

The concept of learning styles is not as black and white as it may seem and oftentimes during discussions on the subject, there seems to be some inherent confusion about what is fundamental to a person's cognitive state versus what is a preference for learning material. As Slack (2007) notes of learning styles, they differ from "general or specific cognitive abilities, which are about differential capacity for learning or attainment.

Since learning styles are seen as independent of cognitive abilities, this opens up possibilities for teaching which can have an impact on learning and attainment across the ability range." What this means is that while many educators and managers are wrapped up in the notion of individual learning preferences of learning styles being at the core of who does or does not learn effectively, the core of ability lies in cognition, not learning preference. Still, with the right learning styles approach, educators can make the most of existing cognitive ability.

One particularly interesting study (Lisle 2007) examined intellectually challenged individuals with a range of mental handicaps but who all tested far below average on standardized intelligence tests. With the study population selected, the researcher used several learning styles quizzes to determine the preferred learning styles of the sample population. The results showed that there was no conclusive homogenization of learning styles in the group with just a little over 30% being visual learners, another roughly 30% in the auditory learning style category, and roughly another 30% in the kinesthetic category. This study, among many others, shows that there is no relationship between intelligence and learning styles. Furthermore, this supports the assertion here that there is no "preferred" learning style for success and our failure or gains learning are cognitive and not based on how we learn.

Just as an individual's learning style has little to do with his or her ability to perform well in an academic or other learning setting, it should also be mentioned that one's learning style does not spell success or failure. In many ways, trying to determine which learning style is the best to have is a lot like trying to find out whether people who are right or left handed tend to be better

in the kitchen—there are no easy answers and furthermore, by positing any, one risks generalizations that can be dangerous and myopic. Still, there have been studies on individual learning styles that have sought to determine which learning styles are best and seem to point to better academic success. However, there is so much inconsistency that putting together a cogent synthesis of these results is a task in stretching the truth.

Again, our learning preferences are not ones that we actively choose, but they are demonstrated in how we learn best. No one learning style or learning preference is better than the other and one's learning preference does not relate in any way to level of intelligence or ability.