



August 29, 2011

Re: “Learning Styles” in the news

In December of 2009, Harold Paschler, Mark McDaniel, Doug Rohrer, and Robert Bjork published an article in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* entitled “Learning Styles: Concepts and Evidence” examining several commercial products that purport to measure learning styles. At OpenBook, we support the research and conclusions of Paschler et al.

Unfortunately, *Science Daily*, which publishes summaries of recent research and is a source for many reporters, published this limited and measured study under the provocative headline – “Education: Learning Styles Debunked.” This has led to a misunderstanding of both the scope and conclusions of the research.

In fact, Paschler’s conclusions include:

“Our review of the literature disclosed ample evidence that children and adults will, if asked, express preferences about how they prefer information to be presented to them. There is also plentiful evidence arguing that people differ in the degree to which they have some fairly specific aptitudes for different kinds of thinking and for processing different types of information.”

“Further, it would be an error to conclude that all possible versions of learning styles have been tested and found wanting; many have simply not been tested at all.”

“An obvious point is that the optimal instructional method is likely to vary across disciplines. For instance, the optimal curriculum for a writing course probably includes a heavy verbal emphasis, whereas the most efficient and effective method of teaching geometry obviously requires visual–spatial materials. Of course, identifying the optimal approach for each discipline is an empirical question, and we espouse research using strong research methods to identify the optimal approach for each kind of subject

matter.”

“Furthermore, it is undoubtedly the case that a particular student will sometimes benefit from having a particular kind of course content presented in one way versus another.”

The research in this article was limited to a small number of commercial learning styles products and did not include OpenBook.

In particular, Paschler and associates found no evidence for the “meshing hypothesis” which suggests, for example, that visual learners get targeted visual instruction. Our work at OpenBook is consistent with the research of Paschler et al. which finds a multi-modal approach is always preferred.

Regards,

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