



Teaching personalized fit to home sewers using a hybrid workshop format: A case study

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Researchers and popular press authors have claimed that home sewing is a method for achieving better fitting garments (LaBat, Salusso, & Rhee, 2007; Plamer & Alto, 2003). Today, the home sewing industry is experiencing a major boom in participation and interest (Bain, 2016). There are a proliferation of blogs and websites selling designer home sewing patterns and “yet sewing and home dressmaking specifically has failed to elicit the same level of scholarly interest” (Bain, 2016).

A gap in knowledge still exists for the home sewer when attempting to achieve proper fit. It is difficult to learn how to fit a garment, let alone how to properly fit one’s own body (a goal of most home sewers). Additionally, “the process of adjusting patterns requires advanced skills that typically require specific training or experience” (LaBat et al., 2007, p. 429). LaBat et al. (2007) found that as sewers spent more time working on pattern adjustments for improving fit—their overall enjoyment of sewing went down. Some sewers even become frustrated with the fit of commercial patterns to the point that they decide to pursue non-apparel products. Numerous designers for the home sewing industry have offered methods for teaching proper fitting techniques. One intriguing new method, and the focus of this research, was developed using a pattern with an overlapping system of flat lined pieces. The purpose of this case-study research was to investigate the success of this method, which was delivered in a hybrid workshop format for teaching the principles of fit and basic draping techniques to home sewers.

Methods and Procedures

A local designer piloted a fit-based workshop targeted at teaching home sewers the principles of fit by draping on a dressform. A limited number of students with various skill levels and body shapes were recruited to attend the pilot workshop. The workshop pattern was a princess seamed, a-line dress constructed from multiple pieces including: a bodice section, a midriff, and a skirt. The dress pattern was delivered in an online pdf. Each piece was flat lined and stitched with the raw edges facing out. Darts were sewn following the flat lining process. These steps were done prior to the workshop and were facilitated through online learning modules.

A one-day workshop was then held with participants. Participants first draped the bodice pieces on a dressform padded to match their measurements. The bodices were then pinned and tested on each participant by the instructor to perfect the fit. Next the participants draped the midriff, followed by the skirt on the padded dressforms. No participants finished the entire dress in the workshop but they were able to finish draping in the five hour workshop. Following the workshop, the students were able to use online video lectures to complete their dresses.

Data were gathered in three ways. A pre-workshop questionnaire was administered via email to determine each participant’s skill level, and past sewing, draping, and fit experience. Data were also gathered by the primary researcher via participant observation at the workshop.

Finally, the participants had the opportunity to leave post workshop comments via email. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis was employed to categorize the written comments.

Results

Six participants attended the workshop. Prior to the workshop the participants used a five point Likert-type scale to rate their skills. They felt their sewing skills ranged from very skilled to not very skilled (avg. 2.67). They indicated that they had no draping experience (avg. 1) and little skill in fitting (avg. 1.67). The participants revealed that they were primarily interested in the workshop to improve their fit and draping skills. For instance Nell stated, "The dress appeals to me because it breaks down the bodice, which is where I have my biggest challenge!" Others commented during the workshop that they liked the unique construction and style lines of the dress.

The participants also remarked on the hybrid format of the course. Many felt that the videos were invaluable for helping them to prepare for the workshop. Additionally, the follow-up videos, which explained finishing details such as zipper insertion were also favored. The participants felt that it might be possible for the entire workshop to be held online but some cautioned that the expertise of the instructor was invaluable when fitting the garment.

Following the workshop, the participants indicated that their confidence in fitting their own bodies had increased dramatically. One stated, "I loved learning how to shape it to my body" (Cindy). They also felt that the unique pattern, "made me realize why it's so hard to get a good fit with typical commercial patterns" (Heather). Overall, the participants were very happy with the workshop and many intended to tackle more fitted garment sewing projects to further utilize their new skills.

Discussion and Conclusion

It has been suggested that a new method of teaching fit for home sewers may prevent sewers from becoming frustrated and leaving the hobby (LaBat et al., 2007). By utilizing the pattern and workshop studied in this research it appears that the participants became more comfortable with the processes of fitting and draping, thus reducing this risk. The hybrid format was also enjoyed by the participants, possibly due to the relative comfort of contemporary home sewers with online material (Bain, 2016). Future research should be done to determine if participants are able to apply the newly acquired fitting skills to other types of patterns. Additionally future research should be done to determine if it would be possible for these skills to be taught in a completely online format, which would allow for a larger number of home sewer to gain access to the knowledge gained in the workshop.

References

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