

LSAT Reading Comprehension Sample

Directions

Each set of questions in this section is based on a single passage. The questions are to be answered on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passage. For some of the questions, more than one of the choices could conceivably answer the question. However, you are to choose the best answer; that is, the response that most accurately and completely answers the question, and blacken the corresponding space on your answer sheet.

Reading Comprehension Passage

Educational neuroscience combines the work of neuroscientists, educators, psychologists, and clinicians to examine the connection between biological factors and education in order to optimize learning. Research in this emerging area has enabled more accurate identification of children at risk for negative educational outcomes due to certain neurological conditions, and has offered support for funding programs that optimize critical learning windows. Yet critics, including researchers in the field, worry that without proper consideration of cultural and ethical concerns, an emphasis on biological explanations above other interpretations could yield fewer overall opportunities for individual students throughout the course of their educational experience.

Some historians of science posit that modern culture favors brain-based understandings of self. What it means to be human has long been conveyed through the imagery and metaphors common in a particular time period. Our words impact our understanding of our environments. Language that privileges neuropsychological and genetic perspectives influences how we describe the world, our beliefs regarding philosophical concepts like free will, and cultural identifications about “us” and “other.” Societal language choices subsequently influence the ways in which educators understand and engage with the children they teach daily.

For example, language comparing “non-impaired” and “atypical” brain types faces potential ethical challenges, including ignoring research suggesting that so-called “learning difficulties” are better regarded as extremes within a range of normal developmental variability rather than as completely different learning styles. Some scientists critique models based upon averages because human learning capability does not fit within those boundaries. Additionally, relying on such models may encourage a harmful form of stereotyping based upon race, gender, or neuropsychology. Once these stereotypes are established, they can harm the ability of identified individuals to learn and develop according to individual strengths, as teachers and others unwittingly regard learning capacities and deficiencies as static.

Ever changing cultural understandings of autism provide a case in point. Once hypothesized as a consequence of inattentive parenting, autism was treated with long years of unsuccessful psychological therapy. Next, autistic individuals were separated from other students and provided intensive therapeutic and educational treatments to enable more accessible communication with peers, teachers, and parents. More recently, advocates have encouraged interpreting autism as a style of neurocognitive difference rather than as a disability. Groups favoring this approach regard an inflexible society as the culprit needing treatment, not the individual presenting autistic traits. Whether one regards autism as a form of disability requiring treatment or instead understands that society needs reform impacts the ways in which schools and classrooms are run and the ways in which children are taught within them.

A potentially harmful reality is that many adults regard scientific language as highly credible without understanding the science behind a particular claim. Companies offering neuropsychological seminars and training (sometimes known as “brain-training” programs) employ scientific language that is highly persuasive to non-experts, even when the research methodology and undergirding claims lack rigor. Programs employing genetic language have shown a similar persuasive effect. Unscrupulous individuals or companies can exploit this tendency when promoting dubious products. Some “brain-training” learning programs ignore the reality that any learning – whether a new instrument, chess strategy, or martial art – relies upon and further develops the brain’s ability to learn more and to learn more easily.

The future ability of educational neuroscience to create enhanced learning opportunities for all students hinges on the abilities of educated adults to understand scientific claims and limitations, and to use critical thinking capacities in order to ensure that the needs of the whole child are met. Adult self-awareness of learning preferences and biases will positively mediate brain-based educational opportunities afforded to children. Educational neuroscience offers the opportunity to provide stronger individualized educations, but ethical challenges inherent in overreliance on a neuroscientific approach necessitate thoughtful decision-making.

Question 1

The author provides the example of autism in paragraph 4 as a means to:
offer a cautionary tale regarding poor treatment approaches to a diagnosed educational problem.
provide a historic example of a neurodiverse condition that we once viewed as a disability and now regard as normal.
model the ethical dangers inherent in using scientific language to determine an individual’s learning opportunities.
understand that educators must consider neurological disabilities when deciding how to structure educational environments.
demonstrate how our understandings of neuroscientific differences have shifted and impacted treatment of individuals with those traits.

Explanation for Question 1

This question requires the test taker to determine the purpose of the selected example within the context and style of the entire passage.

The correct response is (E). The paragraph demonstrates how now-outdated understandings of autism have impacted education decision-making and outlines how educational and psychological treatments model our cultural understandings of a condition’s cause. The paragraph also explains how current autism advocates suggest that an “inflexible society” should receive treatment instead of individuals identified with a form of autism. This discussion regarding autism serves as evidence of the way our society’s understanding and perspective on neuroscientific differences continues to impact treatment of individuals with those traits.

Response (A) is incorrect because, while the autism example does mention the use of “unsuccessful psychological therapy,” the emphasis of the paragraph is not to provide a cautionary tale about selected treatment strategies but rather to place differing understandings of autism’s causes and treatments

within the larger societal context that informs our understanding of learning challenges and the ways in which to educate individuals with them.

Response (B) is incorrect because the example of autism, while drawing upon a historic interpretation, does not result in a current shared understanding of the best treatment approach for this “neurocognitive difference” and the societies in which individuals with autism live. The paragraph does not discuss in detail that there remains disagreement about the “normality” of autistic understandings.

Response (C) is incorrect because, while the example of autism discusses a range of therapeutic approaches from “psychological therapy” to “intensive therapeutic and educational treatments” and a discussion of societal norms, the ethical challenges of these various approaches are discussed more in paragraph 4 than in this paragraph.

Response (D) is incorrect because, although the paragraph does discuss the impact of neurological differences on decision-making in educational environments, the paragraph does not argue that educators must consider them “disabilities” when planning how to structure learning environments. The paragraph rather discusses the ethics and impact of one’s perspective regarding these neurological differences when making decisions about how to educate the individuals who display those neurological traits.