5 Things You Should Read About Learning Styles

The Series

This is the fifth in the "5 Things" series. The 5 Things we recommend are intended to be eclectic and thought-provoking. They may be journal articles, blog posts, podcasts, interviews, reports, or just about anything else that we think is important to read, watch or hear about this topic. For the general concept, this series is deeply indebted to the EDUCAUSE "Seven Things You Need to Know About…" reports.

The Topic

Methods of teaching and learning based on the theory of "learning styles" are under an increasing level of scrutiny. Though many librarians have been quick to incorporate learning styles into their teaching in order to better address students' needs, education scholars and cognitive scientists have raised questions about the reliability of the studies on which those methods are based. The five resources below represent a range of the reviews, questions, and critiques directed toward learning styles in recent years.

1. Dembo, Myron H., and Keith Howard. 2007. Advice about the Use of Learning Styles: A Major Myth in Education. *Journal of College Reading and Learning* 37: 101-9.
This article groups the most common critiques of learning styles approaches into three categories: validity, reliability, and applicability. In other words, it is unclear whether learning styles are an effective instrument, because the studies on which learning styles theory was founded have been deemed of questionable methodology. Finding a lack of support in scholarly literature for learning styles according to these criteria, the article concludes with a brief overview of other pedagogical strategies with demonstrated effectiveness, such as teaching learning strategies or implementing scaffolded instruction systems. **Approximate reading time: 15 minutes**

2. Pashler, Harold, Mark McDaniel, Doug Rohrer, and Robert Bjork. 2008. Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 9: 105-19. doi: 10.1111/j.1539-6053.2009.01038.x.
Should educators consider their students' learning styles when they design and deliver instruction? The authors of this article apply scientific standards to existing studies addressing the use of learning styles in education. They conclude that there is insufficient proof that modifying instructional practices to accommodate learning preferences impacts learning. The authors "feel that the widespread use of learning-style measures in educational settings is unwise and a wasteful use of limited resources" (p. 117). **Approximate reading time: 30 minutes**

3. Mestre, Lori S. 2010. Matching Up Learning Styles with Learning Objects: What's Effective? *Journal of Library Administration* 50: 808-29. doi: 10.1080/01930826.2010.188975.

Libraries try to meet users' needs by developing and providing online instructional tools. This article explores learning styles in relation to tutorials and other online tools. The study finds that while students may gravitate towards one learning style, it is recommended to use of multiple modalities in the design of online instructional tools. Students preferred online tools that included both images and sound, are visually engaging, and are available at the point of need. **Approximate reading time: 15 minutes**

4. Sanderson, Heather. 2011. Using Learning Styles in Information Literacy: Critical Considerations for Librarians. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 37: 376-85. doi: 10.1016/j.acalib.2011.06.002.
In her article specifically written for librarians, Heather Sanderson provides an overview of the controversy of learning styles, including the history of development as well as the general and specific critiques of numerous learning style theories. She provides a sound review of the library-related literature in which learning style theory serves as the foundation for information literacy teaching techniques. Overall, this article is a thorough examination of the development of learning style theory, as well as a critique of the science on which these theories are based. Highly recommended for IL instructors who are using or are considering incorporating learning style theory into instruction. **Approximate reading time: 15 minutes.**

5. Krätzig, Gregory, and Katherine Arbuthnott. 2006. Perceptual Learning Style and Learning Proficiency: A Test of the Hypothesis. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 98: 238-46. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.238
The authors present the results of their study testing the learning style hypothesis. The study suggests that learners' intuition about their learning styles may indicate how they prefer to learn rather than how they actually learn best. The authors support the idea of using multimodal learning but suggest instead that those teaching strategies should be varied based on content material rather than students' learning styles. **Approximate reading time: 15 minutes**