

The background features several abstract, organic shapes in teal and orange colors. A large teal shape is in the top-left corner. A large orange shape is in the top-right corner. A large orange shape is in the center-right. A large teal shape is in the bottom-right corner. A large orange shape is in the bottom-left corner. The shapes have irregular, hand-drawn edges.

reFashion



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Context to where my thesis started ...

I belong to India, the country with diverse, rich in history, culture, and religion. With that comes a variety of crafts and 744 craft clusters. The craft of each cluster reflects the influence of different empires. Throughout centuries, crafts have been embedded as a culture and tradition within rural communities. Communities earn their living by making crafts. Coming from this background, I was always interested in crafts. But the scenario has changed with the international business making their markets in India. And these communities are dwindling away and migrating to cities to find factory jobs.

When I came to the U.S to pursue my MFA, and I use to visit a lot of craft markets. I was trying to see what craft belongs to the US and how it works over here. Meanwhile, I attended a winter craft market in upstate New York, and this is how my journey began.

Meet Sara

She is a sheep farmer in Elizaville, New York. She owns this farm for 25 years. Currently, she has 200 sheep heads. From the time they are born, she takes care of them and cares for them. Once the sheep wool is fully grown in a year, she shears it, cleans it and separates it by its quality. She spins this wool into yarn that is ready to be made into woolen clothing. **When she goes out in the market to sell her products, very few products are sold.** She has built a community of people who help her out in the whole process who are dependent on her income. **People who take care of the sheep shear them, clean them whenever needed. And the sheep because if the products are not sold taking care of them gets difficult, so she has to sell some of the sheep and newborn lambs for a secure source of income.**



“The problem is wool to end consumer doesn’t have value. The wool industry has not created the aura around this fiber that cashmere or silk has.”

- Sara Healy
(Owner of bwba goat farms, New York)

But,

Through my research, I learned that all the craft industry is struggling to make its space in the market due to tremendous technological, socio-economic and cultural change. **Consumption of fashion has become so fast that it is taking over the craft industries.** Crafts have always been the communities backbone, but unfortunately, people are moving to find factory jobs to have a fixed income source.



“People are buying more clothes than before. The more people are focused on those materialistic values, the more they say that money, image, status & possessions are important to them, the less happy they are, the more depressed and anxious they are. All these physiological values tend to go up as materialistic values go up.”

- *The True Cost*

Fast Fashion: cheap clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends.

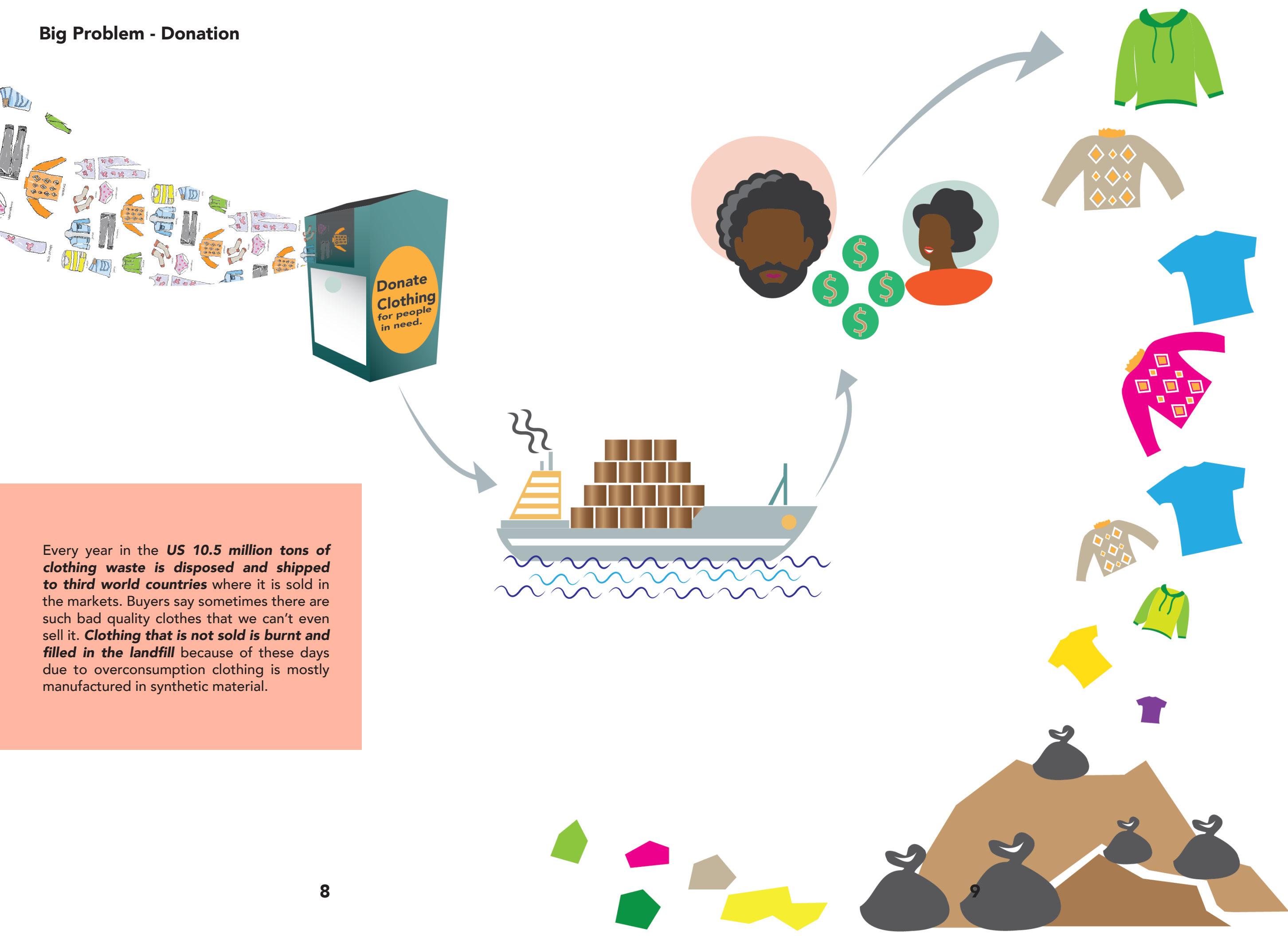
Buying clothing has increased by 400% since the year 1980. **An average person in the US gets rid of approximately 80 pounds of used clothing every year** by donating at the places like Salvation Army or Goodwill. Out of all the clothes donated at such sites, only 15% is provided to the needy and remaining all other clothes are sold to the developing countries like Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, Haiti, Tanzania, Zambia and many more where they sell second-hand clothing. These countries even have their own special word for it that means clothes donated by wealthy people.

Clothing disposal reasons



Data from Greenpeace

Big Problem - Donation



Every year in the **US 10.5 million tons of clothing waste is disposed and shipped to third world countries** where it is sold in the markets. Buyers say sometimes there are such bad quality clothes that we can't even sell it. **Clothing that is not sold is burnt and filled in the landfill** because of these days due to overconsumption clothing is mostly manufactured in synthetic material.

Reframing the problem

“According to the research, the data reveals how kids impact what parents buy and how much money they spend.”

Kids have a tremendous influence on consumer spending. In fact, in the U.S. there are 50 million kids age 11 and under who wield \$1.2 trillion in annual purchasing power in direct and indirect spending. Their opinions today will influence consumer trends far into the future, as 25% of brand preferences persist to adulthood.

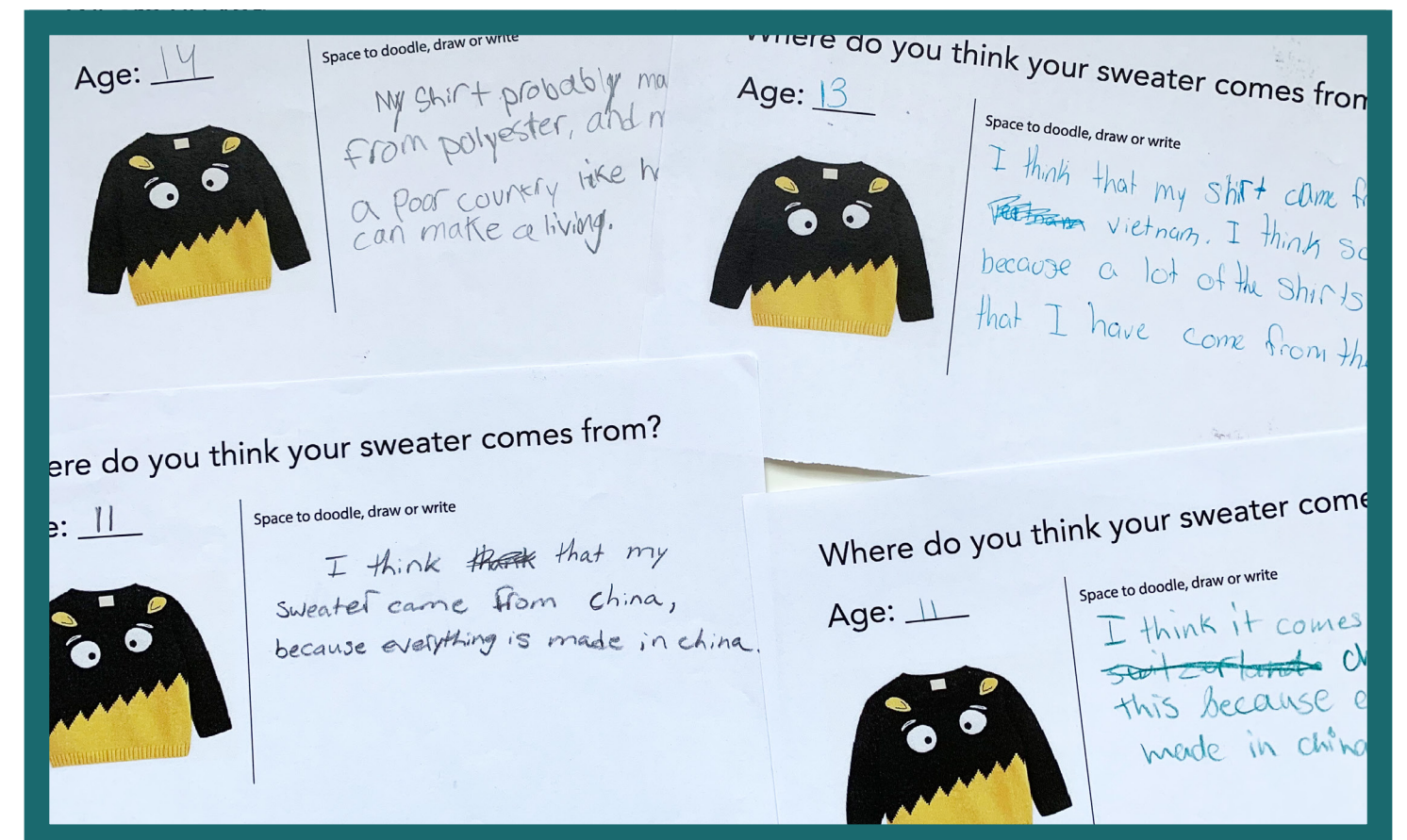
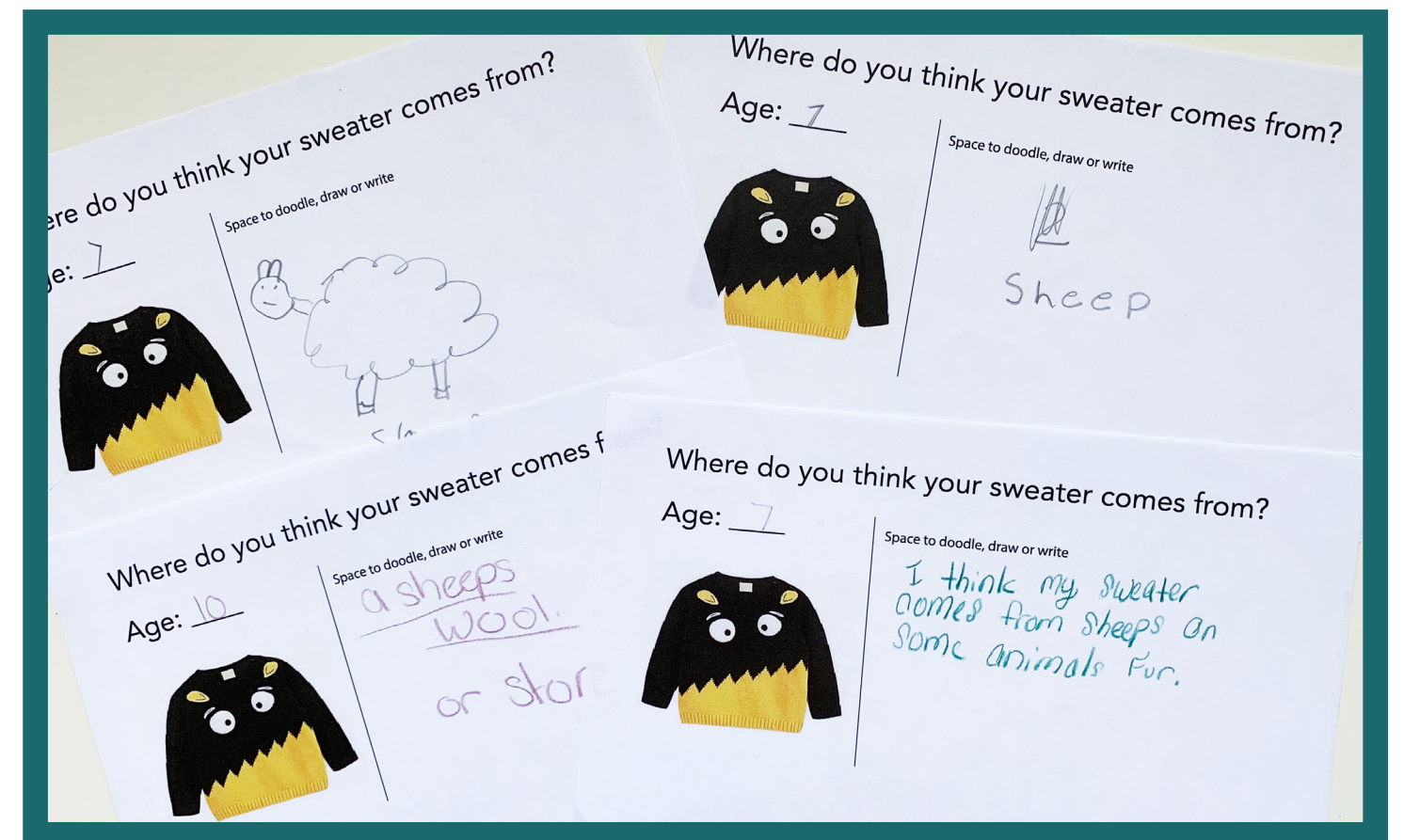
To understand what knowledge do kids have about the clothing I printed sheets and interviewed 21 kids in the mall while they were shopping or in the food court. I observed if they had shopping bags around them and have already purchased new clothes. This activity was a conversation starter to test their knowledge and to know how aware they are about the clothing is made.

Through my prototyping I found many observations, many of which were surprising.

- Kids between the ages of six to nine years said sweater from sheep wool.
- Kids between the ages ten to fourteen years named brands and mentioned they had been made in developing countries. They learn to read labels and material composition.

Insight from the prototype

Kids, as they grow older, get aware of the fashion brands and where the clothing is made, what material it is but they still lack the knowledge of what happens after the clothing is decomposed.



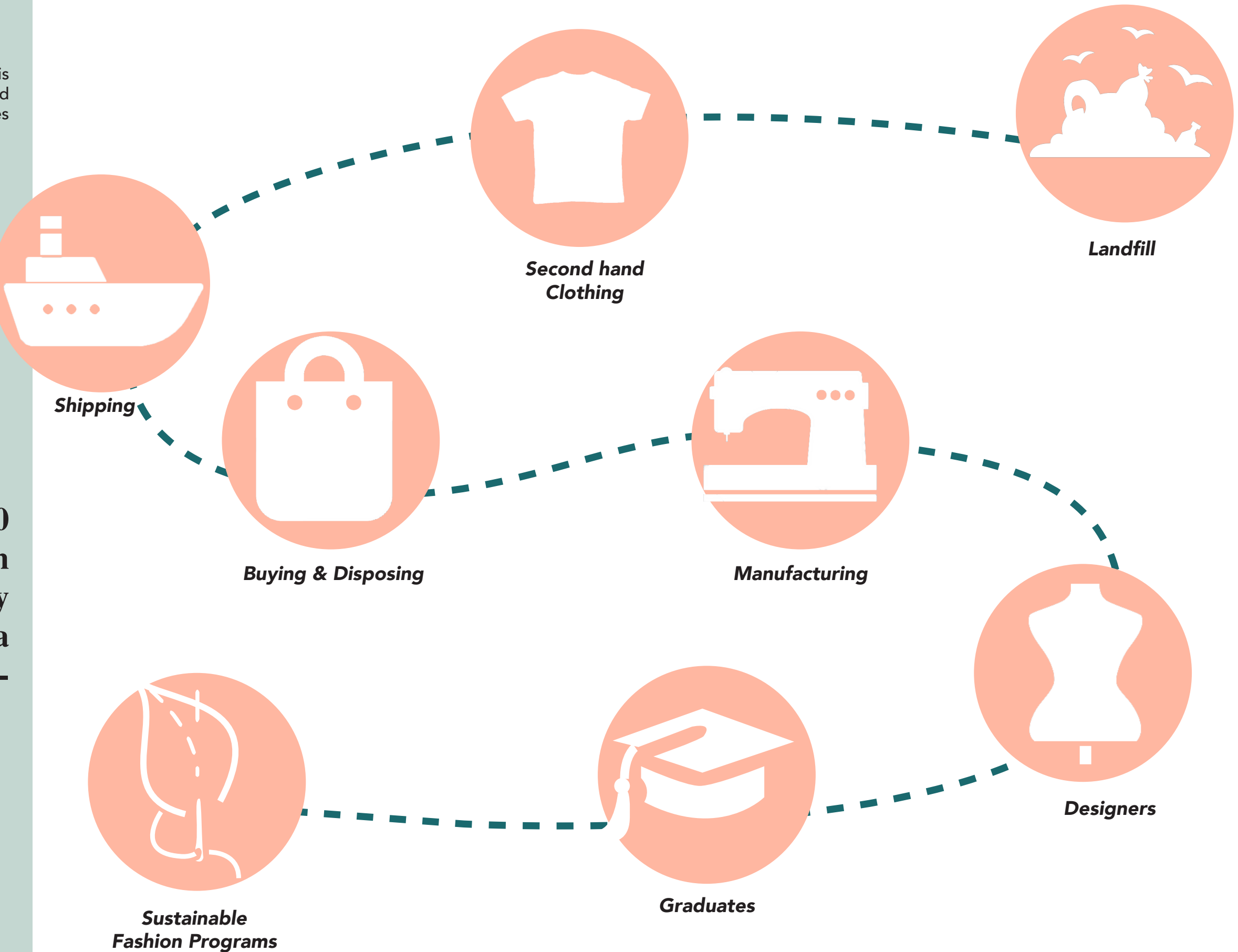
Reframing the problem

Analyzing the journey of how fast fashion is made before it is disposed and shipped to third world nations to see when sustainability comes in the play.

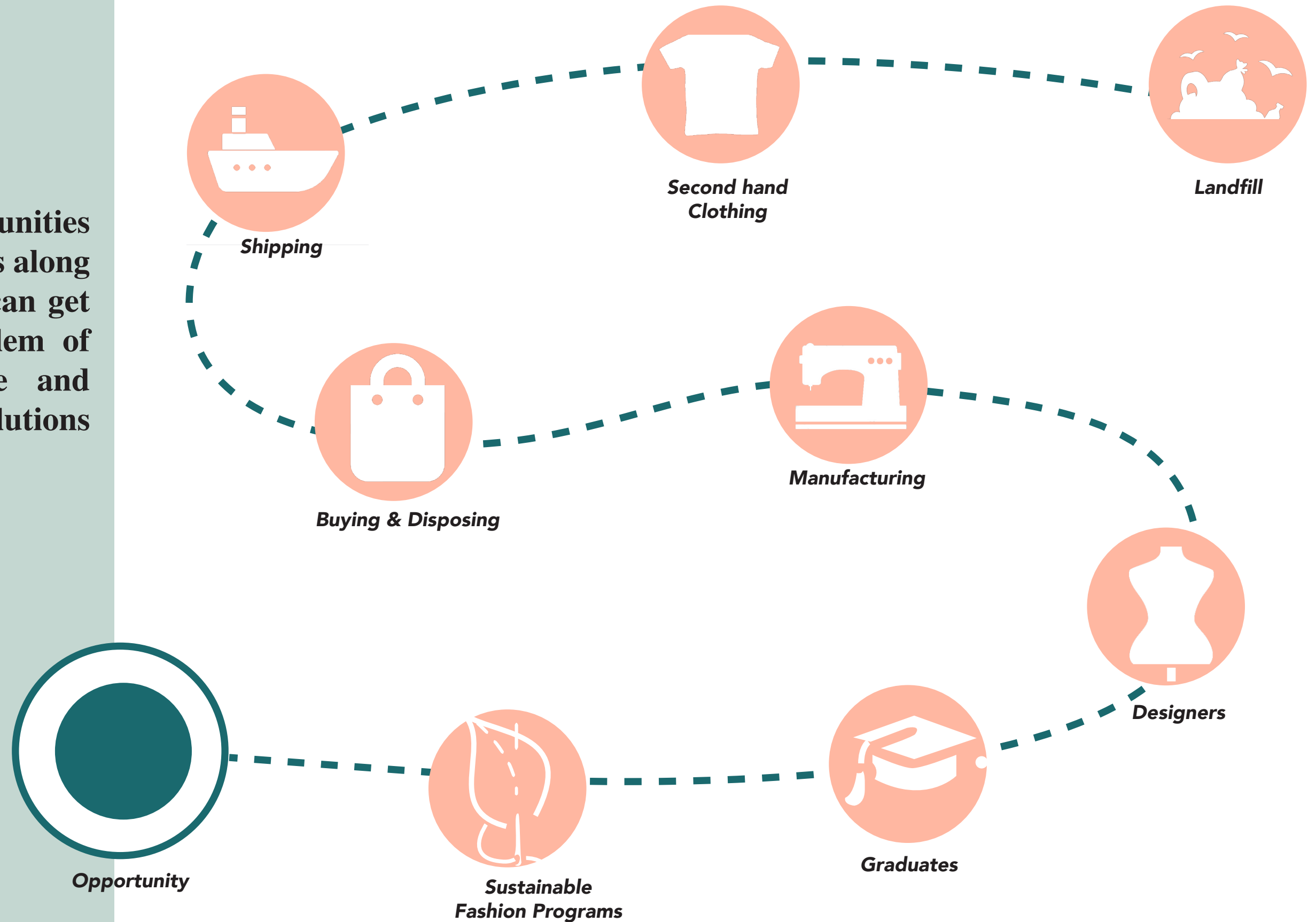
Learning

Every year almost 51,000 students graduate from fashion colleges, and only three schools in America have a full-time sustainability fashion program.

<https://www.fashion-schools.org/articles/top-50-fashion-design-schools-and-colleges-us>



Co-creating opportunities for high school teens along with them so they can get aware of the problem of fast fashion waste and create actionable solutions to reduce it.



Unmet Needs & Demotivations

All my previous research was taking me back towards teens. This was an excellent opportunity to co-create a learning session where kids could get aware of the fast fashion problem and learn ways to reduce it.

I interviewed 5 kids from Woodbridge High School in Edison Jersey city and introduced them to the problem. I wanted to check what do they think about the problem and if they are committed to being a part of this co-creation.

Interview Questions:

- Why do you want to be a part of co-creating a curriculum?
- How will it benefit you as you grow?
- How do you follow fashion?
- What are your motivations for being a part of the co-creation?
- Why do you think you cannot be part of co-creating a curriculum?
- Do you have any extracurricular activities other than school?
- Are you participating in other events?

Motivations to be part of co-creation

- We are part of the future, and we should decide for ourselves
- We can become more aware of the current situation of the industry
- Learn new things.
- Start a new trend in school.

Barriers to be part of co-creation

- Won't be able to complete the task in the given time frame
- Difficult to manage time with school, extracurricular activities
- Preoccupied with a lot of homework
- Pre-commitments for other events
- Not sure if I want to pursue fashion as my career

All the above quotes are from students of Woodbridge High School in Edison, New Jersey.

Learning from a set of teenagers who were not interested in pursuing fashion as their career let me discuss with Educator Mrs. Manju Ukey who teaches at a Charter School in New Jersey.

“Students need consistency and it has to be way students are exploring it step by step. If students want to pursue in a particular area, then they will be more focused on co-creating it.”

-Manju Ukey



Hypothesis

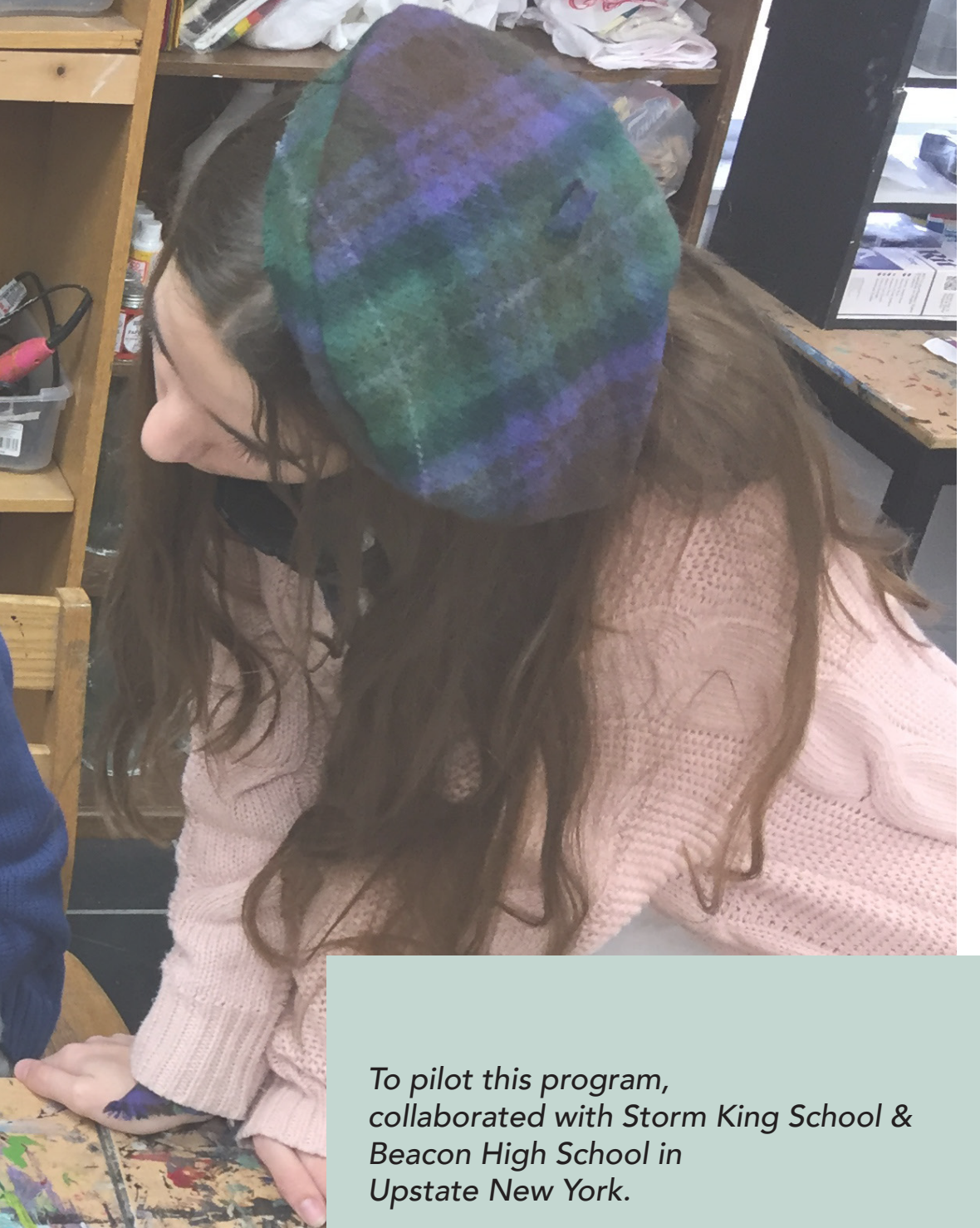
If the program were to be created for pre-college fashion students that help them learn about sustainability, then it would build a code of ethics that align their future learning, with an explicit aim to close the growing gap in understanding material to product life-cycle and the industry impacts on the environment.

Taking consideration from the educator to create consistency, I designed a program called reFashion.



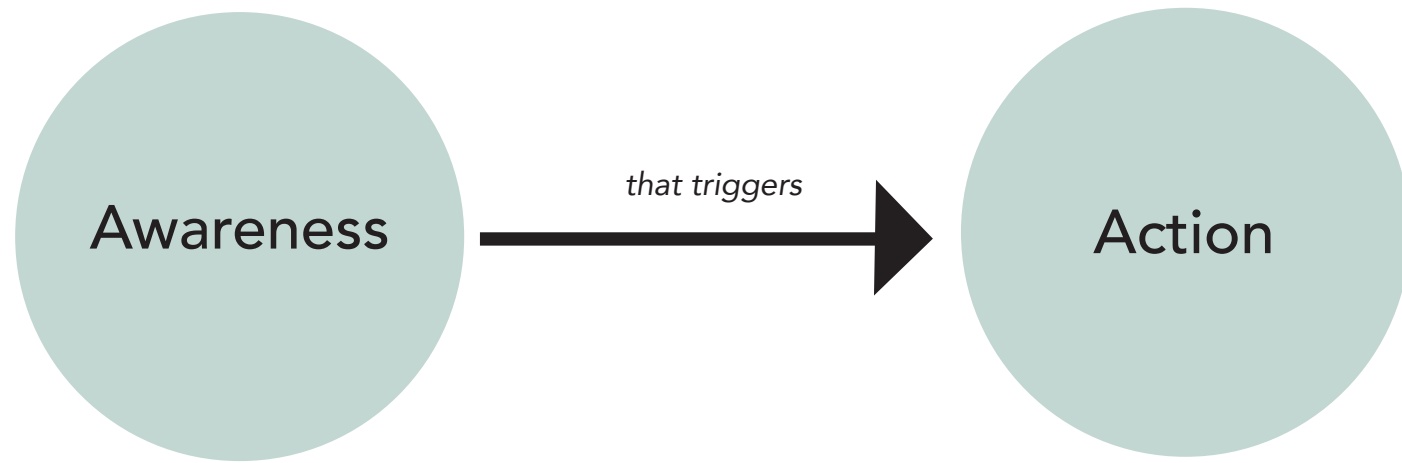
*Mindful creation leads to
mindful consumption*

**FLAMMABLE
KEEP FIRE AWAY**



To pilot this program, collaborated with Storm King School & Beacon High School in Upstate New York.

The curriculum is based on two principles





Objective

This prototype was designed to see if the dolls can be used as a tool to create awareness of fast fashion along with showing video and presentation. Inspiration was taken from Tsunami - a living symbol. One of the many Tsunami-related projects of Auroville - a city in the making in south India, dedicated to the ideal of human unity. These dolls are to be gifted and used as a storytelling element about the woman in trauma.

Observation

- Students used waste material to create dolls.
- They used them to tell a story about the fast fashion waste that they have learned through dolls.
- Inspired by one of the Tsunamika's principles, they used these dolls to gift people that act as a reminder to the people about the decisions they make when they buy new clothing.

Learning

Students did not know fast fashion existed and to create actionable solutions this exercise was needed.

Objective

Getting aware and learning through hands-on activities by going to sheep farms. Learning the product cycle from shearing the sheep wool to cleaning, processing, and dying.

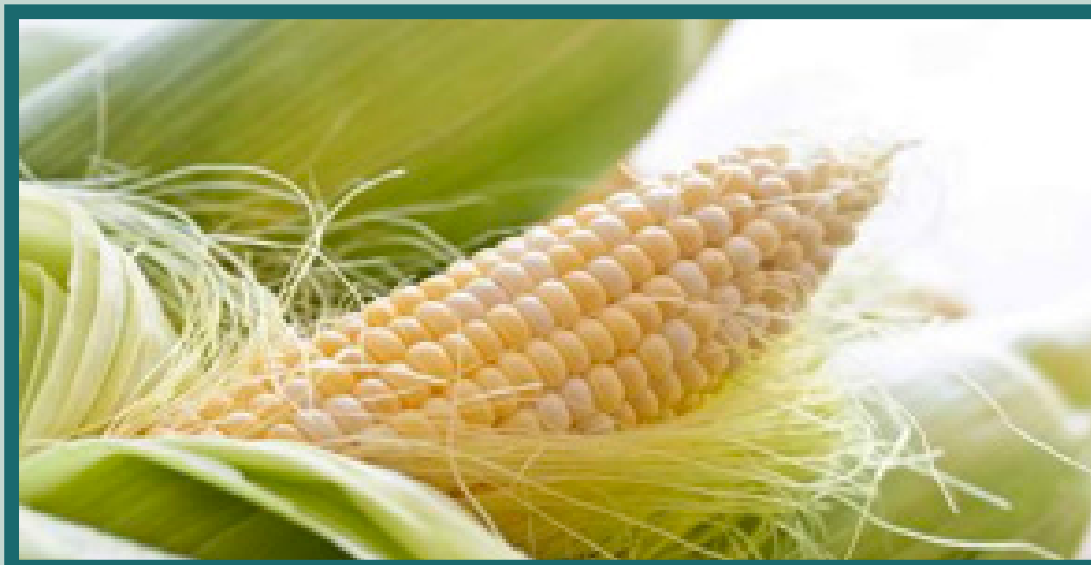
Observation

Students were excited to know more about the process and did not want to miss an opportunity to learn this process.

Learning

After learning about this, students were curious to learn about more sustainable fibers.





Objective

Introducing sustainable fibers like milk, soy protein, banana, lotus and, hemp that they develop material vocabulary & their benefits.

Observation

Students were excited to know more about the process and did not want to miss an opportunity to learn this process.

Learning

One student got interested in material science as she learnt new sustainable material.



Observation
Helps to visualize the garment.
Develop a three-dimensional design with fabric scraps.

Objective
Croquis is a French word for quick and sketchy drawings for fashion illustration. Ways to reuse fabric scraps to design.

Learning
Making clothing with constraints helps them to distinguish and classify different materials.



Observation

Students made garments from clothing available in the donations boxes at school.

Learning

Students had applied all the skills that had learnt and used in making the garments. Sourcing sustainable material was difficult for them but scraps were easily available.

“Many fashion design students don’t realize the importance of creating sustainable fashion. They are just in it for the creativity and designing. They aren’t aware of all the negative impacts this industry can have on the environment. We hope to help change that in the future”

- Gloria Siyu Wang '19 (Student, Storm King School)

“I’m happy to know that I can still make creative pieces of clothing that are not harming our natural world.”

- Emily Elizabeth Kent '21(Student, Storm King School)



Learning

- Students got interested in learning more once they were introduced to fast fashion waste problem. They wanted to invest their time in the curriculum.
- While, some students wanted to explore more but six weeks was a long commitment.

How will this curriculum be taught in some hours if student does not want to invest six weeks in learning?



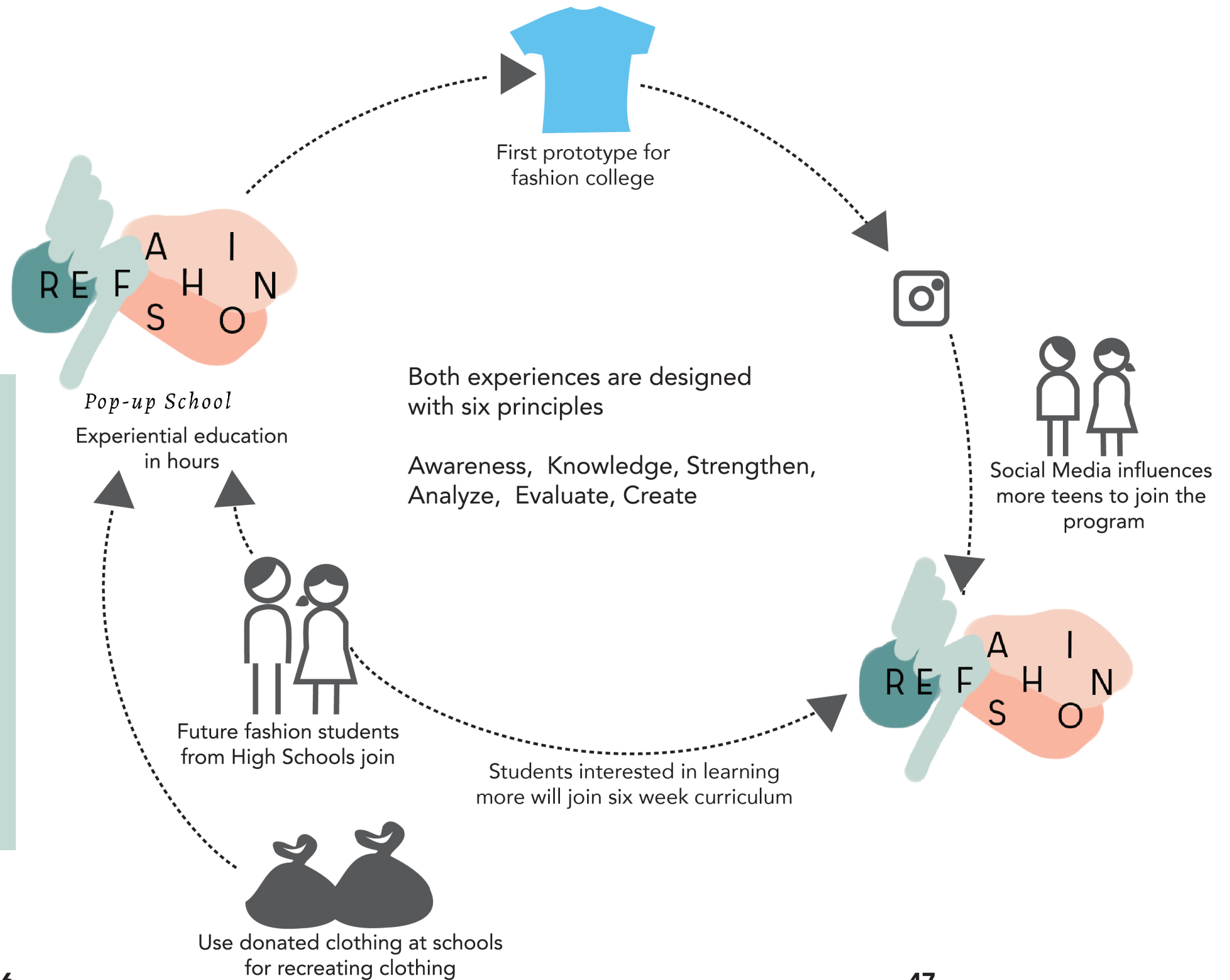


Pop-up School

reFashion pop-up school is an experiential social space that aims to help students become aware of fast fashion and inspire them to create sustainable clothing through the use of fashion waste.







How does it work?

The Refashion pop-up is an experiential social space that aims to help students become aware of fast fashion in a couple of hours through an immersive environment we create. It inspires them to develop sustainable clothing through the use of fashion waste sourced through donation boxes. Once students create their sustainable clothing pieces, they share their work on Instagram along with their learnings. Students interested in exploring fashion sustainability more in depth can join Refashion Program that offers a six-week learning experience.

Theory of Change

reFashion program and pop-up creates an experience where students get the awareness of fast fashion reality, learn fashion recycling, learn better material sourcing practices, introduced to innovative natural materials, create a piece of sustainable clothing, build a code of conduct for themselves.

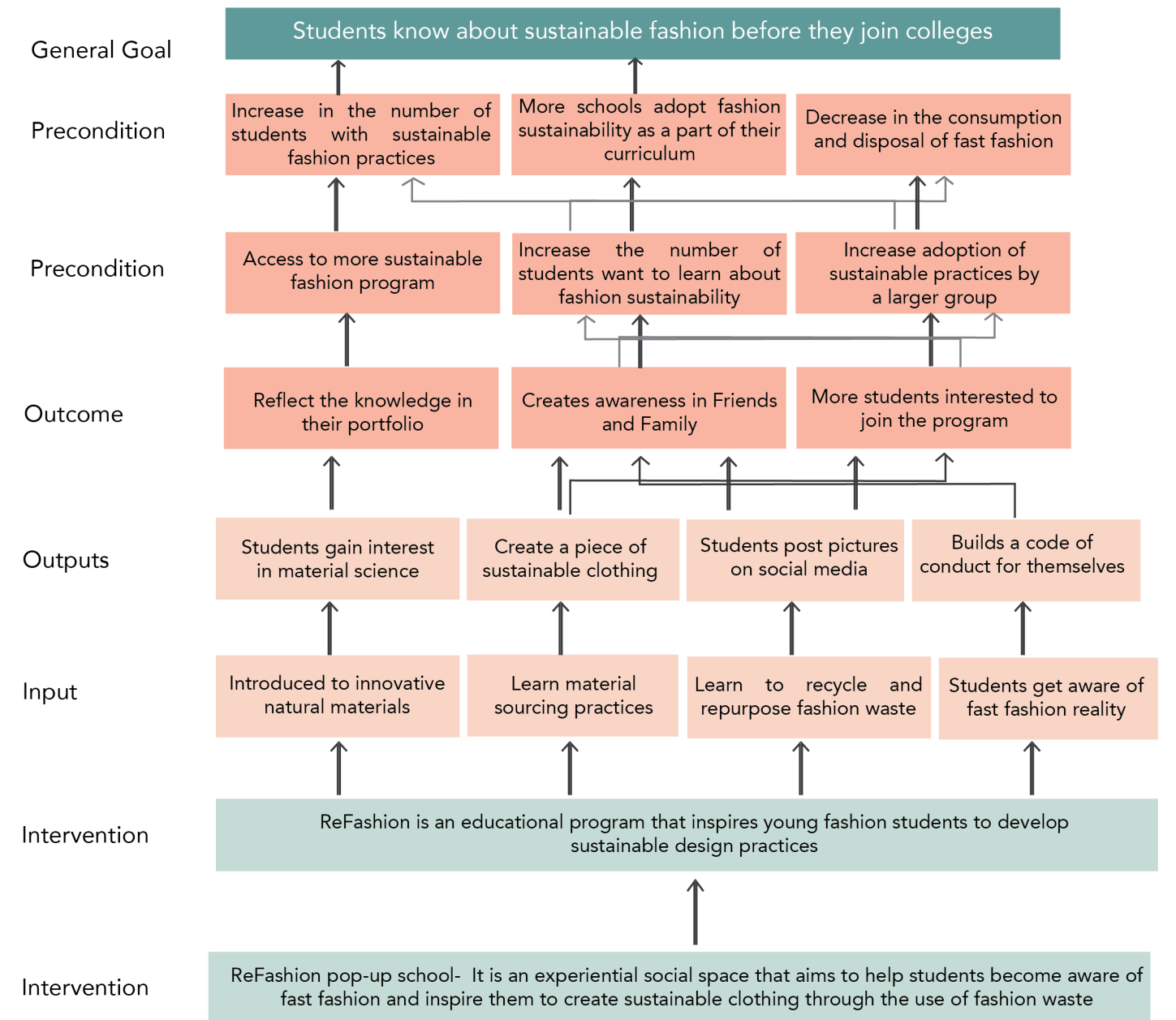
So that.. before joining fashion programs, students possess knowledge about fashion sustainability; interest in material science, reflect the knowledge in their portfolio, builds a community around themselves who are interested in learning sustainable fashion.

So that .. they create awareness about the issue with friends and family; shares current innovation with the community, post pictures on social media, research more on innovative material.

So that.. increase in the number of students wants to pursue the program, access to more sustainable fashion program, a decrease in the consumption and disposal of fast fashion, increase adoption of sustainable practices by a larger group, increase the number of students want to learn about fashion sustainability

So that.. More schools adopt fashion sustainability as a part of their curriculum

So that.. Students know about sustainable fashion before they join colleges



While reFashion program has piloted at two schools - Storm King School and Beacon High School, sixteen students in total participated in the program.

Moreover, reFashion pop-up school was piloted at Storm King twice the goal is to create as many pop-up experiences for the students who are willing to pursue fashion careers. This experience teaches them the best practices of repairing and recreating their clothing.

Next Steps:

- Test pop-up experience at Beacon High School
- Evaluate the impact on their learning
- Develop lean business plan for reFashion pop-up experience
- Pitch this idea for funding.
- Promote plan for scaling.
- Acquire necessary partnerships for material, promotion and help.
- Develop a website
- Develop plan for expansion



reFashion was built by the support, encouragement, and knowledge of many people:

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