



## Promoting Experiential Learning and Community Engagement through a Student Pop-up Shop

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“...all genuine education comes about through experience.” (Dewey, 1938, p. 13)

### Introduction

The fashion merchandising program at my school is part of the business department. The school does not offer a fashion design program. Many merchandisers and designers often work together in the industry, but my students cannot gain that experience as students without fashion design major students. Although the students may not participate in the design process in the future, it is important that they understand the process to gain a holistic perspective—from creating to selling. I decided to create an assignment requiring the students to make something they would be able to sell.

### Preparation

At first, the fashion merchandising students were uncomfortable with the idea of making a product to sell. They were worried that because they did not know how to sew, they would not be able to make any apparel. In addition, the school does not have any sewing machines. I brought my idea and the issues raised by the students to a local knitwear designer, who also is on the school’s fashion merchandising advisory board. She suggested having students create arm knit cowls, as arm knitting—the process of using one’s arms as knitting needles—is quicker and, for most people, easier to learn as the stitches are more visible. To alleviate the cost for students, I sought out funding opportunities. Eventually, I was able to obtain enough funding to bring the knitwear designer in to teach the students, to cover the cost for the bulky yarn needed, and to cover a table fee for a craft fair.

### Arm knitting

The knitwear designer came to the class and spent two hours with the fifteen students. She first showed them the finished product and then a video that shows the entire process of making a cowl. After watching the video once more, she demonstrated the process in person. The students struggled in the beginning, but the majority of them were able to complete most of the product. The knitwear designer and I provided support throughout the process, but the students needed more support when creating the first row and finishing the last row.

### Pop-up shop

A craft fair is hosted every month in an old textile mill very close to the campus. The students and I obtained the space needed for our own pop-up shop for a day. Once the space was confirmed, the students worked on coming up with the price, how the scarves would be displayed, what shopping bags will be used, etc. On the actual day, the students arrived two hours prior to the opening of the craft fair to set up the store. They spent six hours selling the scarves and sold fifteen.

#### Community engagement

While some of the students were at the pop-up shop the entire six hours, others spent some time getting to know some of the other vendors. This was a great way for the students to learn about other local businesses and organizations. The money earned from the pop-up shop was used towards a field trip and the unsold scarves were donated to a local non-profit organization which has “closets” set up in local high schools to provide clothing for students in need.

#### Follow-up

After the first pop-up shop experience, the students, the designer, and I discussed what we learned. Both the students and the designer agreed that fifteen students were too many for the students to learn. In the future, more sessions with fewer students will be offered. The students asked to be involved in the purchasing process as well to learn the logistics of obtaining funding. In addition, buying the yarn on their own would allow them to come up with their own color scheme.

#### Reference

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Collier Books.