

Going Green, Blue, and Plaid for Fashion!

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Overview

Do you ever wonder where the clothes on your body and the shoes on your feet really come from? Most consumers simply purchase and wear what they aesthetically like; the average person is not concerned with knowing where that garment or pair of high tech sneakers originated. However, everywhere today we hear more and more about how the effects of what we eat, how we live, and what appliances we use in our homes are doing to our environment. Our schools and cities are making serious attempts to recycle and many citizens practice the rule of “reduce, reuse and recycle.” However, there are still some glaring offenses when it comes to our consumer buying habits. It is my goal to have my students do three things: (1) truly think about the effects of what they wear/buy to our environment, (2) research some possible solutions to some of the offending habits, and (3) change their buying behavior in future purchases so that they can truly make a difference in helping to make some positive changes for the environment. This curriculum unit will serve primarily as a “wrap up activity” and will be a major project that will take approximately one week of class time to complete.

I have taught Marketing Education on the high school level to students in grades 9 – 12 in a large urban school district in North Carolina for the last 17 years. One of the courses that I most often teach is called Fashion Merchandising. In this curriculum, students are taught six basic components of marketing and fashion. They are: economics; business of fashion; merchandise information (including textiles); selling; promotion; and workplace readiness skills. All Marketing Education courses fall under the realm of Career and Technical Education, which focuses largely on preparing students for a future career in different career clusters. The goal of these courses is to provide these students with a certain level of readiness to continue in a chosen career path. For example, once a student finishes taking a Fashion Merchandising course, they may choose to study merchandising, textiles, or design in a career college or university and then go on to eventually work in such fashion related fields as clothing design, manufacturing, retail sales and management or textiles. Some of my students are very serious about pursuing a future career in fashion; however, the majority of my students is simply interested in

fashion and enjoys it and wants to become more fashion savvy in their everyday lives. Therefore, the focus of this curriculum unit is to challenge students to complete a series of activities that will incorporate many of the major units, as well as be both a “real-world” learning experience while at the same time, force them to investigate some eco-friendly concepts into their everyday fashion experiences.

Rationale and Unit Plan

The purpose of this unit is to study a growing trend in today’s marketplace: green marketing and making the idea of sustainability a “reality.” Students will be working in small groups of 2-4 students to create a brand or line of brands that incorporate the use of green marketing or sustainability. According to the American Marketing Association, green marketing is the marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe. Thus green marketing incorporates a broad range of activities, including product modification, changes in the process of production and manufacturing, changes to the ways products are packaged, as well as using modifications in the promotions and advertising of products. However, defining green marketing is not a simple task; there are many interpretations; there are also several accepted terms used when describing it: sustainable, eco-friendly, and green. In the 1980’s the first real wave of green marketing came into play when the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Reports started. The company that first started to supplement its marketing with a “green viewpoint,” was the ice cream maker Ben & Jerry’s, who not only thought about its viable food products, but also how the company had an impact on the environment.

During the past decade or so, the focus on green marketing has not been only on what companies are doing to be “green,” but also to elicit the consumer’s role in being more environmentally aware. Additionally, many consumers are becoming more and more responsible in their product purchasing practices and usage of products that may or may not be eco-friendly. The so-called “green consumer” movements in the United States and other countries have struggled to make an impact on the “average consumer,” who still considers price value largely more important than whether a product or company is sustainable. Many consumers say they want eco-friendly products and would support making purchases from companies that are environmentally friendly. However, often times, these eco-friendly products come with a higher price tag to the consumer, and some shoppers are not willing or able to justify the higher price tag.

One of the challenges that many companies face is figuring out how to produce products that are either environmentally friendly or more sustainable while still keeping the manufacturing costs low enough to be profitable. For businesses, going green is more than just using clever marketing; it's about recognizing the environmental costs involved in every decision along the design and manufacturing processes and finding innovative and unique ways to minimize those costs. Furthermore, going green connotes the general idea that a product or a process is beneficial to, or at least has minimal impact on, the environment with regard to energy, resource and raw material usage; greenhouse gas and toxic emissions; and/or waste generation. It often is interchangeable with environmentally friendly, eco-friendly, and other general terms. Sustainable is a broader term that encompasses not only the environment, but also economic and social equity considerations. A sustainable product has minimal impact on the environment in that harvesting or resource usage does not deplete or permanently damage the resource plus, it can be produced in an economically viable way and it is produced with consideration for the welfare of employees and others impacted by the production. However, it's ultimately the consumers who determine whether "going green" will be possible and for many, they know that they hold the key to the success of eco-friendly products and/or companies...by choosing to spend their money with businesses that are practicing sustainability. It all comes down to that.

Another consideration to keep in mind is that the term "sustainability" has become so widely used that it is in danger of meaning nothing, really. According to the Lowell Center for Sustainable Production defines sustainable production as "the creation of goods and services using processes and systems that are: non-polluting; conserving energy and natural resources; economically efficient; safe and healthful for workers, communities, and consumers, and socially and creatively rewarding for all working people." Another source defines sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future." One of the goals of this project is to ask students to research some of the new trends in the fashion industry regarding sustainability and then incorporate one of these trends into their project. Another goal of this unit is to have students create mock products that would realistically appeal to the "green shopper;" who is defined as a consumer who cares about the effect their purchasing decisions have on the world around them. A green shopper wants to know where their food comes from, how their clothing was made, what's in the products they use and whether they were produced humanely, sustainably and with minimal impact on the environment.

The study of the fashion industry focuses on many different topics, ranging from product designs, market segmentation, pricing, visual merchandising, selling, and distribution. Typically, a fashion student would not study ecology. However, it is my plan to blend some amount of science into the fashion curriculum with this unit. I will help my fashion students become aware of some of the sustainability trends going on in the world of textile development, retailing, and distribution. We will see how green marketing is blending the world of ecology and commerce. Companies are constantly seeking ways to reduce waste, decrease their spending, reduce their carbon footprint, as well as appeal to their customers, many of whom support this idea of “eco-friendliness.” We will also be looking at the concept of recycling, since there has been quite a bit of recycling being used in the world of textiles. The fashion industry reinvents and copies itself all of the time. Designers study fashion trends throughout history, change them slightly, as well as predict fashion’s future based on its past. Carrying this idea of recycling one step further, some fashion designers are finding ways to use recycled and discarded materials in their designs. Others are using vintage fabrics or dismantling and reshaping old garments into something new and cutting edge. This calls for less energy in production and produces less overall waste. Shops that specialize in vintage goods are experiencing a boom in many areas, since it allows shoppers to buy items that are slightly used. The socially conscious and green fashion movements are making big waves in the fashion industry and have the potential to revolutionize the business.

Strategies

The unit will incorporate a variety of strategies to help students gather information on fashion trends happening in the world of sustainability. These will include, but not limited to:

- Brainstorming (keywords, concepts, etc)
- Connecting (to experiences, texts, authors)
- Constructing
- Reading
- Writing
- Outlining
- Listening, Viewing, Evaluating
- Working independently and cooperatively
- Discussion
- Oral Presentation

Use of technology (creating charts & graphs, word processing, researching databases)

Activities and Lessons

This unit will be brought in as a type of capstone activity that takes place towards the end of the course, once all of the major units have been studied in depth. It will serve primarily as a “wrap up activity” and will be a major project that will take approximately one week of class time to complete. Students will be asked to research one of the newest ecological trends regarding textiles and designs. Then, they will be working in small groups of 2-4 students to create and develop a mock product (prototype) or line of products using one of the new ecological trends discovered in their prior research. This unit will take approximately 5 -7 ninety minute block periods to complete. There will be several “mini activities” or sections of the overall project.

Activity #1: Take approximately 30 minutes to share with the class various articles that detail what some of the existing trends in the marketplace are in regards to sustainability and green marketing efforts. Teacher should do some current research to get the most up-to-date trends. One that I will discuss with my current students is the company called Mink, which is a vegan footwear brand that was created by vegan stylist Rebecca Brough in 2002 when she became frustrated with the lack of stylish and sexy “animal-cruelty-free shoes” on the market. She creates shoes that are leather free (thus animal-cruelty free) that are stylish enough to compete with the likes of Prada and Gucci brands. She uses embellishments on her shoe designs that include things like recycled cork, wood, buckles from vintage surplus stores, organic cotton fabrics rather than leather, and each shoe is handmade in order to reduce the energy consumption used in normal mass production. Some might argue that the idea of mass production is more efficient and the energy per shoe is less than for handmade products, but for the volume of shoes that she creates, this has not been proven to be true in her company. I will also pull up several images of her eco-friendly designs to share with the class. Then, allow approximately one hour for students to break up into small groups of 3-5 and then brainstorm other possible eco-friendly products.

Some sites that I have researched and will encourage my students to investigate include:

- www.Patagonia.com This outdoors company labels products with a greenE when they contain at least one-third by weight of what is considered environmentally friendly fibers. The fibers that qualify for this designation

include organic cotton, hemp, chlorine-free wool, recycled polyester, recycled nylon, and Tencel fabric.

- www.physiciansformula.com This cosmetics company features a line of bamboo based products, including powders, concealers, bronzers, and brushes and comes in completely biodegradable packaging.

- www.Teracycle.com This company is the leader in using a concept called “upcycling.” Upcycling is turning disposable items into new products. This is a company that grossed over \$8 million in sales of basically selling products made from trash! They make a variety of products from recycled material: fertilizers from worm poop, backpacks from used juice boxes, and reusable shopping totes from plastic bags given away by retailers. In fact, they were the first company to use this process for the retailing giant, Target corporation, and now there are numerous other uses for it such as developing placemats, trashcans, and notebooks out of the same material.

- www.junkstyling.uk.com This is an independent jewelry designer who takes vintage pieces and re-constructs older, outdated pieces into fresh designs, without using any new materials. There are also a host of jewelry designers that use only scraps of metals, or use copper from pipes, etc. in their designs.

- www.GaiaConceptions.com This is a designer from North Carolina that creates eco-friendly clothes that are stylish and have a low impact on the environment.

- www.obabyorganics.com This is another North Carolina retailer that carries baby clothing from organic apparel designers, as well as sells only clothing that is pesticide-free, organic cotton, and the suppliers they use have made a pledge to fair trade and environmental stewardship.

Activity # 2: Taking about ½ hour, students should log onto website called www.nrc-recycling.org/recyclingcalculator.aspx to go get a sense of the effect of recycling certain products such as cans and plastic soda bottles has on the environment. Students are also asked to calculate their own positive or negative effects regarding their own usage and recycling habits. Fashion students should in particular do the activity regarding soda bottles since it will lead them to a graphic that informs them about how plastic soda bottles are being ground up and used into textiles to make tee-shirts and other apparel. This should serve as a jumping-board for students to brainstorm their own possible product ideas. There are also several activities from the Project Lead the Way curriculum from North Carolina that they can complete, if time permits.

Activity #3: Take one full class period to research various eco-friendly trends in the textile and design industries (I will include several required reading articles to get them started on the right direction) Students should investigate the trends of using sustainable products (such as **bamboo, recycled polyester, recycled nylon, organic fabrics, Tencell Lyocell** (which is made from the pulp of eucalyptus trees), **recycled material such as plastic bottles into fabrics, etc.** An excellent video clip to show the class can be found included in the show “Trash Inc: The Secret Life of Garbage.” The link is <http://www.cnbc.com/id/15840232?video=1620084176&play=1>. At 32 minutes into the show, there is a segment that features turning plastic bottles into fabric runs. It is approximately 5 minutes long and is a perfect jumping board activity for the students.

There is a great deal of literature available on the benefits of using **bamboo** in fashionable products. Bamboo is one of the world’s most renewable resources since it is actually a grass and does not typically need to be replanted, it grows very quickly without the use of fertilizers or pesticides and the root system of the bamboo also serves to stabilize the earth by preventing erosion and sequesters excess oxygen in the root of the plant. Bamboo also retains water, reduces runoff, and helps mitigate water pollution due to its high nitrogen consumption. Bamboo releases 35% more oxygen and takes in nearly 5 times the amount of greenhouse gases than equivalent timber stands. Bamboo can be utilized in just 4-5 years unlike traditional hardwoods that take 25-70 years to mature. Bamboo is the fastest growing plant on the planet; some species can grow up to 3 feet per day. All bamboo fibers are naturally round, giving it a non-abrasive smooth texture which is especially important for sensitive skin and makes it a perfect fiber for use in towels and other domestic products for the home. Additionally, bamboo is very versatile with over 1,200 species of bamboo on the planet.

Another hot fabric in the fashion industry is organic cotton. **Organic cotton** is grown using methods and materials that have a low impact on the environment. Organic production systems replenish and maintain soil fertility, reduce the use of toxic pesticides and fertilizers, and build biologically diverse agriculture. Organic cotton is grown without the use of toxic and synthetic fertilizers. In addition, federal regulations prohibit the use of genetically engineered seed for organic farming. All cotton sold in the United States must meet strict federal regulations covering how the cotton is grown. Organic cotton is now being grown in over 22 countries worldwide by over 220,000 farmers. In 2009, the United States had sales reaching \$521 million for organic cotton fibers and that trend seems to be rising. Apparel companies are developing programs that use either 100 percent organically grown cotton, or blend small percentages of organic cotton with conventional cotton in their products. Also, as a result of consumer interest, organic cotton fiber is used in numerous consumer goods, ranging from items used in personal care (sanitary products, make-up removal pads, cotton puff balls, and ear swabs) to domestic goods (towels, sheets, blankets, bedding, bathrobes), children's products (clothing, sheets, toys, diapers), stationary and note cards. Its future uses seem almost endless!

I will also provide them with the names of current designers and shops that are already committed to incorporating sustainability into their lines, such as Gaia Conceptions, O Baby Organics, Tees for Trees, and zoe&zac line available at Payless Shoesource stores. Other ideas might include coming up with a potential product that uses strictly recycled materials within the design such as the purse made from sewing soft-drink can tabs or rolling up old papers from magazines to create jewelry or novelty plates and vases. (show images of these products to students) Another idea for students to consider investigating is the concept of "upcycling." Upcycling is turning disposable items into new products and selling them as a business opportunity. TerraCycle is one company that has embraced this unique concept and makes a variety of products they market such as fertilizer from worm poop, backpacks from juice pouches, and reusable tote bags from plastic bags.

Activity #4: In this activity, students will identify the potential customers for their product. Students should be sure to indicate each type of market segmentation used to describe their customer in terms of their demographics, psychographics, geographics, and behavioral responses that are applicable to their target market. Students should have already studied units 2 and 3 in the Fashion Merchandising course, where the meanings of these terms have been taught. (see Standards)

Activity #5: Students will identify the marketing mix, discussing each of the 4 P's of Marketing to include:

PRODUCT:

- Describe the desired image of the product/product line.
- What are the name(s) of the product?
- What makes the product useful and/or unique to the consumer?
- How should it be packaged? (keeping in mind the eco-friendliness of it)
- Create a prototype or sample of the product.

PLACE:

- Where will customers buy this product? Brick and mortar locations and/or websites?
- Why is this is the best place to market these products?
- Where is the best place to have this product manufactured and why? (keeping in mind the eco-friendliness of the process it requires to manufacture the product, etc.)

PRICE

- What is the correct manufactured suggested retail price for this product?
- How does this price compare to other (fairly) similar products price? Will it be able to remain competitive against other products? Will it be higher or lower priced? How does the cost of sustainability factor into the price?
- Will this price allow for profitability, while remaining truly eco-friendly?

PROMOTION

- What specific information do customers need about this product?
- What is/are the most effective form of communication for this product—advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, &/or publicity? Explain the reasons certain forms were chosen and take into consideration the costs involved in using this form of promotion.
- Provide two examples of forms of promotion to be used in promoting this product.

- Discuss promotional activities aimed at taking advantage of the changing consumer attitudes toward an eco-friendly brand.

This part of the project will take the students approximately 2 – 3 blocks to complete. Each part should be written out, in business format, and in enough detail to completely answer each section.

Activity #6: Once the students have completed the prototype and finished each section in activity #5, they will prepare a software-based presentation such as Power Point, Windows Movie Maker, or Photostory that outlines their proposed product or product line. It will discuss each section in activity #5, and should be creative and engage the “audience,” which will be the other classmates. Each person in the small group should have an active part in presenting their proposed product in front of the class. In essence, the group will be “pitching” their new product to the class, in hopes that the class will accept their idea.

Each group will be assessed using a grading rubric (see appendix) Depending on the size of the class, this final part of their project (activity #6) will take approximately 2 -3 class periods.

Students will be asked to evaluate themselves as well as the other group members, and we will “vote” on the product that we feel is most realistic, will most likely to be accepted by consumers, will make the best use of sustainable products, and is the most original and creative. Students should prove to the best of their ability how their potential product would affect both the fashion industry as well as the overall economy.

Another important issue to tackle during this unit is to take a closer look at how companies are claiming that their products &/or companies use the word “sustainable” when marketing and advertising their products. The Federal Trade Commission recently released an update to the FTC Green Guides, the first in over twelve years. The revised guidelines caution against claims such as “eco-friendly” or “environmentally friendly,” meaning that companies can no longer say on their advertisements that the product is “eco-friendly” if it is only based on the ability to recycle it.

Along those same lines, it will be more difficult to claim that products and packaging are “biodegradable” or “compostable.” Before a company can make those claims, the packaging must prove to be truly biodegradable within a year’s time span. Therefore,

these new rules could have far-reaching effects on packaging, especially on the way companies sell and package their line of package-goods.

When this curriculum unit is complete, it is my hope that my Fashion Merchandising students will see the benefits of putting into practice one of the hottest topics in the corporate world right now...green marketing and sustainability. On a personal note, it is my hope that students will open their eyes to their own responsibility in finding concrete ways to be more “eco-friendly,” and I think this unit will help to do that. It is also going to be interesting to use some cross-curricular instruction, since many of the eco-friendly trends in the fashion world derive from trends in textiles (which is largely based on chemistry).

While researching this unit, I also discovered a wonderful link from the magazine geared towards teen age girls, *Seventeen*. In the September 2010 issue, the magazine featured a contest put on by ebay that challenged teenagers to live 30 days of being green. There was also an interesting article that highlighted 17 ways to easily go green, such as not printing receipts at the ATM or gas pump (just write it down in the ledger immediately!), and to use blackle.com as a search engine because its backgrounds on the computer are black, not white, making your computer use less energy. I would like to have my students complete some sort of “green journal,” in which they will incorporate at least one week of “Green Living” in their daily lives. It could be as simple as unplugging their computers and televisions at night in order to save energy. I will have my students write in a journal about the green choices they made for that week as well as how those new choices made them feel. In addition, it is my hope that when the students make clothing or domestics purchase in the future, they will at least take the time to read the tag, to see what the fabric consists of, if it is certified organic or uses fair trade practices. I hope that this project will make a live-long impact on their sense of green purchasing and living.

While writing this unit, it was my intention to find a hands-on way for my fashion students to delve into the topic of sustainability and stretch the focus from simply selling “hot new fashions” to create those hot new fashions that are both eco-friendly as well as potentially profitable to the textile manufacturers and retailers who sell them. Students will be forced to think outside the box and **go green**, blue and even plaid for fashion!

I will challenge my students to think more globally and take into consideration, not only the product itself, but to really try to incorporate more eco-friendly packaging that

comply with these new FTC guidelines. Along these same lines, students will be challenged to consider the method in which their mock products will be made, what countries will be used in the manufacturing, and will be encouraged to look at global ideas such as environmental justice, equitable working conditions, sustainability of humans and communities in which their products are manufactured, etc.

Following socially and ecologically friendly fashion trends means feeling good about your clothes and feeling good about where they came from can go hand in hand. While eco-friendly fashion may have a way to go before it's mainstream, this fashion trend should be encouraging to both fashion designers and fashion lovers who want to see fashion embrace a kinder, more sustainable future.

Partial Reading List for this Unit:

1. Council of Economic Priorities. *Shopping for a Better World*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992. Gives rating in ten categories for over 21,000 products. Supports using dollars to vote economically for green products. Provides hard to get information.
2. Dell, Kristina. "Going Green. The Promise and Pitfalls of Bioplastic." Time magazine, May 3, 2010. Gives relevant information regarding this issue.
3. Green Trade & Development" <http://www.green-markets.org/context.htm>. January 2008.
4. "Green Fashion: Is It More than Marketing Hype?" <http://fastcompany.com/articles/2008/05> Addresses the hot issue of greenwashing.
5. Makower, Joel. *The Green Consumer*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993. Covers environmental problems and relates them to consumer buying patterns. Guidelines and resources to help make green purchasing choices.
6. Neff, Jack. "FTC Goes After Broad Environmental Claims in Long-Awaited Guideline Revision." Advertising Age magazine, October 6, 2010.
7. Sellers, Jennifer. "Green Garb: Eco-Friendly Apparel to Help Dress for Style-and Lifestyle." Triad Living Magazine, summer 2009.

8. www.nrc-recycle.org/recyclingcalculator.aspx Excellent tool for figuring out different uses for recycling and makes valid, clear impacts of use for students.