



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE LEARNING STYLES MYTH: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

The claim that individuals possess a dominant “learning style” has become a kind of pedagogical common sense. Teacher-training courses, consultancy packages, and classroom posters often divide learners into visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic “types” and encourage instruction to be “matched” accordingly. The proposition is seductive because it promises humane personalisation: if a student struggles, the solution seems to be a more congenial modality. Yet as the research literature has matured, the central promise of the approach—better learning through matching—has proven far less empirically secure than its popularity suggests.

A first clarification is conceptual. It is perfectly plausible that learners prefer particular formats, and preferences can influence willingness to persist. However, preference is not the same as cognitive advantage. The strong learning-styles claim, often called the meshing hypothesis, predicts a specific interaction: students identified as a given style should learn more from a matched method than from a mismatched one, and the reverse should hold for learners with a different style. Harold Pashler and colleagues argued that without this interaction, the label has little instructional value, because it does not tell teachers what to do beyond varying presentation. Testing, therefore, requires controlled comparisons that separate novelty, enthusiasm, and teacher expectations from measurable learning outcomes.

When studies are designed to meet that standard, the most consistent conclusion is not that matching works, but that the content should govern the method. Spatial relations, such as geometry, circuitry, or anatomy, often demand diagrams or models; phonology and accent learning require listening and production; motor skills improve through repeated practice with feedback. In other words, the cognitive architecture of the task determines which representations are efficient. This point is frequently misunderstood: acknowledging that diagrams help with diagrams does not imply that a “visual learner” exists as a stable category. It implies that certain information is intrinsically visual, regardless of who is studying it.

Even when researchers attempt to identify “types,” measurement problems weaken the enterprise. Many popular inventories lack stability: if students retake the same questionnaire weeks later, results can change, sometimes dramatically. Categories also tend to be porous—items overlap, definitions are vague, and different instruments can classify the same person differently. The consequence is methodological and practical.



Methodologically, unstable classification makes interaction tests unreliable. Practically, teachers are encouraged to base instructional decisions on labels that are not robust enough to serve as diagnostics, creating a ritual of personalisation rather than a reliable guide to teaching.

Why, then, does belief persist? One explanation lies in subjective validation. Teachers often observe that students appear more engaged during certain activities and infer that engagement caused learning. Yet engagement is not identical to durable knowledge, and the inference is amplified by confirmation bias: people remember instances that support an appealing theory and discount counterexamples as exceptions. Moreover, classrooms that vary activities may indeed improve learning—but for reasons unrelated to styles, such as increased attention, richer examples, and more opportunities for retrieval. The myth can therefore “ride on the back” of sound pedagogy, gaining credibility from benefits it did not uniquely produce.

A more troubling consequence is the opportunity cost of the label itself. Instructional time spent administering inventories and designing “matched” worksheets can displace strategies with stronger evidence bases, such as spaced practice, retrieval practice, worked examples, and timely feedback. The harm is not merely inefficiency. Labelling can also produce a subtle form of pedagogical essentialism: students may begin to treat a questionnaire result as an identity, avoiding tasks that feel uncomfortable (“I’m not a visual person, so reading graphs isn’t for me”). Such self-limitation resembles a fixed mindset applied to modality, where difficulty is interpreted as mismatch rather than as a normal stage of learning.

Critiquing learning styles does not mean embracing uniformity. In fact, one of the strongest alternatives is explicitly multi-representational teaching, grounded in theories such as Allan Paivio’s dual coding theory. This proposes that verbal and visual information can be encoded through partially distinct systems, reinforcing memory when they converge. The most defensible form of personalisation therefore shifts the focus from styles to conditions that genuinely differ across learners: prior knowledge, vocabulary, misconceptions, attention, and self-regulation. From this perspective, the key question is not “Which modality does this student like?” but “What knowledge and practice does this student need, and what representation best fits the task?”

Finally, the popularity of learning styles offers a cautionary tale about educational fads. An idea can be intuitive, marketable, and morally attractive—“teach students the way they learn”—and still fail the standards of empirical validation. Institutions under pressure may adopt programmes that look scientific because they involve questionnaires and categories, even when the evidence for improved outcomes is thin. The conclusion, then,



is not that teachers should abandon variety, but that they should abandon the meshing promise. Variety is valuable because it supports attention and practice—not because each learner has a fixed modality that must be matched.

Questions 27–32

Select the correct answer.

27 Why has the idea of learning styles remained attractive despite doubts about its evidence?

- A** It provides teachers with highly stable categories for diagnosing learning difficulties.
- B** It offers an appealing promise that instruction can be personalised to suit individual learners.
- C** It removes the need to consider differences in students' prior knowledge.
- D** It shows that preferred learning formats consistently produce better outcomes.

28 What does the passage imply about Pashler's standard for evaluating learning styles?

- A** It requires teachers to document student preferences over several years.
- B** It argues that any increase in engagement counts as evidence for matching.
- C** It demands evidence of a matched-versus-mismatched interaction on objective outcomes.
- D** It recommends replacing tests with interviews to identify learner types.

29 Why does the writer say the “content drives method” conclusion is often misunderstood?

- A** It is wrongly treated as proof that stable learner types exist.
- B** It assumes that the same method works equally well for all topics.
- C** It claims that visuals are always superior to verbal explanations.
- D** It denies that motivation plays any role in learning.

30 What criticism is made of learning-style inventories?

- A** They focus too much on academic performance rather than personality.
- B** They are accurate but too complex for practical classroom use.
- C** They classify students consistently but offer no teaching implications.
- D** They may be unstable and can categorise the same learner inconsistently.

31 What is presented as a major “opportunity cost” of learning-style programmes?

- A** They stop teachers from using multiple examples and varied activities.
- B** They divert time from evidence-based strategies such as spacing and retrieval.



- C** They reduce school spending on technology and professional development.
- D** They force teachers to abandon feedback in favour of independent discovery.

32 What role does dual coding theory play in the writer's argument?

- A** It offers an evidence-based explanation for why combining verbal and visual forms can help.
- B** It proves that visual learners recall information better than auditory learners.
- C** It shows that matching instruction to preference improves test scores reliably.
- D** It argues that multimodal teaching is harmful because it overloads memory.

Questions 33–36

Complete the summary below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

Problems with the learning-styles approach

To evaluate the learning-styles claim properly, researchers must test the so-called meshing hypothesis under controlled conditions. According to Pashler's criteria, evidence should show a measurable **33** in which learners do better with matched than mismatched instruction. However, many style inventories suffer from poor **34**, and different tools may classify the same person inconsistently. Belief in the approach may also persist when people discount **35** as exceptions while remembering cases that support the theory. The passage argues that labelling can also encourage a **36** about what students believe they are capable of learning.

Questions 37–40

Choose **YES** if the statement agrees with the views of the writer, choose **NO** if the statement contradicts the views of the writer, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

37 The writer believes that teacher-training courses are more responsible than consultancy packages for spreading the learning-styles claim.

38 The writer suggests that student enthusiasm may be mistaken for genuine long-term learning.

39 The writer argues that multi-representational teaching is valuable for reasons other than matching fixed learner types.

40 The writer suggests that programmes which appear scientific are necessarily supported by strong evidence of improved outcomes.



Answer Key

27. B

28. C

29. A

30. D

31. B

32. A

33. interaction

34. stability

35. counterexamples

36. fixed mindset

37. NOT GIVEN

38. YES

39. YES

40. NO