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Understanding and building student interest in alternative fashion design careers through a project based learning patternmaking project

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Key words: alternative careers, fashion design, curriculum, patternmaking

Significance and purpose. Fashion designers are part of an ever changing job market. Many shifts have occurred in the hiring decisions of companies that have increased the number of designers working as freelancers rather than full time employees (Florida, 2014). In order to expand the job market for fashion design students, additions may need to be made to existing program curriculums. The knowledge attained while pursuing a degree in fashion design can be used in many related industries including growing craft and sewing industries (Haider, 2015).

The purpose of this research was twofold. First, we wanted to learn about the alternative fashion design careers that students are most interested in pursuing in order to create curriculums that accommodate their interest. Second, we wanted to also test if student interest in alternative career opportunities would change after being exposed to an alternative fashion design option through a patternmaking project teaching the development of home sewing patterns.

Framework. This project was designed using components of the project based learning framework (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, & Palincsar, 1991). In order to get fashion design student considering potential opportunities to use their existing patternmaking knowledge a class project was developed on how to develop home sewing patterns. As part of the the project, students were asked to consider and then inform the researchers of the types of alternative fashion design career options that they would be interested in learning about. Aspects of project based learning framework implemented into this project provided students a self paced, autonomous, and relevant learning experience that resulted in a finished product (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

Methods. This study builds on the researchers' previous research that the integration of alternative fashion design career training into existing fashion design curriculums (Martindale & McKinney, 2016). The 2016 study pointed out the need to gain a better understanding of students' interest in alternative fashion design career opportunities. Thus, the home sewing pattern development project was implemented again, a year later, with a new advanced patternmaking course at a large Midwestern university. In addition to the previously used pre- and post-tests questions designed to understand student comprehension, perceived benefits, and overall interest, objective and open-ended questions were added to understand student interest in alternative career opportunities. The findings reported her focus exclusively on students' interest in alternative fashion design career opportunities.

This research took place over a four-week period during the spring semester. The pattern making project instructional content was delivered through self-paced video modules and work was submitted digitally. Students were provided with handouts and reference materials as supplements to the videos. All 23 upper level students fashion design student enrolled in the

course completed the project. Twenty-two students completed the pre-test and post-test. Basic quantitative methods were used to interpret the results of the objective questions. The results of the open ended questions were coded and the emergent themes for alternative career interest were identified.

Results. Reported here are the results from two objective (yes or no) and one open-ended question asked on both the pre-test and post-test, as well as, one additional open-ended question that was only on the post test. From the pre-test to post-test student interest in learning about alternative fashion design career opportunities increased 36% from 36% to 72%. Even though student interest in developing home sewing patterns was relatively high in the pretest at 68% it increased to 73% in the post test. The pre-test open ended question regarding types of fashion design career alternatives students had considered, the answers did not reveal much diversity in the themes found within their answers. The interest shown was all closely related to apparel patternmaking with some interest in blogging and fashion editorial. Whereas with the same post-test question, student responses revealed a wider range of considered possibilities with themes of interest including blogging and fashion related editorial, video tutorial and instruction development for patternmaking and garment construction, and sewing pattern development entrepreneurship. In the 4 additional open-ended question added to the post-test concerning what career alternatives the students most wanted to learn about, the themes revealed a desire to learn more about writing fashion related editorial, developing blogs, and creating video and written tutorials.

Implications. Exposing students to one alternative fashion design career path through a project based learning assignment to develop a home sewing patterns increased their interest in alternative career opportunities as well as the range of alternative career opportunities considered. Similar teaching strategies may be used to build fashion design student awareness and interest in alternative ways to use their skills. The high percentage (72%) of students completing the project with an interest in alternative fashion design career opportunities combined with the awareness that the fashion design job market can be unpredictable should be considered in future curriculum development for fashion design programs. Based on the study findings the researchers plan to integrate new projects into their fashion design curriculums that include blogging and tutorial creation.

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