



Providing Adolescent Struggling Readers with Text-Based Content Area Instruction Improves Reading Comprehension

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<https://www.meadowscenter.org/projects/detail/promoting-adolescents-comprehension-of-text-pact>

Almost a quarter of eighth grade students do not read well enough to understand important concepts and make simple inferences from text-based materials (NAEP 2015). They also struggle to understand the meaning of words well enough to use them to comprehend a sentence or paragraph. Unfortunately, these reading difficulties too often result in a difficult post-secondary college pathway where 68% of community college students are required to take at least one remedial course (Chen, 2016), termed by some as the “Bermuda Triangle of higher education,” since only 28% of remedial course takers earn a college degree within 8 years (Attewell et al., 2006). According to the ACT (2006) the clearest differentiator between students who are college ready and students who are not is the ability to comprehend complex texts. ***If the nation’s K-12 education goal is to prepare every student for meaningful post-secondary experiences, it is imperative that schools at all levels provide opportunities for reading remediation.***

How can research address this problem? To provide adolescent struggling readers—including students with disabilities—with high quality reading comprehension instruction in the content areas, researchers at the University of Texas at Austin have partnered with schools across the nation to implement PACT—Promoting Adolescents’ Comprehension of Text—an approach that uses text sources as the driving force behind content acquisition, vocabulary growth, and reading comprehension gains. Classroom materials have been developed for middle and high school classrooms and are available free of charge to any teacher who wishes to use them (www.meadowscenter.org/projects/detail/promoting-adolescents-comprehension-of-text-pact).

What does the research show? The efficacy of PACT has been investigated through nine large randomized control trials. Consistent findings suggest that students with disabilities included in the regular education social studies classroom outperform their peers on measures of social studies content knowledge (effect sizes range from .26 to .51) and reading comprehension (effect sizes range from .04 to .59) after only 6 weeks of PACT instruction. When PACT is implemented among struggling readers over the course of the year, effects are even more impressive for reading comprehension (effect size = 0.59). Work is now focused on bringing PACT to scale in middle schools across the nation. Scott Telfer, a social studies teacher of 8th grade students comments on the efficacy of PACT by saying:

PACT requires my students to read and really think about the content in the text. It also provides me a structure for my lessons so that I can remain on target and focused on improving reading comprehension for all of my students, including those with disabilities.

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