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Introduction

Just as a building reflects the vision of its architect, my interpretation of learning style reflects my vision of the learning and teaching process. You, too, have a vision of this process. Through this book, I share my ideas with you as a point of departure on a study-journey into style. We will consider theory and its personal and professional application to learning and teaching, and assess how ideas about style apply to you in your classroom. This approach allows you to address the influence of your own style, it encourages you to listen to your students and observe them in relation to your style, and it gives you the opportunity to create a style approach that enhances and actualises your own teaching style.

We have a journey to start. Along the way, you will have the opportunity

- *to look closely at your personal style—its source, its use and its effect on you and on others.*
- *to assess your role as an instrument of thought in the classroom.*
- *to look at each student as a unique human being with unique goals and needs, whose differences in style reflect individual mind patterns.*
- *to use a style-differentiated approach to instruction by considering interpersonal, curricular and instructional options that address and broaden individual student styles.*

Clearly, consideration of style in the classroom takes both teacher and student into account. We cannot isolate teaching or learning into neatly examined and categorised components. Rather, we study them together in a holistic process. Learning flows between the inner forces of the teacher and of the students. All the learning-links that occur in the classroom have the influence of the lives brought together there.

Five assumptions underlie my position on learning and teaching style.

ASSUMPTIONS

The first assumption: **As a teacher, I must understand myself and my own goals before I can understand or accept others and their goals.** I cannot walk in others' shoes before I am comfortable in my own. Let us put our goals as people and as teachers into perspective.

The second assumption: **As a teacher, I bring to the classroom a unique and natural set of qualities that have positive and negative sides in intent as well as action.** In my role as a teacher, I am charged to enhance my positive qualities—those that help me, others and the environment to maintain, grow and develop. I need to diminish my negative qualities—those that block, harm or destroy me, others or the environment. In studying the concept of style, and in trying to meet the specific styles of all students, I will not give up my own personal style. I expect to understand the forces of my style and to work with my style rather than in defence of it.

The third assumption: **As a teacher, I should not try to "fit" someone's model of the competent teacher.** I need to self-assess, and to find and accept

PART I

Learning Style–In Focus

As we come to understand more about learning and teaching styles and how the mind operates, I believe we will improve mental health and self understanding as well as increase learning. Learning styles and teaching styles have already revealed much to us and continued research will undoubtedly reveal more. This trust can lead to the revitalisation of “the noblest of professions”.

—Anthony F. Gregorc

Learning Style is a generic term, an umbrella concept, and a name for recognising individual learning differences. Learning style has also become a complex field of study. Just as we can identify schools of psychology by examining their philosophical beliefs and subsequent operation and implementation strategies, so, too, can we identify several approaches to learning style. No one has a monopoly on the terms *psychology* or *curriculum*. And no one can claim to represent learning style in its entirety.

Learning style research supports several branches of theoretical interest and operational models, each stemming from a different perspective on how the human mind operates. Each makes a notable contribution. Further, just as the various branches of psychology meet the needs of certain people, so do the various models of learning style. Some models serve specialised populations or specific points of view, and some are more broadly based.

Through this book, I will attempt to meet the needs of those interested in an interpretation of the model of learning style developed by Anthony F. Gregorc, Ph.D. and offer application of this model for classroom teaching. I will interpret the model’s major theoretical principles, provide a descriptive analysis of learning and teaching style for teachers and students, as well as introduce my approach to implementing style, Style Differentiated Instruction (SDI). SDI proposes application guidelines, approaches and strategies for using the Gregorc learning style model in the classroom.

In Part 1 we begin with a review of Gregorc’s Mediation Ability Theory and Energetic Model of Mindstyles*, discuss the implications of working with a psychological model of style and offer you a way to examine your own style.

*Mindstyle is a trademark registered by Anthony F. Gregorc, Ph.D.

CHAPTER 1

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Style

The asking of a question with passionate concern for its answer, a concern which demands life investment, suggests a door which will sooner or later be found...A new idea fails if it involves too great a sacrifice of invested belief. If the new idea triggers a passionate enough pursuit to make suspension or abandonment of previous beliefs, or current criteria worth the risk, however, the new idea can change reality structure.

—J. C. Pearce

Significant ideas often begin with significant questions and from time to time do change the shape of reality. Anthony F. Gregorc began with the question, How and why does the human mind work? His pursuit of answers has changed the shape of reality for us in education by redefining the nature of human learning.

Our own views about the nature of human learning begin with our views of our philosophy of life. Gregorc states, **"The primary purpose of life is to realise and actualise one's individuality, spirituality and collective humanness."**(2) Our beliefs about what, how and why we learn as individuals, as members of our society, and as world citizens develop from our philosophy. Given his philosophy, Gregorc investigates learning as it is experienced by the individual human mind.

A PHILOSOPHICAL
BASE

The research approach that lent itself best to considering the nature of human learning, and how people experience learning, was phenomenology. Phenomenology aims to uncover the nature and role of individual perceptions. It allows the researcher to gain an understanding of fundamental consciousness—a person's essence and driving forces—the essential self.

THE RESEARCH
APPROACH

With a phenomenological approach to study a person's mind, we ask, What forces drive the individual? How does the individual reveal these forces? What is the relationship of the individual's internal driving forces to the way the individual experiences learning? How can we encourage people to consider these questions about themselves?

Phenomenological research reveals that invisible, driving forces lie at the core of being, the individual essence and that the mind is the vehicle that expresses