

# Living Education eMagazine

A magazine that discusses education in our everyday lives

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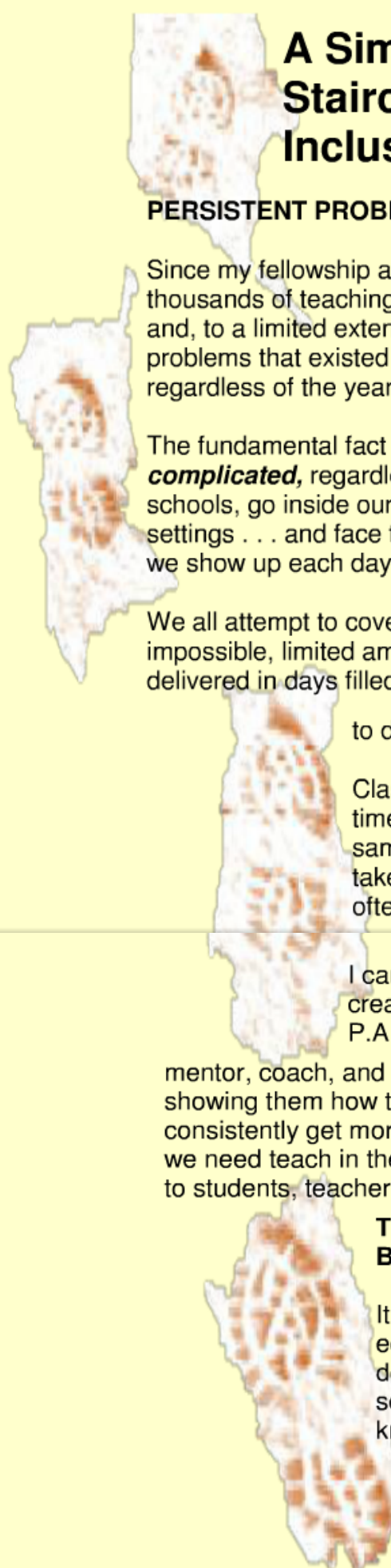
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# A Simple 4-Step Roadmap for a Staircase of Differentiated Instruction & Inclusion

By Phyl Macomber: @AllAboutTHEPACT

## PERSISTENT PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION

Since my fellowship at Johns Hopkins Kennedy-Krieger Institute in 1988, I have trained thousands of teaching staff across North America in both the United States and Canada and, to a limited extent, in parts of Australia and Italy. Unfortunately, many of the same problems that existed back then in education continue to persist in education today, regardless of the year on the calendar or the postal code of the location.

The fundamental fact is that our educational systems have become extremely **complicated**, regardless of where you live in the world. Each day, we walk into our schools, go inside our classrooms, arrive at our learning centers, or enter our therapy settings . . . and face trying to simply keep our heads above water. But, most significantly, we show up each day *trying to make a difference*.

We all attempt to cover an incredible amount of information in an unrealistic, often impossible, limited amount of time. Instruction in today's educational system is typically delivered in days filled with multiple things to do and just not enough time in which

to do them – with people often feeling very under-appreciated.

Class sizes are increasing. Caseloads are getting bigger. We rarely get time to collaborate with fellow team members so that we can be on the same page. Because of these challenges, we are frequently forced to take a **reactive** approach to instruction, rather than a proactive one, often not even knowing what the other person is doing!

I can attest to this because I spend a great deal of time in schools as the creator of the research-based teaching framework called T.H.E. P.A.C.T., and author of the book, ***The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T.*** I

mentor, coach, and train educators - both in general education and special education, showing them how to deal more effectively with these very problems and how to consistently get more results from their time. The solution is quite simple: as educators, we need teach in the way our brain works . . . in a sequence or order that makes sense to students, teachers, and parents.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SYSTEMS-BASED INSTRUCTION: BE SURE-FOOTED – TAKE THE STAIRS, NOT THE ELEVATOR

It is so important to remember that good content does not always equal sound instruction. A vast amount of curriculum content is not delivered in “bite-sized” chunks in the classroom, nor in a brain-based sequence, that best fosters understanding and demonstration of knowledge that our students need, regardless of their ability, in order to meet the standards.

Due to challenging time constraints and unrealistic pacing guides, curriculum instruction is often like getting on an “elevator” – one day going to the 24<sup>th</sup> floor, and the next day back down to the 4<sup>th</sup>



floor, and the following day, shooting up to the 60<sup>th</sup> floor – with instructional lessons not linking with each other. Students of all abilities often struggle to know the “**WHAT, WHY, and HOW**” of their instruction and how one lesson relates to the next. The solution is to deliver instruction in a “**connect-the-dots**” teaching and learning approach: methodically taking the stairs, instead of the elevator, sequentially achieving one step of mastery at a time – drawing a line from one lesson to the next - to significantly improve overall academic performance.

It is critical that educators have a systematic roadmap that is easy to follow for **teaching anything to anyone at any grade level**. This roadmap needs to have “no expiration date,” so to speak; meaning that it could be used from preschool to high school. In addition, it is crucial that this curriculum solution work with students of **any** ability, from gifted to special needs - and every learner in between, to bridge the gap between special education and general education and foster meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities using inclusive strategies.

## SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY

We need to simplify the process of learning, which in turn, simplifies teaching for teachers. T.H.E. P.A.C.T. methodology is a simple, research-based template system for learning. This delivery system for instruction is only four steps – which means that it is easy to implement in a jam-packed school day.

These four components are presented in the framework as a “Module System” – Learn About, Read About, Write About, and Talk About – aligned to the vital components of educational standards. Educators, from preschool to high school, are now gaining control of their instruction, decreasing their prep time, and meaningfully including learners with disabilities in their classrooms.



As educators, we need to provide instruction in this order, based on the longstanding research of how the brain works, which is to teach an understanding of content **before** we test what was learned. This significantly helps students succeed.

## T.H.E. P.A.C.T. Modules *At-A-Glance*



Learn about **vocabulary & key concepts** to build word knowledge and comprehension of word meaning



Read about the vocabulary in **bullet points, sentences, & paragraphs** to gain more knowledge about main ideas, details, & summary points



Write about the vocabulary in brainstorming, composing, & editing lessons in **concrete visual form**



Talk about what was learned, share knowledge, & increase **meaningful participation** in the learning community or social interaction

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Macomber, 2010

This system of teaching provides “connect-the-dots” instruction, so that both students and teachers understand **WHAT** they are doing and **WHY**. Regardless of subject or topic of study, teachers methodically walk students through “learning about” it, “reading about” it, “writing about” it, and “talking about” it.

Educators do this in a way that allows students to feel anchored with the “**HOW-TO-DO-IT**” part - by using consistent teaching activities and predictable instructional tools - so the students focus on “what” they are learning, instead of “how” they are learning it. This significantly decreases cognitive load for students of all abilities

Teachers now know what to do: how to focus their time, streamline their time, organize their time, and be successful at what they need to do when showing

students how one lesson connects to the next. With this methodology, teachers can reach students of all abilities in their classroom and build a real solid understanding of whatever material they are teaching.

### **GAINING CONTROL OF CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION: A REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE OF CLASSROOM SUCCESS**

Teachers often feel that they are no longer in control of how they teach. The beauty of this system of instruction is that teachers can come up with their own creative activities for lessons in each of the four steps, which in turn, speaks to their OWN style of teaching, without anyone telling them "how" they have to teach it. But once they decide "how" to teach it, they use these teaching activities over and over again to anchor their students and streamline their lesson planning.

Here is an example of how one classroom teacher, with integrated special education services and speech-language therapy in her classroom, set up grade-based science units using T.H.E. P.A.C.T.'s foundational principles of consistency and predictability:





As students mastered each type of lesson format, additional teaching activities and lessons were added to keep the methodology creative and novel. In turn, the students were then more active in selecting the module activities for the science lesson of the day. In other words, this approach transitioned from the teacher selecting the specific lesson in the module to student-led lesson selection.

### **BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND INCREASED ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNERS . . .DECREASED PREP TIME FOR TEACHERS**

This systems-based approach of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. has shown improved comprehension of curriculum content, with students acquiring knowledge at a



## Consistent and Predictable Instructional Lessons to Decrease Cognitive Load

Science Units	 Learn About	 Read About	 Write About	 Talk About
EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review Vocabulary Flashcards</li> <li>● Create a Vocabulary Collage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Highlight Main Ideas and Details in an Accessible Book</li> <li>● Review Embedded Q &amp; A Study Guides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Research and Build a Project</li> <li>● Write a Report on the Project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Share Facts in a Collaborative Discussion</li> <li>● Give an Oral Presentation on Write About Project</li> </ul>
Owls of North America	<p>Teacher displays <b>vocabulary flashcards</b>-containing an image and definition for each owl. Students highlight in green the words and underline details in the definition on print copy w/ a green-colored pencil.</p> <p>Students create a <b>vocabulary collage</b> of the different types of owls on a range map of North America.</p>	<p>In a group lesson, students take turns sharing a page of informational text in an <b>accessible book</b> on each owl. Students are guided for highlighting in blue the main idea on each page, along with underlining 3 supporting details w/ a blue-colored pencil.</p> <p>Three <b>Q &amp; A sets</b> for each owl are reviewed to summarize.</p>	<p>Students select an owl for their science <b>project</b>. Students build a 2-D or 3-D version – true to size – of their owl they are going to write about.</p> <p>Students <b>write a report</b> about their owl – using their owl project as a guide for details for their report.</p>	<p>Using an interactive spinner, students <b>share facts</b> about what they learned about, read about, and wrote about owls related to different categories of curriculum content.</p> <p>Students give an <b>oral presentation</b> on their writing project and report about their owl.</p>
Solar System	<p><b>Vocabulary flashcards</b> in same format for the planets and celestial bodies in space.</p> <p>Students create a <b>vocabulary collage</b> of the planets in the order from the Sun.</p>	<p><b>Accessible book</b> in same format for the planets and celestial bodies in space.</p> <p>Three <b>Q &amp; A sets</b> for each solar system vocabulary word are reviewed to summarize.</p>	<p>Students select a planet for their science <b>project</b> and build a 2-D or 3-D version of their planet they are going to write about.</p> <p>Students <b>write a report</b> about their planet.</p>	<p>In the same format, students <b>share facts</b> about the Solar System.</p> <p>Students give an <b>oral presentation</b> on their writing project and report about their planet.</p>
Electricity	<p><b>Vocabulary flashcards</b> in same format for electricity vocabulary.</p> <p>Students create a <b>vocabulary collage</b> for the parts of a circuit.</p>	<p><b>Accessible book</b> in same format for electricity concepts.</p> <p>Three <b>Q &amp; A sets</b> for each electricity vocabulary word are reviewed to summarize.</p>	<p>Students build a circuit for their science <b>project</b>.</p> <p>Students <b>write a report</b> about the steps of the process and additional details about a circuit.</p>	<p>In the same format, students <b>share facts</b> about electricity.</p> <p>Students give an <b>oral presentation</b> on their writing project and report about their circuit.</p>

faster rate over time with each topic, as evidenced in our two-year research study, in both the United States and Canada, across 19 research sites serving learners with disabilities. In addition, this 4-step model of using consistent and predictable methods has increased the engagement of students in their lessons and has improved meaningful participation and inclusion of learners with disabilities in the classroom.

Special educators and classroom teachers find that they are “**working smarter, not harder**,” and decreasing their lesson preparation time, to provide “learning for all” to their diverse students. In addition, special ed and general ed are now having the same conversation about instruction while increasing their collaboration and co-teaching opportunities using sound principles of differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning.

For example, a New Hampshire kindergarten teacher, who served a range of learners, from those who were gifted, to those with moderate to severe disabilities – including English Language Learners from China, Taiwan, Canada, Mexico, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia – shared:

“My goal of meeting or exceeding the needs of **every** child in my class has been achieved using T.H.E. P.A.C.T. This conceptual framework is designed to help **all** teachers create lessons that can meet the needs of learners of **any ability** within an inclusionary setting.”

The longstanding myth in education is that learners receiving specialized services need much “different” teaching strategies than those that can be used in the classroom in order to succeed in their least restrictive environment or general education setting. The **TRUTH** of the matter is that these successful, research-based strategies for “connect-the-dots” curriculum instruction should not only be used with our learners in special education, but also need to be used with students of **all** abilities, in any general education classroom, so that every student – **and every teacher** – has the greatest chance to succeed.

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