, methods and tools lacking a modern outlook that would inspire and engage young people. When speaking of pattern making and its future, Kershaw (2013) sums it up well by saying "The future challenges to practising this craft will be the ability to generate innovative products through new vocabularies while conserving elements of the past."

Method

In order to understand how practical fashion resources have developed and changed over the years, I looked into literature that was either key in the development of menswear education, or is still commonly used in education (Table 1).

Authors	Title	Pros	Cons
A.S. Bridgland (1949)	The Modern Tailor Outfitter and Clothier	Tailoring skills and knowledge were traditionally passed down from master to apprentice and little was ever written down. This series of publications by The Tailor and Cutter were some of the first to record and teach the skills behind menswear and for that reason they had a huge influence on the systems and teaching methods that were to follow. The books cover almost every aspect of tailoring, from measuring, cutting, pattern and sewing through to comments on style, retail and industry.	Whilst these books are a fascinating look into the history of menswear, as expected they are also old-fashioned in both their written language and visual language, with hand drawn diagrams that are inconsistent and sometimes disproportionate. They use the imperial measurement system which is uncommon in today's industry, the texts are generally difficult to follow and garment styles are traditional and outdated.
A.G. Chaudhry (1964)	Designing and Cutting Modern Leisure & Cotton Garments for Men	This series was also published by The Tailor and Cutter, but it advanced menswear by offering more modern 'casual' styles, more contemporary language and cleaner more precise diagrams.	The book focusses on drafts only and lacks information to completing the pattern with pockets, facings and other details. It also uses the imperial system which is uncommon in today's industry. No sewing instructions.
Winifred Aldrich (1980)	Metric Pattern Cutting for Menswear	This series of books revolutionized men's pattern cutting by introducing not only the metric system but also a 'block' system previously only used in womenswear design which encouraged a more creative approach in a time when menswear was blossoming. Currently in its 5th edition, this book has been an education staple for the past 40 years.	Although this book is still very relevant some styles feel old fashioned, some instructions are a little vague and the aesthetics of the book is dated. No sewing instructions.
Bunka Fashion College (2005)	Menswear I & II	In true Japanese style, this book is one of the most detailed, accurate and in depth books I have come across. Published by the Bunka Fashion College it covers every aspect from drafting and completing a pattern through to cutting, sewing and pressing using its own unique system that is common throughout Asia. There is also a great connection between the sewing and pattern process, something in which I have not seen in any other publication. I also admire their pictorial drafting system which can be followed even without Japanese language skills.	The overall design of the publication is very functional, utilitarian and could with do with modernising. Whilst its accuracy is commendable it sometimes sacrifices creativity for perfection. Only available in Japanese.
Gareth Kershaw (2013)	Pattern Cutting for Menswear	Possibly the most contemporary menswear book available today, it offers modern language, modern styles, a modern approach and modern design aesthetics in terms of the book and its graphic layout.	Some instructions are very wordy and require a lot of reading. The drafting processes are spread over several pages which provides more insight and detail but also feels convoluted at times. No sewing instructions.
Myoungok Kim & Injoo Kim (2014)	Patternmaking for Menswear	Menswear pattern book that offers the largest range of contemporary styles, drafts and adaptions, using modern language, a modern approach and in a modern graphic layout.	No sewing instructions.
M.Müller & Sohn (2019)	Fundamentals Menswear	This German take on menswear is equally as engineered and precise as the Bunka publications, offering its own system with great knowledge and detail. The book itself is a modern looking publication with a simple refined aesthetic.	A disappointing amount of drafts with a focus on traditional tailored styles and lacks any casual wear. No sewing instructions.

Table 1. Comparison of Menswear Textbooks

It appears there has been a progression of educational menswear publications over time, not only in the language used and diagram quality, but also in the creativity, expression and overall aesthetics of the publications. However when it comes to sewing and construction for menswear there are few educational materials available and even fewer publications that link them together. This may reflect society's attitude towards sewing as a hobby or cheap labour skill, compared to pattern making as more of a professional skill. This is unfortunate considering 25 per cent (Figure 1) of my research group listed Garment Construction as their preferred subject, surpassed only by Design at 42 per cent (Figure 1), with Pattern Making behind at 13 per cent (Figure 1).

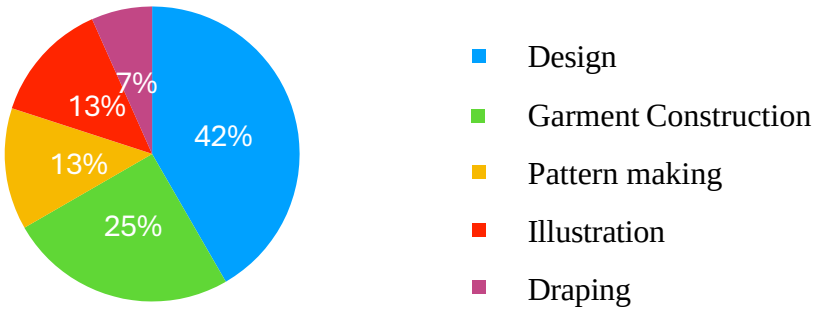

Figure 1. What is your preferred subject area?

It is my opinion that these two skills are integral to each other. In order to pattern draft, you need to know how garments are sewn together and to sew you need to know how they were drafted. If resources were available that cohesively linked these subjects, I feel it would enhance the learning and understanding of both fields, and would promote more interest and creativity by enhancing students' confidence in the area.

The Bunka Textbooks (Table 1) are possibly a lone standout in this area, offering linked materials for both pattern making and garment construction aimed at a professional student market. It is over 15 years since YouTube and smartphones revolutionised our access to information, yet there are still no relevant teaching resources that cohesively link textbook resources with video or animation to enhance the learning of practical fashion skills.

Participants

In order to gather candidates for this study, an invitation to participate was sent to all students currently enrolled in the Shih Chien Fashion Department. Sixty students accepted, 49 females and 11 males, aged 19 to 24 years. They were predominantly second and third year students with a few in their fourth and fifth years. They came from both the Menswear and Womenswear programmes and all had existing knowledge and experience of pattern making and garment construction.

Resource Definitions

1. *Textbook* (Figure 2)

This refers to a traditional textbook style teaching method of printed notes on A4 paper that include written step by step instructions and diagrams.

Figure 2.

2. *Animated* (Figure 3)

This refers to a PDF document that students viewed on a digital device. The page layout was exactly the same as the paper notes with the same written instructions, but the static diagram was replaced with an animated gif that demonstrated each specific step.

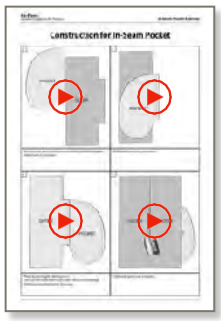

Figure 3.

3. *Video* (Figure 4)

This refers to an instructional video that students viewed on a digital device. The video had no written instructions and instead relied on verbal instructions and demonstrations.

Figure 4.

The Study

The 60 participants were divided into three groups of 20 students (groups A, B and C), and each student was provided with an envelope containing fabric, textbook resources and QR code hyperlinks to the animation and video resources. Participants were given the task of drafting and sewing three prototype samples: an in-seam pocket (Figure 5); a binding placket (Figure 6); and a flat felled seam with split (Figure 7).

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

In order to create a variable, each of the three prototypes used a different teaching method: Textbook resources (Figure 2); Animated resources (Figure 3); and Video resources (Figure 4). Then for each group, the method rotated (Figure 8), so that each group tried all three methods and each prototype was made with all three methods. Students were also required to record their start and finish times for each prototype.

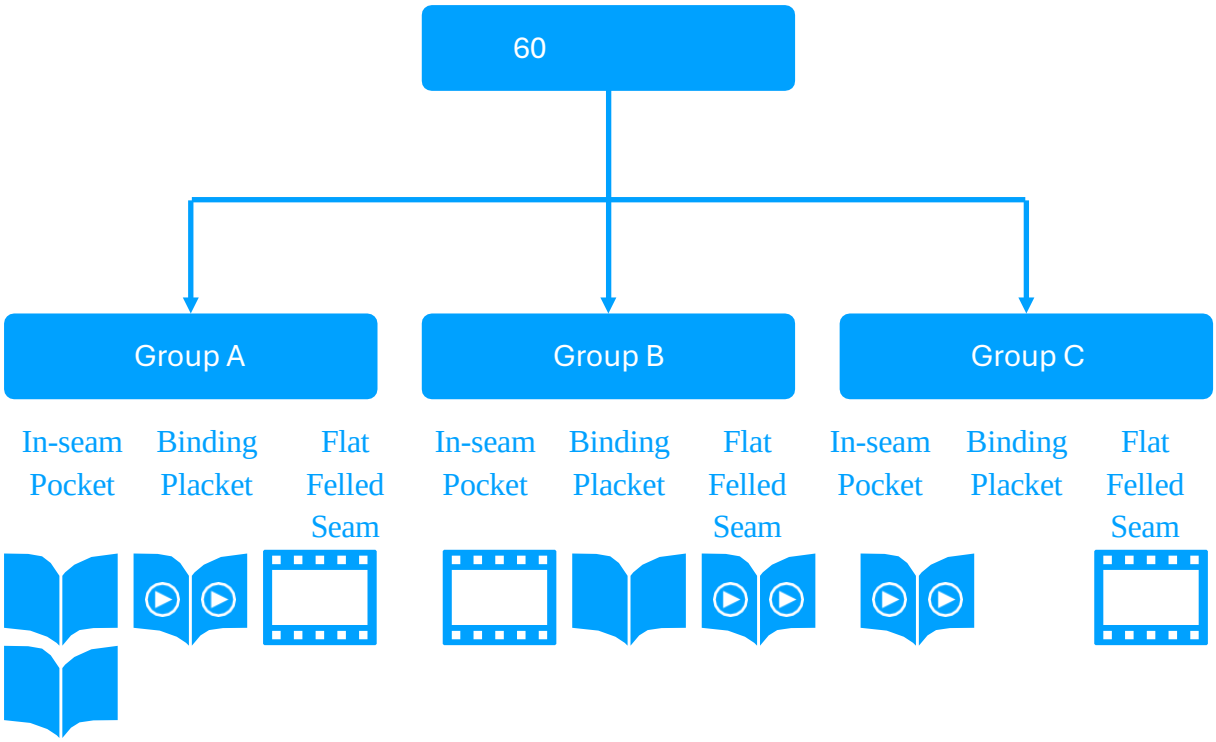

Figure 8. Group A, B and C

Questionnaire

On completion of the three prototype samples, students used a Google Form questionnaire to express how they felt about the different teaching methods and any suggestions for improvement.

Although I normally interact with the students, during class, for this study they had to rely entirely on the teaching resources provided. This forced them to read, watch and listen to the teaching materials, to gain full understanding.

Results

The results in Figure 9 show that the average completion time for each prototype sample was very similar, regardless of which teaching method was used, with a maximum difference of just over six minutes. The completion times between teaching methods were also consistent for all three prototype samples, with Animation students reliably finishing first, followed by Textbook students and then Video students (Figure 9).

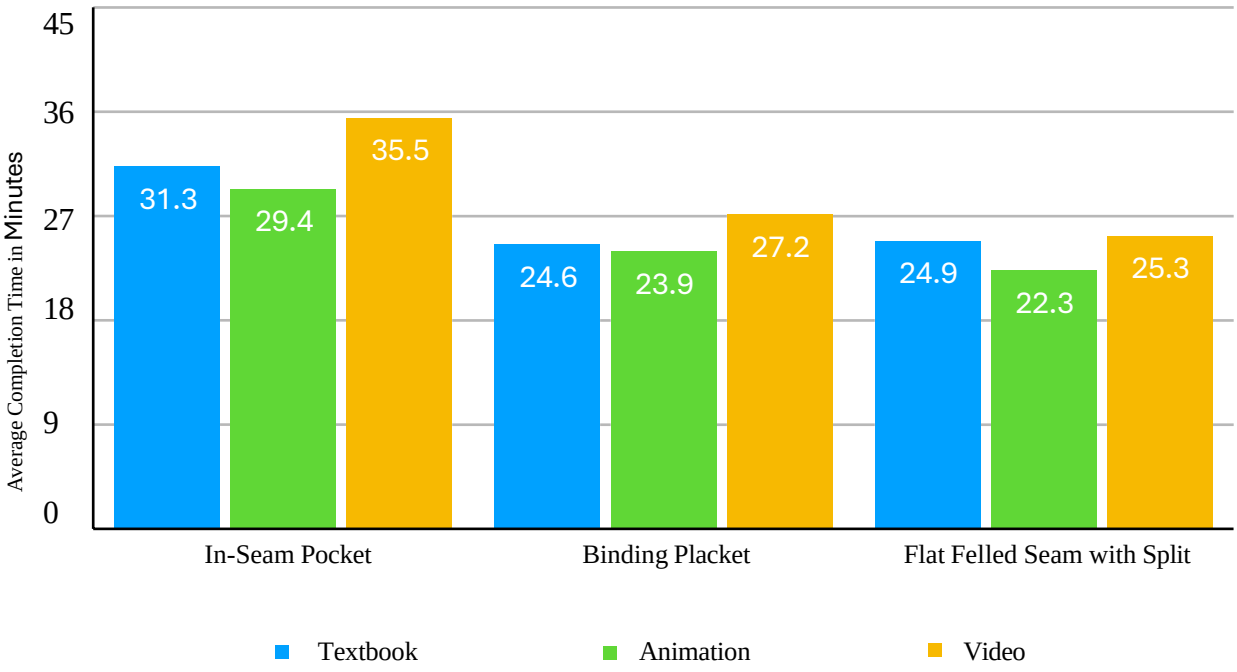

Figure 9. Prototype Completion Times

This possibly indicates how easy the process was to understand and follow. In the Questionnaire, students often commented that Video resources provided more detail and insight than seeing the process demonstrated. However the entire video must be watched to understand the process, compared to Animated and Textbook resources which allowed them to absorb the entire process at a glance and do so as they continued to work. Several students also mentioned the annoyance of having to constantly rewind and repeat the video in order to understand a step, some even said they “screen-shot" the video so it was easier to refer back to particular points. Within the questionnaire, 45 per cent (Figure 10) of students confirmed that the animated resources provided a quicker learning experience, possibly explained by the fact that 40 per cent (Figure 11) of the students felt that animation posed less of a language barrier.

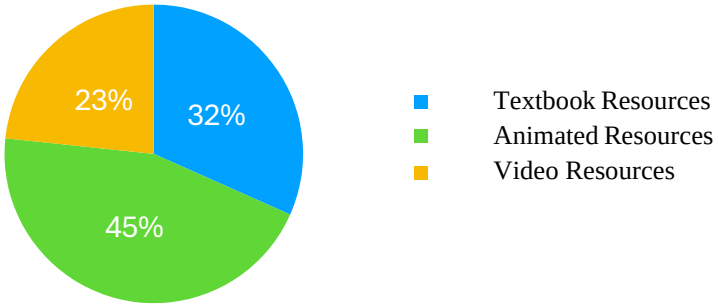

Figure 10. Which method do you think provides a faster learning experience?

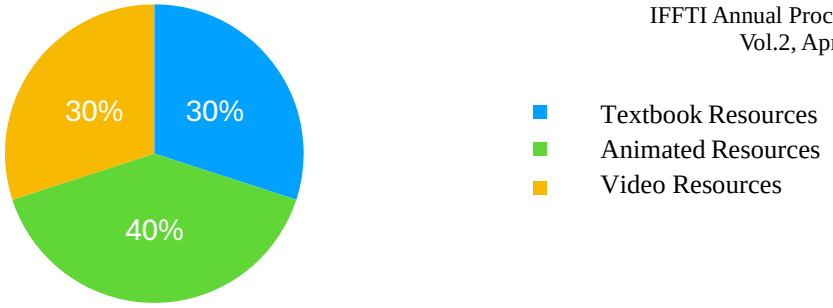

Figure 11. Which method do you think provides less of a language barrier?

The questionnaire revealed that 38 per cent of students preferred the animated resources, 32 per cent the textbook, and 30 per cent the video resources (Figure 12), yet most preferred textbooks for pattern making (Figure 13) and videos for garment construction (Figure 14).

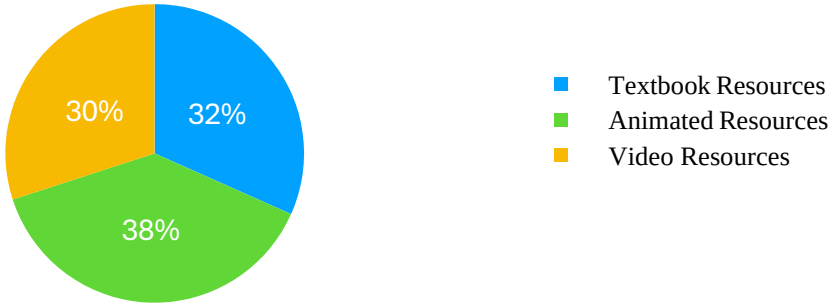

Figure 12. What was your preferred learning method from today's experiment?

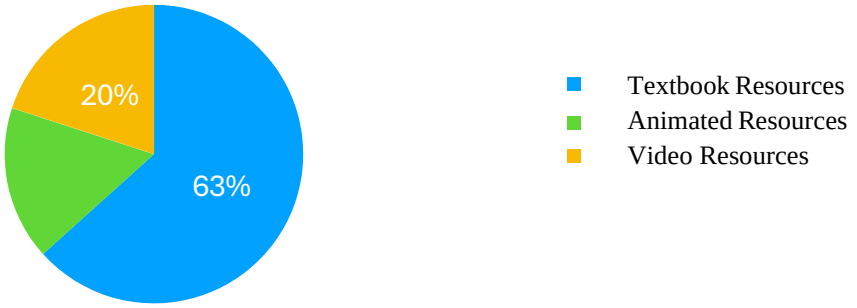

Figure 13. Which method do you think is better for pattern drafting?

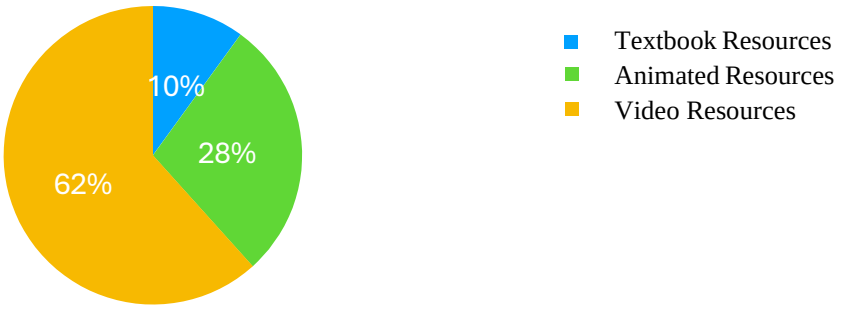

Figure 14. Which method do you think is better for garment construction?

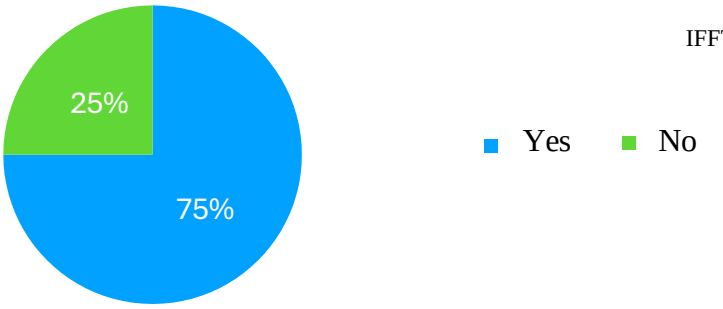

Figure 15. Do you think printed textbook resources are still relevant and useful in 2022?

Most students felt that textbooks were still relevant today (Figure 15), commenting that they could write notes directly onto the textbook, which is less easily done with digital resources. According to Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014 as cited by Roessingh, 2020), taking notes by hand involves cognitive engagement in summarising, paraphrasing, organising, concept and vocabulary mapping—in short, manipulating and transforming information that leads to deeper understanding. These findings equate with a European study (*Blackwell's Bookshops Learning Resource Survey*, 2020) indicating students appreciated a non-digital, distraction free learning environment.

Conversely, students commented that while valuing class demonstrations, the content can be difficult to recall, whereas a video allows for repeated viewing in order to grasp a process, as well as the ability to pre-watch and gain an understanding before class.

Another consideration is that while an academic classroom is suited to digital tools, a practical workroom is not, as they take up valuable workspace and have a high risk of being knocked or damaged. Smartphone screens are too small to be of practical use. A4 textbooks are a good size for viewing information, are more reliable and easily replaced. They are also unaffected by IT complexities and software changes.

Environmental Concerns

As a strong advocate for sustainable practices I want to address a key comment made by students in this study who liked the idea of introducing digital resources because they saw them as better for the environment. This idea is championed by tech companies who promote an ideal of 'go paperless, save trees' and whilst this concept seems logical, there are a variety of studies looking into the environmental effects of cloud storage and computing.

A key finding by Nazaruk (2020) is that the environmental impact depends on the lifespan of a document. While the carbon footprint of a cloud based document is initially low, its footprint continues to grow every time it is viewed and continues to be stored online, whereas the carbon footprint of paper is initially high but it remains stable throughout its life. It appears that textbooks, which may be used for years, have in fact a lighter carbon footprint than digital counterparts.

Limitation Acknowledgment

A key limitation of this study was English being a second language for participants, with their variable comprehension levels possibly affecting outcomes and their answering of the questionnaire. In future, I would suggest translating all materials into Mandarin. My goal however is to create a textbook where the visual language is so strong that processes can be followed to a basic level without written language.

An issue experienced during this study was the WiFi becoming overloaded, indicating that classroom technology must be improved to support digital learning.

Conclusion

My initial hypothesis for this project was that one particular teaching method would be shown to be superior, and I assumed that today's students would value digital over textbook resources. Both assumptions were proven incorrect, with all three methods having an almost even rating from students (Figure 12) and the physical textbooks remaining a preferred method for pattern making (Figure 13) due to their unique benefits over digital, an opinion noted even by students who normally preferred digital resources. It was also discovered that students found video resources especially helpful for garment construction processes (Figure 14) by offering real world demonstrations and clarity. Therefore it would make a lot of sense to introduce video when developing my garment construction resources. Interestingly the study revealed that animation has a lot more to offer than I initially thought and is most useful in the teaching of multistep processes and is preferred by 38 per cent of the students (Figure 12). It also poses less of a language barrier (Figure 11). I see great potential in introducing this type of animated resource into my curriculum.

I have concluded that in future my teaching materials should include a hybrid of resources, (refer to the article by Nieves-Whitmore, 2022) to accommodate the different learning styles of students (visual, audible and kinesthetic). This would improve their overall learning experience.

This study has shown that physical textbooks remain current and valuable as a distraction free and uniquely malleable tool, and that digital resources such as video and animation, are a valid secondary resource. By positioning QR code hyperlinks throughout the physical textbook, I hope to provide the students with access to multiple learning experiences and digital resources that will expand their insight and learning.

As found in the literature review (Table 1) there is both a lack of resources to teach menswear garment construction, and a major disconnect between the practices of pattern making and garment construction, with few resources teaching them cohesively. I intend to bridge this gap by developing detailed menswear garment construction resources, linking them together so that the pattern process reflects what is sewn and the sewing reflects what was drafted.

My hope is that these resources will promote more interest in menswear and the fields of pattern making and garment construction, while also sparking creativity, curiosity and a love for the craft.

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