



## Developing Interdisciplinary Partnerships Based on Cognitive Learning Styles

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Strategy. The soft skills to listen, learn, collaborate, and communicate are essential for both interior design and fashion fields (ASID 2012; Frazier & Cheek, 2016). Yet most individuals have varying degrees of mastery in these areas with little understanding why they approach these skill sets in the way they do. The strategy was twofold: how faculty may build teaching partnerships and how students may build learning partnerships by understanding cognitive learning styles as measured by the Gregorc Style Delineator Self-Assessment Instrument (Gregorc, 1982). The purpose was to reduce the frustration and to increase the success of partnerships within the classroom for both faculty and students. The Gregorc Style Delineator Self-Assessment classifies four domains of learning styles: Concrete Sequential, Abstract Sequential, Abstract Random, and Concrete Random. The assessment reveals which domain dominates and that each individual will have characteristics from all domains.

Method. The interdisciplinary project was between a fashion merchandising class and an interior design class. The class project was for fashion students to develop a brand; and the interior design students were to develop a store environment for the brand. The classes were concurrently scheduled and students were organized into teams with members from each class.

Step 1: the course instructors took the self-assessment test before project development. By knowing the similarities and differences in learning styles it was easier to understand the approach each instructor had toward project organization and project outcomes.

Step 2: the interior design students took the self-assessment the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the semester. The interior design instructor helped the students understand their individual learning style and how differing learning styles impacted team work. One of the retail project parameters was for the interior design students to learn how to take direction from a client.

Step 3: all students participated in a site visit to add a reality to the store project. The space was located at mixed use site that included retail, housing, hotel, and office space. This visit required students to interact among one another and learn how each “side” perceived spatial requirements. The student work to show differences in space use was through the bubble diagram— merchandising students focused on spatial product flow whereas interior design students focused on the spatial movement through the space.

Step 4: the students developed a unified presentation of their project to faculty and industry professionals. The presentation’s purpose was to reveal if students learned to communicate in order to develop a brand with an appropriate sales floor brand aesthetic.

Step 5: The fashion students took the self-assessment in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the store project. The interior design students took the self-assessment a second time after project completion. Both students took a survey to evaluate their team experience.

Results. To tabulate an individual assessment, each domain could be scored up to 40 points. A dominate domain scored 27-40 points and the secondary domain scored 16-26 points. If the score was  $\leq 15$  points the learning style would be described as a facilitating domain.

The merchandising instructor's dominate domain was concrete sequential (38 points); the secondary domain was Abstract Sequential (24 points). The interior design instructor's had two equally scored domains—Concrete Sequential (30 points) and Concrete Random (29 points). Concrete Sequential characteristics are identified with linear progression, practicality, literal meanings, succinct language, and reality. Abstract Sequential characteristics are identified with two-dimensional thinking, probability; multisyllabic language, and concepts. Concrete Random characteristics are identified as 3-D patterns, possibility, and creative language. The merchandise instructor lead in the overall organization of the project and the interior design instructor led in the creative process sequence within the project.

The students' collective domains were near identical to the course instructors, respective to the field. The fashion students dominate domain was Concrete Sequential—with an approach to concept the brand and retail environment in a linear progression. The interior design students dominate domain was Concrete Random—their approach was intuitive, pulling together random ideas beyond the client's overall concept. The final survey revealed students acknowledged the difficulty when communicating with a teammate whose background was completely different. Not all of the interior design students connected communications issues with differences in learning styles. However, all students enjoyed the project because it required "real life" skills.

Impact on the Curriculum. The collaborative project addressed student outcomes for communication skills for Interior Design and Fashion Curriculums. For interior design this collaborative project met the CEDA requirement for students to develop active listening skills in the context of professional collaboration (CEDA, 2012). ITAA Meta Goals (2008) for professional development stated the ability to communicate ideas in written, oral and visual forms (ITAA *online*, 2008). The retail project will become a regular part of the course work with revisions to add classroom activities to help students identify learning styles of others.

Conclusion. For the course instructors, the quality of the partnership improved through greater understanding and patience to merge perspectives unique to each field. The course instructors were able to compliment rather than contradict student learning styles when problem solving facets of the project. Collectively the students learned how to develop a brand aesthetic relative to their field. The students understood that to fully communicate ideas with each other, they had to present their concepts in a way the other would more easily grasp. Communications skills were enhanced by creating a unified presentation with respect each field.

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