



“All Education is Special”: <http://the-missing-piece.net/all-education-is-special/>

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By: Phyl Macomber, President of Make A Difference, Inc., Author of “The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T.” and Education Specialist

Since completing a fellowship at Johns Hopkins Hospital's Kennedy Krieger Institute in 1988, I have trained and consulted with literally thousands of classroom teachers, special education staff, and parents of children with disabilities across North America and in parts of Europe. Unfortunately, I can say that many of the same problems that existed then continue to persist in education today, regardless of the year on the calendar or geographic location.

As the author of the research-based teaching framework called T.H.E. P.A.C.T., I have successfully helped countless educators gain control of their instruction and produce the results that they need to reach each individual student they serve, both in general education and in special education. It has been so rewarding seeing all students – including those students with disabilities – be successful in general studies classrooms.

If you are a teacher, you know that you can barely keep your head above water. Each day, you walk into your school, go inside your classroom, or arrive in your learning center – and face trying not to drown with a heavy workload and dizzying array of initiatives. But, most importantly, you show up each day trying to make a difference. If you are a parent of a child with a disability, you may simply want your child to be engaged when learning, to be eager to participate, and to be a contributing class member to share their knowledge – just like every other student in the classroom. And you are probably thinking, “Does it have to be so hard?”

Classroom teachers attempt to cover an incredible amount of information in an unrealistic, often impossible, amount of time. I have experienced these struggles firsthand because I, too, only have 180 seconds to go to the bathroom during a typical day!

Instruction in today's educational system is typically delivered in days filled with multiple things to do and just not enough time to do them – with people often feeling VERY under-appreciated. I know this because I spend a great deal of time in schools, mentoring and coaching staff – showing them how to deal more effectively with

these very problems so that they consistently get more results from their time.



Under a positive umbrella, what parent of a child with a disability would not want to get a call from their school to say that a meeting needed to be scheduled because their child had MET all of his or her education goals BEFORE the targeted time?

Matthew's mom received just such a phone call . . .

Matthew was a third grader with Down Syndrome whose teacher embraced a "learning-for-all" philosophy in her classroom using T.H.E. P.A.C.T. Mrs. Woolridge, along with the classroom support staff member, "Mrs. C," discovered after teaching the very first science unit of the year, that this method of teaching could be used with students of ALL abilities – from gifted to special needs, and

every student in between – for ANY subject on ANY topic in school.



This third grade teacher anchored her students, including Matthew, in the four basic steps of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. – Learn About, Read About, Write About, and Talk About – when teaching ANYTHING in her classroom. Mrs. Woolridge used consistent teaching activities, ranging from vocabulary games to hands-on projects. Matthew accessed these classroom activities at his learning level and fully participated with his classmates. And, for the first time ever in elementary school, Matthew was able to give an oral presentation to share all of his knowledge in front of his peers.

At that moment, the eyes of all the adults working in that classroom were filled with tears of emotion as they observed the true meaning of

inclusion.

Near the end of the school year, when Matthew's classroom support staff person, Mrs. C, was going to be out of the building the following day attending one of my seminars, Mrs. Woolridge announced to the third grade class that a substitute classroom helper was going to be there working with Matthew and some of the other children in the third grade. Many of the students were very confused by this. Abby, one of Matthew's classmates (who also had a big crush on him), shared: "Why does Matthew need a sub to help him? We are ALL using T.H.E. P.A.C.T. in class, Mrs. Woolridge. We can just help him if he needs it – and then he can help us, too! We've got this!"

BRILLIANT. Learning for all, indeed!

There has been such a huge gap between what classroom teachers do and what special educators need done to include children with disabilities – such as those students with autism, Down Syndrome, learning disabilities, and attention deficit disorders to name a few – in their general studies classrooms in a meaningful way. And the key word here is "MEANINGFUL."

The longstanding MYTH in education is that, in order to succeed, students receiving specialized services need much "different" teaching strategies than those that can be used in the regular classroom. That is flat-out wrong.

The TRUTH of the matter is that the successful, research-based strategies used with our learners in special education – such as those used in T.H.E. P.A.C.T. – benefit and should be used with, students of all abilities in ANY general education classroom.



This successfully bridges the gap between special education and general education.

The teaching method needs to work for learners above grade level, at grade level, and below grade level in order to provide an “INCLUSIVE” model of education worldwide. This method also needs to work to support parents – especially when assisting their kids with homework and building the necessary social skills and community skills for their children to be successful.

Students with disabilities do not “earn” their way into the general education classroom. It is their basic right to be there. The teaching method of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. simplifies learning for children of all abilities, which, in turn, simplifies teaching for teachers at all grade levels.

In fact, my “PHYL-osophy” is that “**ALL EDUCATION IS SPECIAL.**”

Until next time,
Thanks for reading.

Love From

Phyl xx

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