# Assessment of Creativity in Fashion Design Education in India

**Arindam Das, Sibichan Mathew**

***Abstract:*** ***Creativity has been given a myriad of definitions, and involves generating innovative outcomes, ranging from an entirely new concept to an improvement of an existing idea. Such outcomes are often interpreted in relation to a particular field of application within a given domain. In design education too creativity, innovation and design are closely interlinked in the transformation of ideas into desired output, as part of a process where students are encouraged to convert abstract ideas into concrete outcomes. This is largely applicable to fashion education also, a major domain of design education, which, with its intrinsic connect to an industry concentrated on trend-driven innovative products, needs to assess creative potential through enhancement of divergent thinking and cognitive skills in an open perspective, and with focus on outcomes rather than grades. Fashion design education in India uses assessment methodology that is dissimilar to that used by other educational institutions in higher education. Assessment and evaluation followed in Indian schools are mostly based on written examinations, and largely driven by rote learning. In contrast fashion design programmes tend to rely primarily on encouraging creative thinking and applications based on explorations and innovative problem-solving, and assessment conducted through mentoring sessions, portfolios, presentations and juries. This paper seeks to identify and critically review key issues related to assessment of creativity for under-graduate level Fashion Design education in India against the background of some key parameters of creativity in design identified through earlier research.***

***Keywords: Creativity, Innovation, Design, Design Education, Fashion Design Education, Assessment, Assessment of Creativity***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Creativity either in tangible or intangible forms arouses curiosity and excitement in all spheres of its existence be it arts, social sciences, education, markets and even day-to-day life. A definition of creativity and its outcomes are often interpreted in relation to a particular field of application within a particular domain, and hence often without clear delineation in general terms. Fashion design education, with its concentration on creative derivatives, nurtures and fosters creativity as a process where students are encouraged to convert abstract ideas into concrete conclusions.

Fashion design programmes tend to rely primarily on encouraging creative thinking and applications based on explorations and innovative problem-solving, and assessment is conducted primarily through mentoring sessions, portfolio submissions, presentations and juries.

This paper seeks to emphasise some key parameters of assessment of creativity identified through earlier research. It further seeks to highlight the major considerations involved in the assessment of creativity within the domain of fashion design education in India.

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## II. THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF CREATIVITY

Over the years there has been an array of research on creativity. However, except for certain overlaps a final unassailable definition appears to be elusive [1]-[3].

In one of the earliest expositions of creativity, Lewis [4] refers to creativity as a concept that is bereft of impulsion, but involving conceivable alternatives. Till the 50s studies on creativity were limited, and it was J.P. Guilford [5], who defined creative thinking as a subclass of general thinking. Rhodes [6] identified more than 40 definitions of creativity. Treffinger [7] listed more than 100 definitions of creativity based on literature review.

In essence, creativity has been given a wide plethora of handles – as being both individual and collective and of being emphatic and dynamic [8],[9].

In spite of different viewpoints and expressions on creativity, there appears to be some core consensus on some core elements of creativity [9]-[11].

What is significant is that creativity appears to be domain-specific meeting certain required characteristics, because the nature and relevance of creativity can differ according to the context and relevant expertise of a particular domain [1], [10], [12].

To sum up, creativity involves the application of divergent thinking and cognitive skills relevant to both processes and outcomes, involving exploration of alternatives, iteration and imaginative problem-solving.

## III. CREATIVITY AND DESIGN EDUCATION

Creativity has often been linked to divergent thinking, which involves the generation of alternative concepts and theories directed towards arriving at a solution [5], [13], [14].

The terms divergent and convergent thinking were coined by the psychologist Joy Paul Guilford [15], who defined convergent thinking as being directed towards a singular or correct solution; while divergent thinking explores a multitude of options to generate several possible solutions in a spontaneous manner.

Finding a solution to a problem usually involves both convergent and divergent thinking [16]. If there is a correlation between divergent thinking and creativity, and if most educational institutions emphasize convergent thinking, the culmination of such learning in assessment and evaluation may actually not encourage creative potential!

To begin with, it may be important to set a basic definition of what design education primarily encompasses. Vaughan [17] observes that although design education largely involves the concept of the *"*studio*"* in terms of physical location and dimension, but the studio hosts also hosts the process

of the student producing creative output.

Martin [18] strongly feels that most design education programmes tend to create designers who focus primarily on the tangible aspects of the product based on the client brief, but in the process miss out on the contextual relevance of the product. Design education tending to be vocational in nature, without creating design leaders who are able to be socially meaningful, people-oriented or being able to co-create wealth [19].

In this scenario, education itself play a key role in nurturing and enhancing creative and innovative skills, and very importantly, the stimulation of creativity propels the student towards a process of lifelong learning [20].

Design education needs to be multi-disciplinary and endorsing creative thinking and innovative applications through design interventions. More importantly, students expect that the content of their design will remain relevant at the time of their graduation [21].

In this context, it is important for fashion design students to have a cross-disciplinary approach to research, exploration and problem-solving, in order to be able to come out with solutions that are not only innovative, but also contextually appropriate for consumers overwhelmed with complex array of choices.

## IV. FASHION DESIGN EDUCATION IN INDIA

The first art schools in India were established in the mid-1850s; the first design institute, National Institute of Design (NID) Ahmedabad was established in 1960; the Industrial Design Centre (IDC) was set up in 1969 under the auspices of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay; the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), New Delhi was founded by the Ministry of Textiles in 1987 [22].

As a parallel development, with a growing Indian economy, especially for fashion lifestyle products, a large number of private sector companies have invested heavily in design-driven corporate governance, even setting up company-owned design departments [23]. This indicates an increasing demand for trained fashion designers in India.

Fashion design education caters to an industry characterised by fast-changing trends, increasingly shorter fashion cycles, and fierce competition trying to capture mindshare of a fickle consumer, and needs trained professionals to cater to these fast changes through domain-relevant performances.

## V. TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT (TLA)

Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) form the three cornerstones of any academic structure and process.

Any effective TLA approach must factor in an unambiguous connection between the teaching and learning inputs and the outcomes measured through assessment [24].

Effective teaching cannot be based on "rule-book" and must essentially involve contextual adaptation and individual focus [25]. Contextual adaptation is important because every teaching session for a particular cohort is dynamic in nature, and contextual relevance is set through dynamic interaction between the teacher and the student(s).

An effective combination of teaching and learning involves a fundamental balance between the teacher's approach and the student's acceptance, and any gaps in this may lead to students' "resistance" to learn and absorb, and the teacher's "reluctance" to impart proactive teaching [26].

The fundamental assessment process involves generating and collecting evidence of the student's learning and is a joint responsibility of both the teacher and the student. The assessment process involves the following important parameters [27] :

a) judging the student's performance against clearly defined criteria understood by the student
b) a robust feedback system which involves discussions between the teacher and the student
c) facilitation of access by the teacher to benchmarked samples

It is extremely important that both the teacher and the student realize that assessment should not be merely treated as a gauge of achievement of grades, but more importantly, as a clear indicator towards acquisition of lifelong skills [28].

Assessment performs two important roles in terms of completing the academic cycle of TLA – it measures not only the absolute and relative strengths of the student, but also provides insight into the weak areas of a student – and helps define a route towards improvement. Assessment is equally important for the student (in terms of imbibing learning) as well for the teacher (in terms of imparting learning) [29].

An ambiguous assessment system and strategy may not only fail to achieve assessment objectives but may also create a negative student experience. A negative experience with assessment arises primarily from two factors [30] :

a) Over-emphasis on examinations resulting in surface learning rather than deep learning
b) Students approaching assessment more in terms of successfully clearing examinations rather than absorbing learning

Assessments is both formative and summative. Formative assessment involves evaluating a student's performance during the active teaching. Summative assessment is a systematically defined format of assessment – structured, formal, and always recorded.

It is summative assessment which finally plays the role of awarding grades to the student, but as Biggs [25] notes, summative assessment is carried out "after the teaching episode has concluded". Haines [31] differentiates formative assessment to be a "coaching" role; and summative assessment to be a "judging" role.

Formative assessment, with key requirements of support and guidance tends to be overlooked relative to summative assessment [32], while summative assessment tends towards inadequate documentation, especially in terms of visibility to students [33]. Formative and summative assessment must complement each other, and any over-dependence on only one invariably leads to a biased and regressive assessment strategy.

Based on the above assessment, in a larger context [34]:

a) measures the student's performance at progressive levels, leading to evaluation of

the student's eligibility for receiving programme awards;

b) provides invaluable feedback to both tutor and student, tracking the latter's progressive development over a specific period of time across a defined spectrum of learning outcomes

c) points, through a combination of evaluation and feedback, the student's strengths as well as areas where improvement may be required

d) acts as a primary pathway that guides a student's progression, in terms of defined objectives of a programme, and also for all future learning progression across a lifetime

Faculty members engaged in the assessment process therefore require evidence of students' performance based on professional benchmarks that can be clearly observed and recorded [21].

## VI. ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVITY IN FASHION DESIGN EDUCATION IN INDIA

Assessment in design education must enable the student being able to independently critically review, consolidate and extend the concepts and skills learned through a combination of practice and reflection [35]. This means that the student must be given appropriate time and freedom towards exploration of possibilities through engagement with the environment leading to discovery and future possibilities [17].

Assessment is a key enabler that supports creativity and innovation [20], and in the context of fashion design education must facilitate the judgement and improvement of how the student is able to link functional, aesthetic and socio-cultural facets of design.

Fashion designers need to engage in deeper levels of research to fully respond to dynamic design briefs, and produce contextually correct output that caters to customer requirements; and if viewed in an Indian context, fashion design students must also be able to acquire a balanced education that not only retains academic or craft-based traditions, but also assume leadership positions in effecting and reacting to change [36].

In a design school, assessment must be geared towards enhancement of creative potential through a clearly defined assessment system. A supportive and flexible assessment system will tend to encourage reflection and creative thinking in the student, and plays a key role in promoting and supporting creativity and divergent thinking.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In an overall context, assessment in fashion design must assess the student's understanding in terms of:

a) an amalgamation of multidisciplinary and collaborative education involving core design areas, the arts, the sciences and liberal studies

b) an awareness and appreciation of the environment – socio-cultural, business and ecology

c) the reality of working under technical and economic constraints

d) the process of moving students up the learning curve of cognitive development involving both contextual adaptation and individual focus

Therefore, assessment of creativity in a professional fashion design programme must address:

a) Encouragement of divergent thinking and application of knowledge with open perspective

b) Collection of evidence that students are able to practice learning of core design areas

c) Motivation of students to work towards outcomes rather than grades or awards

d) Importance of collaborative and multidisciplinary learning aimed at creative applications

e) The roles of the teacher and peers with respect to evaluation and assessment

In summary, assessment of creativity in fashion design courses in India needs to essentially factor in diversity of responses from the student spanning multi-disciplinary contexts; degree of creativity; students' creative output adhering to given learning outcomes and assessment briefs; and forward and backward linkages across progressive levels of learning. Most importantly, both student and teacher need to share a common perspective on the goals and expectations in terms of assessment of creativity.

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