

**Dr. Graniero's Talk to All New Haven School Administrators
Students' Learning Styles Must Match Instructional Plans
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Notes Compiled by Timothy C. Visel

New Haven Board of Education Teacher Evaluation Process

Dr. Graniero's presentation revolved around recent court decisions (New Haven) where the court asked to see "appropriate instructional plans." This is different from an IEP because it asks the question "What is the instructional style (learning modality) of the student, and did the plan match the learning style? ' The IEP (Individual Educational Plan) revolves around accommodations and modifications for instruction, but modifying inappropriate instruction is just that, inappropriate.

For example, courts for the first time recognize that students have different learning styles under IDEA (Individual Disabilities Education Act) and 504 plans. The courts also have ruled that students who resist inappropriate instruction have legal recourse to have instruction accommodate their learning style. This is found within recent descriptions of Least Restricted Environment (LRE), differentiated instruction or the right to have multiple instructional methods to capture different learning styles. In other words, "I have the right to be taught in the way I will learn best." For example, the lecture instructional method has been found to be ineffective for kinesthetic (hands-on) learners. This is a new day for educators. For instruction to be effective, the instructional learning style needs to be identified and appropriate instruction need to be created. This is what the courts want to see tangible evidence of appropriate instruction.

For example, hands-on learners have trouble moving short-term memory to long-term recall. Research has shown that hands-on learners retain more, have the ability to move short-term memory to long-term faster and have greater recall with connecting activities that contain a manipulative component. Thus an instructional plan that has projects and posters is appropriate; lectures without connecting activities are inappropriate. One of the coping strategies of this learning style is the most common "cram for the exam" syndrome. A tremendous amount of isolated,

not connected information is in short-term memory. A few days after the exam, much of the information is "lost," much to the frustration of both the student and the teacher. The information is not lost, because it never was "found;" it never made it into long-term memory because it lacked a "cart" or connecting activity to carry it across the long-term memory bridge. The "cart" in this instance is what the information is dumped into so that it can "travel" to long-term memory. No cart (no connecting activity), no travel, and it is just cram for the exam and the information is not retained.

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Other students' "carts" might be visual or auditory or even mathematical. Auditory learners are often musicians, the ones who hear it once and it is in their minds."

Music is the cart, the instruction is the song. Visual learners need to see it, kinesthetic learners touch it, and concrete learners need to do it. There is a high correlation between artists and concrete learners and musicians and mathematicians. Visual learners often become architects or engineers, and they love computers. This is not to say books are bad, but we know for a long time that the least effective instructional practice is book-based lecture. Unfortunately before LRE, it was the predominant instructional practice in middle and high schools. Students now have the right to have differentiated instruction with the goal that some part of the instructional day will fit their learning style. (Let's hope so).

IEP 504 and now LRE

Dr. Graniero's Examples, Demonstrated Effort, Does not Equate Learning

What does this mean for Special Education which will be shortly changed to "Special Instruction" to reflect a new emphasis on the instructional aspect?

Briefly, IEP and 504 plans revolve around modifications to instruction. LRE seeks to make certain the instruction is appropriate. If the "modifications were diesel fuel, and it was the best diesel you could put in your vehicle, if your car needed gas, it would not run. It was great fuel; it

just was inappropriate. That is what is meant by saying inappropriate instruction is like a car stuck in sand. There is a lot of sand flying around (inappropriate instruction), but the car does not go anywhere (no learning occurred).

Courts have asked "show us the appropriate instructional plan" for this student. To produce an appropriate instructional plan, you need to know how the student learns. This is the big "elephant" in the room. No one really wants to talk about this, but it is a huge issue. Teachers have known about this issue for a long time. It is often informal and off the record. It usually consists of speaking to the parent or guardian saying "so and so teacher doesn't respond to certain 'types' of students or that a student won't do well in that classroom." What they are really saying is that the student's learning style does not match the teacher's instructional style.

Recently, the town of East Lyme has addressed this issue. Students can choose teachers by instructional methods it has published an acknowledged. East Lyme students choose 'floors' with known instructional styles at the high school. Students pick how they are taught. Can public high schools adapt to LRE? Some

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have, some won't. It is very teacher dependent. You would almost have to set limits on instructional practice to guarantee it. For example, in an 80-minute block period, no more than 40 minutes can be lecture, or you must have visuals or poster projects, etc. Students with special needs can benefit from LRE/Differentiated instruction, but saying you can do it is different than actually doing it. This is the problem that public schools face—having an individualized instructional plan and making it match the student's learning style. This takes enormous resources and time. Time to detail the student's learning style, time to compile a student portfolio of work, and time for the teacher to write an appropriate instructional plan. Time and money, and we all know the dollars often come first, unfortunately. All students should have a portfolio of accomplishments, activities, and school work, but few do.

That is the primary challenge that high school and administrators face today the lack of "time."

Jerry Graniero has been an educator for more than 35 years, serving in the public, private, and business education sectors. Jerry was recruited to become the new Director of the Southeastern Equity Center - a position he began on July 1, 2002. Prior to joining the staff of the Equity Center, Jerry was Senior Managing Partner of Solutions: Common Sense in Educational Practice, Inc. - a company which he founded several years ago. Through his consulting practice he has worked with districts throughout the eastern and southern states. Each year many thousands of teachers and administrators have listened to and participated in his professional development opportunities which stressed the need for schools

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