PREVIEW SAMPLE CHAPTERS

The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T.

The Solution to Adapting the Curriculum

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Foreword

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When Phyl first approached me about reviewing **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** framework in greater detail—and about writing the foreword for ***The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T.***—I was initially concerned whether I could truly take the time to investigate it and write objectively about a new framework for educating individuals with disabilities.

Given the fact that I have spent the better part of my adult life working with special needs children and the staffs who support them, I often find myself, and others, falling back upon old practices and methodologies we have grown accustomed to using. So, to consider something new and revolutionary would require me to challenge my own thinking and possibly even to "**unlearn**" things I have done in the past—not something that is really easy for someone my age.

But, while reflecting and reading more about **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.**'s contents and approach, I had to admit to myself that I had seen concepts, methodologies, and frameworks we have tried to implement in the past not really work or at least not deliver as much as they possibly could have. Much of this reality had to do with simple time constraints and/or not having an easy way to create meaningful activities and materials that truly "**resonate"** and "**stick**" consistently with both the learners and the staff members who are working with them.

In an article I wrote for *Special Education Technology Practice* (*SETP*) in October 2007, titled "Creating Sticky Software," I discussed a number of design principles we try to incorporate into our software offerings at Learning Magic that make a curriculum "**resonate"** and "**stick"** with learners. But, at the same time, I have to admit I have not incorporated some of the same principles in my hands-on, day-to-day *non-computer-based* teaching or work with educators and learners.

"Education consists mainly of what we have unlearned…."

—Mark Twain

Why? Because I was largely stuck in the world of doing what I had always done and never really stopped to consider how we could apply some of the same basic thinking we have applied to the computer to off-computer and day-to-day classroom teaching (i.e., predictable, repeatable formats for teaching and engagement).

Well, thankfully, Phyl has not fallen into the same trap. In fact, when I had an opportunity to examine the materials in greater detail and then talk with several team members about **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** and their successes with a wide range of learners across all areas of the curriculum, I had to ask myself, "Why hasn't somebody thought of this before?"

Without minimizing the tremendous amount of work Phyl has done here, **T.H.E. P.A.C.T. is brilliantly simple**. It provides a solid framework for team members to assist in the identification of key content areas and in the organizing and sequencing of a learner's individualized plan—whether it is inclusive of low-tech or high-tech teaching materials or both.

At a macro level, **T.H.E. P.A.C.T**. framework is first divided into two receptive areas of study in which learners first **learn about** key vocabulary concepts and then **read about** that vocabulary or subject, regardless of their cognitive ability. Then, the framework provides opportunities for learners to express their knowledge through a wide variety of **writing** and **talking** formats. **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** provides both the constructs and the ideas whereby all learners, regardless of their age or cognitive abilities, can be truly engaged with any type of curriculum content.

Within the framework, the content of each of the modules (**Learn About**, **Read About**, **Write About**, and **Talk About**) is color-coded, which provides visual clues as to what this activity is about to the learner. This predictable and consistent use of teaching materials appropriate for that learner within each module further enhances a person's learning and understanding. Additionally, **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** provides a framework with which educators or agency staff can work easily and systematically through the process of reviewing—creating, if necessary—and delivering ***meaningful*** curriculum materials in both the receptive and expressive areas of the curriculum, without having to recreate the wheel each time.

Within this framework Phyl takes these brilliantly simple ideas and expands on them module by module, providing hundreds of illustrations and examples of the materials and strategies that are being used successfully in classrooms everyday within the districts and agencies she serves.

I sincerely believe **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** framework and its contents have the **POWER** to deliver incredible gains for both our learners and those who support them. In my humble opinion, I believe this book should be read and its framework implemented by a wide range of professionals in our field. Everyone can benefit from it, especially our learners, as well as special education teachers, early intervention staff, case managers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, employment and vocational rehabilitation staff, and all the instructional assistants who support them.

I encourage you to examine this body of work seriously and embrace ***The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T.*** within your own environments.

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A Personal Note

I have spent a significant amount of time at both Sanborn and Baker Libraries on the Dartmouth College campus in Hanover, New Hampshire, researching and writing this manuscript. Each time I would start a new writing session, I would reflect on the gratitude I felt to have the opportunity to serve individuals with disabilities over the last two decades of my life.

My parents always taught me that no contribution was too little and that every effort to help someone counted in life. They explained time and time again that **as long as you wanted to make a difference, you would find your own unique way to do so**. For as long as I can remember, my parents "walked the walk" in the "making a difference" category—in the lives of countless folks who have crossed their paths over many years.

Baker Library at Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire

In my own life, I believe it all started when my parents adopted me from St. Joseph's Orphanage in 1961. I honestly cannot even imagine what my life would have been like without them making a difference in mine. Not a day goes by that I am not thankful for the life I was given and the people who were brought into it.

Years ago, my husband, Rob, shared with me an exercise of personal reflection, which he completed daily, that left quite an impression on me. It involved recounting his actions at the end of each day and placing them in two distinct columns. The first column was "Three Things I Did to Be a Good Person and Make a Difference" and the second column was "Three Things I Needed to Shape to Become a Better Person."

I began this exercise quite some time ago in my own life's path as it related to both my personal and professional journey. This reflection helped me to be "bottom-line honest" with myself about my intentions and actions each day. It has assisted me in

trying to become the person that I not only **want** to be but **know** I can be.

And, I will tell you, if you want to make a difference in other people's lives, you have already achieved the first step—you have already identified that you **want** to make a difference. The next step, then, is to channel your efforts, knowledge, and time in the best way possible so as to make it happen.

Every single person has the potential to make a meaningful contribution when working with individuals with disabilities. If you want to make a true difference—one that counts while serving this population in the area of adapted curriculum, you will need to embrace and implement tools and resources that not only assist you in time-efficient methods, but also yield the results you need based on teaching the most important components of that curriculum. Simply put, **you will need to focus on doing a handful of essential things and doing them well.**

As you go through a process of reflection about things you did to feel good about your contribution each day when working in the field of disabilities, I believe you will continually place **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** in that first column of something that you did right to **make a true difference with the individuals you serve.**

Warmest of regards,

Why I Developed T.H.E. P.A.C.T.

Serving as an assistive technology specialist, working in the "trenches" in both educational and vocational settings, I have identified a problem I see many teams **continually** struggling with—finding the time to adapt lessons and customize overall curriculum content and learning formats for individuals receiving special education services or vocational rehabilitation services. Providing curriculum support—whether academic or under the life skills umbrella—to individuals who are special learners in a classroom environment, work setting, community, or group home can be very challenging.

In the field of education, inclusion requires us to look at the specifics of how these students can best learn in the least restrictive environment. Once leaving the educational system, these individuals will continue on a lifelong learning process to improve their level of independence related to domestic living skills, vocational training, leisure and recreation interests, and accessing their communities.

Teams serving these populations realize that "**one size does not fit all**" when it comes to adapting the curriculum for these learners. This individualized type of customization for a learner takes time in terms of adapting the content of what is being taught in the instructional setting. Oftentimes, we then add assistive technology supports to the equation—technology that is supposed to make our jobs easier and, most importantly, help individuals become more independent—and the outcome of all of this work is frequently a feeling of being overwhelmed.

The easy solution to these problems is that when new content needs to be adapted for a learner, the team **does not have to start from scratch**. Team members will no longer need to play "catch up" with the ever-changing curriculum, frequently asking themselves, "How will I present this information to the student in a meaningful way?" or, "Which support would be best for *this* part of the lesson for this young adult?"

Instead, the team follows and implements a **carefully planned and customized program** for the learner using **T.H.E. P.A.C.T**. framework. It consists of four color-coded, easy-to-understand, language-based steps printed out in the form of a workbook.

I will tell you that I solve problems for a living. And, oftentimes, it is not an easy fix. Each individual with a disability is like a unique puzzle. You have to go through the process methodically, building a solid frame and then filling in the holes with all the proper interlocking pieces that fit just right.

When I was a child and went to my parents for advice, my dad would always say, "You can come to me and Mommy with any problem. But, we are only going to talk about that problem for a part of the time—five or ten minutes. The rest of the time, we're going to **focus on solutions**. That is how you get though life, honey." When you use **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** framework, you will see that you are focusing on a practical solution to language-based instruction.

Author Brian Tracy once made a statement that really gets at the heart of what **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** does for those who use it. He said:

"There is never enough time to do everything,
but there is always enough time to do the most important thing."

We all know that there are more things to be done in any given day than most of us can realistically do. The central issue is identifying those things that are truly essential if meaningful results are going to be achieved. **T.H.E. P.A.C.T. helps teams make certain that the most important things do get done.**

Chapter 1

Challenges of Learners with Varying Disabilities

It is challenging to provide curriculum support to special education students or adult special needs learners in various environments because these learners face cognitive, perceptual, motoric, and, oftentimes, psychosocial challenges. Many of our special needs learners cannot physically access materials the way other learners can. For example, a learner with cerebral palsy may need to have page lifts added to customized books in order to turn the pages. To access a computer, this same learner may have to use a joystick to emulate a mouse to access a free talking book website on the Internet. A special needs learner with a different developmental disability may have decreased functional hand use and require worksheet modifications to use a pencil, pen, or highlighter.

In addition to motor challenges, many of our special needs learners have cognitive impairments. For instance, a learner with Down syndrome may need a worksheet customized into a learning workbook, tailor-made with one item on each page—as opposed to having all of the items presented on one sheet of paper like his or her classmates. Or that same learner may require more of a kinesthetic approach to learning and retaining information better if the workbook "comes to life" on a computer screen to reinforce the targeted learning concepts of the lesson.

Instructional materials in instructional settings change as the content varies on a regular basis. This shifting of instructional formats and tools can sometimes be confusing to our special needs learners. To be taught new information in any setting, our learners sometimes use learning books that page-turn in a horizontal fashion and other times are presented with flip books in vertical fashion, which require different physical and visual motor patterns.

To learn new vocabulary, these learners may be presented with vocabulary cards of varying sizes and symbol representations. When completing worksheets, our learners frequently have to hold a pencil or marker and circle the answer on the sheet; yet, from

time to time, they have to cross out an answer and eliminate it if it does not belong. Or the word banks on the worksheets for fill-in-the-blank assignments are sometimes presented on the top of the page and other times on the bottom. This variation in the type of materials utilized in different display formats can affect the ways many of our learners process information and best demonstrate what they have learned since the formats are not consistent.

Cognitive Challenges

When we use the term "**cognition**," we refer to the attention, learning, memory, language, problem solving, and decision-making of the individual. Each individual has his or her strengths and challenges in each of these areas—making it necessary for all learners to use customized materials and strategies not only when **learning** new skills, but also when **practicing** them in varied environments and **retaining** these skills over a period of time.

For example, when a child with Down syndrome learns how to count, he or she may be able to count the jelly beans in the large classroom jar that earns the class a "movie day" to reinforce good behavior. But we cannot assume that this learner will then generalize that counting skill to different tasks, such as counting out the correct number of forks to place on the placemat while setting the table at home or using a number line to complete a basic math problem in class.

When adapting the curriculum to teach this learner one-to-one correspondence—a primary counting skill in the content area of math—specific instructional formats with matching assistive technology (AT) supports need to be customized for use in **any** environment.

When an adult learner with a developmental disability learns a job skill in one particular work environment and then transitions to a new job in a different location, that individual may have trouble generalizing the skill set to a new work setting or experience difficulty when using different work-related materials to complete a vocational task. This learner may need to review the skill set in the new setting to practice several times to build a bridge to the new job site. Or the individual may need to have all the items in the task labeled and their function reviewed in an attempt to complete a comprehension check prior to placing work performance demands on the person with the disability in the new work environment.

Another example would be an individual with a learning disability, challenged in the area of reading, using assistive technology supports to have text read to him or her in order to process what needs to be learned and then demonstrating what he or she has learned. If the text is read to this learner with reading challenges using basic computer technology solutions, this means that the learner's inability to read at grade level does not get in the way of comprehension of the material.

Oftentimes, with a learner of this profile, the activities, worksheets, quizzes, and tests

need to be reformatted to match the way a particular individual processes information the best. This approach impacts how we present curriculum content to an individual of any age—whether that reading content is academic or under the life skills umbrella—like simply reading a cookbook or local newspaper.

One of the easiest ways to define cognition is to say that it is the basic process of **understanding** and **knowing**. If an individual has a deficit in these areas, it can impact how the person comprehends, remembers, retrieves, and even expresses what he or she is learning. Each learner with a cognitive deficit confronts unique hurdles. But that doesn't mean the person cannot learn. It just means that a "cookie-cutter approach" cannot meet the needs of this learner.

Perceptual Challenges

Perception is how we **interpret** and **give meaning** to something. All of us give meaning to information in a variety of ways. For example, we can perceive things visually, audibly, and kinesthetically. When information is viewed without a full understanding—like when you are learning something new or looking at something you have not seen before—the mind will try to reach for something that it already recognizes in order to process what it is viewing. We try to relate unfamiliar information to our past experiences to make sense out of it—especially when we don't understand what we see.

Here is a specific example: An adult, Michael, who lives in a developmental home or group home, is learning to make a picture-based grocery list to assist him while shopping for food. Michael, who is on the autism spectrum, has very specific and peculiar likes and dislikes of meal menu items. When participating in group meal planning with other peers and agency support staff in his home setting, Michael often becomes withdrawn and appears disinterested.

One contributing factor to this lack of participation, in fact, is the level of Michael's "perceptual" abilities due to his limited food preferences. The agency staff came to realize that many of the food items in the meal planning sessions were not in Michael's language and life experience—therefore, having little or no meaning to him—and this learner withdrew from the weekly group meal planning sessions over time.

A different learner, Julie, with sensory integration needs, showed motivation and a high interest in art-related classes with her peers. When engaged in the classes, however, Julie often had a high refusal rate when it came to using the various materials to create the projects in which she appeared to show interest. A recipe for success for Julie was to wear therapy gloves when handling the project materials in an attempt to reduce her tactile sensitivity, which in turn was interfering with her cooperation and participation.

Some of our special learners have visual perception deficits and struggle with figure-ground discrimination—meaning they may have trouble separating information out about one portion of an image from the rest of the image. This difficulty greatly impacts

the type of instructional materials we would select for that learner—meaning the visual instructional materials used would not be busy scenes or illustrations when trying to teach that individual new concept words. Instead, we would select more clearly defined, object-based images—removed from a background—to teach vocabulary of any given curriculum topic to a learner with this profile.

Motoric Challenges

Physical challenges certainly stand in the way of how many learners would access all of the learning formats and activities we use when teaching new content—whether in a classroom, a group home, or supported work setting. **Motor control** is an area of challenge for many of our special learners. Motor control is the result of integrating cognition, perception, and sensory input. Many of the individuals we serve do not have precise motor movements to access things in their various environments. Some of these learners struggle to execute **purposeful movements** in order to accomplish **purposeful tasks** because of deficits in the area of motor planning.

Oftentimes, the control of **posture** and **position** for many individuals stands in the way of successfully accessing learning materials and tools. A functional position, which allows controlled movement and stabilization, is essential for an individual with physical challenges so he or she can access adapted curriculum materials.

A learner's center of gravity should be shifted toward whatever instructional materials or assistive technology solutions that learner is trying to access. It is critical for any learner to be in a **"ready to learn posture"** to complete a task. This becomes a challenge when we have many learners in a tilt position in their wheelchairs.

Psychosocial Challenges

Psychosocial issues, related to a person with a disability, are sometimes overlooked when specialists discuss challenges. **Psychosocial** factors—such as the individual's **identity**, **self-esteem**, and overall **motivation** to increase functional independence—have a significant impact on the success and outcome of learning, regardless of the individual's age. Team members who serve older individuals with disabilities are highly conscious of challenges in this area, but we need to heighten our awareness of the psychosocial challenges our younger populations face.

How a child, teen, or adult views and accepts a disability relates directly to how much that individual works to develop skills in a specific area using assistive technology support. This development, in turn, has a direct correlation to the "**technology abandonment"** often seen in this field and, on a more positive note, the overall technology "**buy-in**" we get from an individual as he or she "bonds" with assistive technology support tools to improve functional independence.

Summary

When examining all of the challenges a learner with disabilities faces when trying to learn new information, use new learning tools, and improve independence, it is apparent that a "one-size-fits-all" approach cannot be used when adapting the curriculum. Each learner requires a highly specialized roadmap, not only for identifying learning objectives, but also for plotting out each customized activity format and instructional approach matched to a practical assistive technology solution when learning new information in an organized method.

Consistent teaching formats using predictable supports are essential to accommodate the array of these challenges. If a learner knows what type of activity will be used each time he or she needs to learn something, along with what will be used to access and improve his or her functional independence each time in that activity, the focus of that learner becomes the new content being taught. There is a solution to these learner challenges, and **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.** is the answer that outlines the consistent activity formats and corresponding assistive technology solutions for a particular learner for the team to follow.