# INTROSPECTION BEFORE ACTION: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN FASHION EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**AUTHORS**

Grang, Harroop Kaur
Associate Professor / Pearl Academy, India
kaur.haroop@gmail.com

**KEYWORDS**

Fashion education, Sustainable development, Inquiry-based learning, Social responsibility, Circular competency

**ABSTRACT**

The fashion design industry is one of today's most unsustainable global businesses contributing to the depletion of fossil energy, deforestation driven by land and water use, severe pollution caused by chemical dyeing, and the non-ethical treatment of factory workers, among others. The widely practiced business models within the fashion industry are implausible, as they are predicated on an imbalanced set of criteria and a Linear Economy – the 'take-make-use-dispose' model. However, with changing times, the concern for socio-ethical issues and its impact on the planet and its people have forced the industry to reassess its role and seek professionals with competencies for a circular model. Thus, fashion designers have a key role to play in making fashion more sustainable, as they can influence and contribute to all dimensions of fashion (economic, environmental, social, and cultural), both positive and negative.

Incorporating sustainable design principles in fashion education has become paramount, thus academic institutions should prioritize responsible design in their curriculum and bring these issues into the classroom, to acknowledge and address them through an actionable plan. Fashion design education should be seen as a chance to make aspiring designers aware of the challenges and potential of design for sustainability and equip them with the knowledge and necessary skills. To meet this industry requirement for new competences, Pearl Academy (India) implemented a foundational course on Social Responsibilities for the Post Graduate Fashion Design students. This research paper covers the scope and outcomes of the course, first established in 2020. The course is created from a collaborative, participatory and ecological paradigm, and draws on an approach to fashion education that is oriented towards process, action, and creative participation in all aspects of the transition to sustainability. It imparts knowledge of systems thinking leading to ecological integrity, conscious choices, consumption patterns, art of use, material flow, social impact, craft, fair trade, human and technological advancement, among others.

This paper explores how concepts such as sustainability, ethics and responsibility can be integrated effectively into fashion curriculum using inquiry-based learning (IBL). This learning style requires students to play an active role in making inquiries, gathering information, and drawing conclusions about a topic. The author uses experiential and qualitative research methodology in this study to:

(i.) Reference students work, to set out some of the opportunities and challenges through the process.
(ii.) The impact of the integration of IBL to effectively engage students as socially responsible learners for life.

This paper strives to demonstrate that teaching Social Responsibilities using IBL strategy to fashion design students can effectively ingrain the philosophy of reflection before action as the design paradigm: Beyond growth to Introspection. Thus, preparing students for new roles as fashion designers who are working within a framework of sustainability.

## SUSTAINABLE FASHION & CIRCULARITY

Over time, the understanding of sustainability in the fashion context has broadened to include social and ethical issues (working conditions and safety in sweatshops, fair trade, traditional crafts, and the social responsibility of the fashion sector) and the organisation of production and responsible consumption (swapping, sharing, collaborative consumption, mending, reusing, limiting fashion purchases, and ecological attitudes with respect to clothing maintenance and laundering). The design and craftsmanship quality of garments has also begun to be highlighted, including the quality of the sewing, the flexibility and adaptability of designs, adjusting the design to specific physical or emotional needs (functionality and inclusivity), a slower pace of fashion in terms of shorter production chains, local production, making use of local skills and craft traditions, and embedding designs in regional culture and heritage. The design and production of clothing in the spirit of sustainable fashion can take the form of a smaller scale of production using more durable, better-quality fabrics in cooperation with local manufacturers, production on demand and made-to-measure, or design and production of clothing with a specific social meaning, rooted in and inspired by cultural considerations. Fletcher, K., 2013, therefore offered the following definition: 'sustainability in fashion and textiles fosters ecological integrity, social quality and human flourishing through products, action, relationships and practices of use'. The concept of sustainable fashion includes physical fashion products made from eco-friendly or recycled materials as well as ethical value such as corporate social responsibility for environment, labor or working condition.

Fashion Education needs to effectively integrate these approaches and the wide range of topics that can enable sustainability at all levels of fashion. A model that brings in personal accountability, knowledge and skills, the new competencies to act towards circularity.

## FASHION DESIGNERS WITH CIRCULAR COMPETENCIES

As proposed by Fletcher, K. and Grose, L., 2012, designers are to be communicator-educators, facilitators who help to change attitudes and production and consumption patterns, activists, and entrepreneurs. Designers may benefit from 'opportunities to engage with sustainability that go beyond individual products or product lifecycles to include functional innovation, systems change, and redesign of consumer practices, behaviour, and even lifestyles'. These newer design-for-sustainability themes include, among others, co-design, design for empathy, design for changing socio-cultural norms, design for localism, slow design (Fuad-Luke, A., 2002), and design for alternative economic and circular business models.

Circular economy requires new competencies. We define competency as: "a functionally linked complex overview of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable successful task performance and problem solving" (Wiek, A., Withycombe, L. and Redman, C.L., 2011). Research suggests that competencies can inform the development and use of methods and vice versa as well as informing the discourse of education. For instance, UNESCO (2005) uses key sustainability competencies to frame learning objectives for education for Sustainable Development. Education plays an important role in driving the transition toward a circular economy, making it relevant to further investigate circular economy competencies.

There still seems to be very little positive impact regarding circularity coming from fashion educational institutions and large organizations mapping circular competences aimed towards a green economy. In this article as well as in a lot of the design-research, fashion designers are often described as 'Agents of Change' in the industry, but the actual effect of their efforts is still very limited and so is the knowledge about their actual contribution to sustainability in

the companies.

## INTEGRATING INQUIRY BASED LEARNING IN FASHION EDUCATION

Based on the challenges and emerging opportunities of our times, we need to solidify commitment to Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) by focusing on Inspiring Education, which sets out a long-term vision for education in a broad policy framework of Sustainable Development. Bringing in enhanced engagement and accountability among the students. Inspiring Education calls for education to be transformed around inquiry phases and several key principles which see a natural application in Fashion Design education.

Principles of IBL include the three E's of 21st century education:

(i.) Engaged Thinker: who thinks critically and makes discoveries; who uses technology to learn, innovate, communicate, and discover; who works with multiple perspectives and disciplines to identify problems and find the best solutions; who communicates these ideas to others; and who, as a life-long learner, adapts to change with an attitude of optimism and hope for the future.

(ii.) Ethical Citizen: who builds relationships based on humility, fairness, and open-mindedness; who demonstrates respect, empathy, and compassion; and who through teamwork, collaboration and communication contributes fully to the community and the world.

(iii.) Entrepreneurial Spirit: who creates opportunities and achieves goals through hard work, perseverance, and discipline; who strives for excellence and earns success; who explores ideas and challenges the status quo; who is competitive, adaptable, and resilient; and who has the confidence to take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity.

As fashion education organises around the three E's, a shift will occur from disseminating information and recalling facts toward developing particular competencies. Cultivating the natural curiosities of students and planting the seeds of life-long learning.

## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS AN APPROACH TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Developing systemized sustainable fashion design education program would be the first step of sustainable fashion, by educating students who will take the leading role in the future fashion industry.

The aim of this study is to present the findings of sustainable fashion design education program run at Pearl Academy, India with Post Graduate Fashion Design students to set the foundation for sustainable fashion industry. This study investigates the case of successful execution of this course since its inception in 2020.

This intensive eight-week course is to sensitize the students to foster a holistic understanding of sustainable, responsible & ethical processes and aspirations in fashion and textiles that lead to actionable change. Further, it aims to cultivate a sense of personal responsibility, an aptitude for listening and observing the best practices in their immediate environment. This course imparts knowledge of systems thinking leading to conscious choices, consumption patterns, art of use, material flow and diversity, social impact, craft, fair trade, technological integration among others. The awareness and integration of social responsibility in students fosters ecological integrity, social quality and human advancement through products, action, relationships, and practices of use.

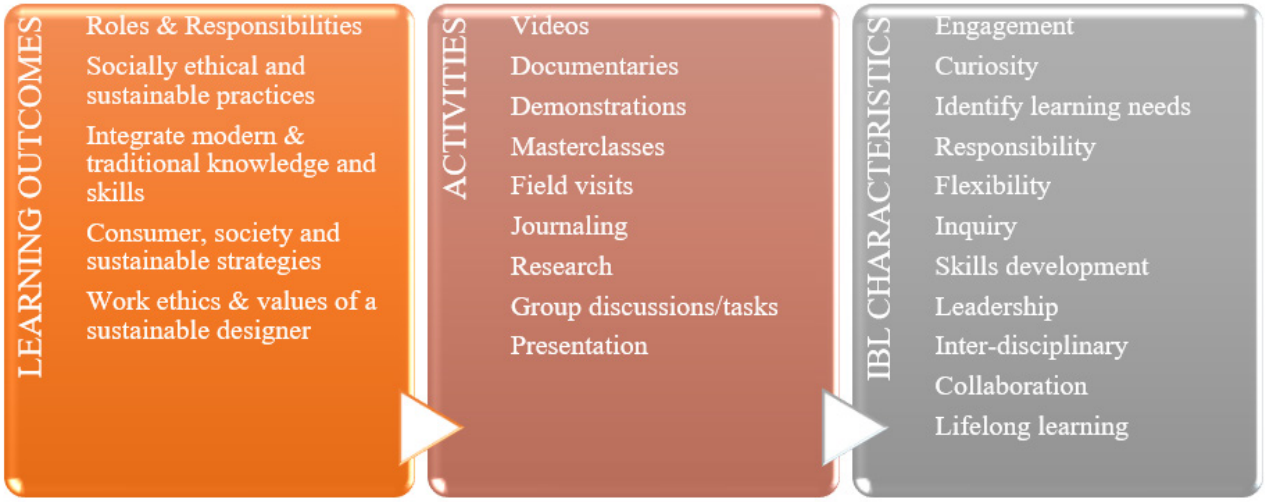


Fig.1. Framework of Social Responsibilities course at Pearl Academy

## OBJECTIVES

• To examine the learning and development experience of Post Graduate Fashion Design students enrolled in the Social Responsibilities course developed using the Inquiry Based Learning framework.

• The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of this fashion course that was holistically designed for sustainability using the Education for Sustainable Development framework.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research: The empirical study of the research focuses on the content analysis of the course outcomes and students' reflective analysis throughout the course. Presentation of the assignments and class activities prepared by the students at various stages of the course.

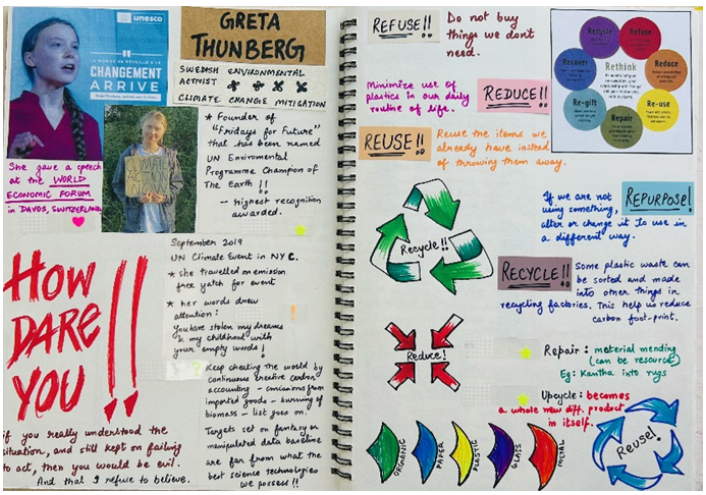


Fig.2. Students personal journal.

Fig.3. Clothes Swap event on campus.

Fig.4. Quit making with fabric scraps.

Fig.5. Re-purposing old garments.


Fig.6. Masterclass with industry expert on 3R's of sustainability.

This qualitative case study represents the findings from a group of students enrolled in the Social Responsibilities course providing a rich description of how the holistic course affects the student experience and the ways in which IBL enhances that experience.

**RESULTS**

• Increased knowledge and awareness about sustainability and social responsibility among students.

• Openness to explore concepts relevant to the field and transferable to future profession.

• Enhanced ability to inquire, research, document and discuss role as an individual, a consumer, designer within the fashion ecosystem.

• Effectiveness of journaling in the course as a helpful tool to reflect on own behavior.

• Holistic application of IBL to the course design and delivery, reflected through active engagement towards developing a "big picture" about sustainability.

• Increased cooperation, and effective communication focusing on collaboration.

**WAY AHEAD**

• Social responsibility as an overarching theme needs more emphasis in design education to become an integral way of thinking and system of working.

• Attention needed to be drawn towards circular design competencies relevant to the fashion industry that will impact scope of work in the future.

• Increased emphasis required on hands-on experience and industry visits.

• Quantitative research with the past and present cohorts of the course on specific questions to measure the effectiveness, achievements, and challenges of the course on specific parameters.

## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that teaching Social Responsibilities using IBL strategy to fashion design students can effectively ingrain the philosophy of reflection before action while working within a framework of sustainability.

## REFERENCES

Atalay Onur, D., (2020). Integrating circular economy, collaboration and craft practice in fashion design education in developing countries: A case from Turkey. Fashion Practice, 12(1), pp.55-77. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17569370.2020.1716547 (Accessed 2nd Aug 2023)

Bianchi, G. (2020). Sustainability competences, EUR 30555 EN. Publications Office of the European Union. ISBN 978-92-76-28408-6. Available at: https://doi.org/10.2760/200956JRC123624 (Accessed 1st July 2023)

Blomsma, F. and Brennan, G., (2017). The emergence of circular economy: a new framing around prolonging resource productivity. Journal of industrial ecology, 21(3), pp.603-614. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jiec.12603 (Accessed 2nd Aug 2023)

Bocken, N.M., De Pauw, I., Bakker, C. and Van Der Grinten, B., (2016). Product design and business model strategies for a circular economy. Journal of industrial and production engineering, 33(5), pp.308-320. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21681015.2016.1172124 (Accessed 1st July 2023)

Chanmi Hwang, Youngji Lee, Armine Ghalachyan, Elena Karpova. (2022) Student learning about social responsibility in the global textile and apparel industry: the use of video as an instructional tool. International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education 15:1, pages 67-76.

D'Adamo, I. and Lupi, G., (2021). Sustainability and resilience after COVID-19: A circular premium in the fashion industry. Sustainability, 13(4), p.1861.

Egan, J. (2004). Skills for sustainable development. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London.

Faerm, S., (2015). Building best practices for fashion design pedagogy: Meaning, preparation, and impact. Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios en Diseño y Comunicación. Ensayos, (53), pp.189-213.

Fletcher, K., (2013). Sustainable fashion and textiles: design journeys. Routledge.

Fletcher, K. and Grose, L., (2012). Fashion & sustainability: Design for change. Hachette UK.

Fletcher, K. and Williams, D. (2013), "Fashion Education in Sustainability in Practice", Research Journal of Textile and Apparel, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 81-88. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/RJTA-17-02-2013-B011 (Accessed 10th July 2023)

Fuad-Luke, A., (2002). Slow design: a paradigm shift in design philosophy. Development by Design, Bangalore, India, 44(0), pp.01-02.

Grose, L., (2017). Fashion design education for sustainability practice. Sustainabilty in Fashion and Textiles. Edited by Miguel Angel Gardetti and Anna Laura Torres. New York: Routledge, pp.134-147.

Haigh, M. (2008). Internationalization, planetary citizenship and Higher Education, Inc. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 38(4), 427-440.

Hattie, J., (2009). Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analysis relating to achievement. New York, NY: Routledge.

Justice, C., Warry, W., Cuneo, C. L., Inglis, S., Miller, S., Rice, J., et al. (2002). A grammar for inquiry: linking goals and methods in a collaboratively taught social sciences inquiry course. In The Alan Blizzard Award paper: The award winning papers. Windsor: Special Publication of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

MCKeown, R. and Hopkins, C., (2007). Moving beyond the EE and ESD disciplinary debate in formal education. Journal of education for sustainable development, 1(1), pp.17-26.

Moreno, M., de los Rios, C. and Charnley, F., (2016). Guidelines for circular design: a conceptual framework. Sustainability, 8, p.937.

O'Rafferty, S., Curtis, H. and O'Connor, F. (2014), "Mainstreaming sustainability in design education – a capacity building framework", International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 169-187. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-05-2012-0044 (Accessed 10 July 2023)

Perez S., F., Abbott, D. & Wilson, G., (2018). Dimensions of professional competences for interventions towards sustainability. Sustain Sci 13, 163–177. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-017-0439-z (Accessed 1 July 2023)

Peters, G., Li, M. and Lenzen, M., (2021). The need to decelerate fast fashion in a hot climate-A global sustainability perspective on the garment industry. Journal of cleaner production, 295, p.126390. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652621006107 (Accessed 2nd Aug 2023)

Reichel, A., De Schoenmakere, M., Gillabel, J., Martin, J. and Hoogeveen, Y., (2016). Circular economy in Europe: Developing the knowledge base. European Environment Agency Report, 2, p.2016.

Shephard Arlesa J., Pookulangara Sanjukta A.. (2022) Teaching slow fashion: an inquiry-based pedagogical approach. International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education, 15 (1), 109. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/17543266.2021.2013958 (Accessed 11 August 2023)

Tam, E., Soulliere, K. and Sawyer-Beaulieu, S., 2019. Managing complex products to support the circular economy. Resources, Conservation and Recycling, 145, pp.124-125.

UNESCO (2005). Contributing to a more sustainable future: Quality education, life skills and education for sustainable development. United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization, Paris. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/14/1410/141019e.pdf. (Accessed 11th Aug 2023)

Wiek, A., Withycombe, L. and Redman, C.L., (2011). Key competencies in sustainability: a reference framework for academic program development. Sustainability science, 6, pp.203-218. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11625-011-0132-6 (Accessed 18th Aug 2023)