Marcus has autism and regularly attends Mrs. Clemens’s sixth-grade general physical education (GPE) class while receiving supplemental adapted physical education (APE) services. Mrs. Clemens works very hard to modify each lesson so that Marcus can participate in the activities in each class. Recently, Marcus has been able to participate in modified, small-sided games of soccer because Mrs. Clemens was able to use a social story (a strategy to help Marcus appropriately participate in social situations) to prepare him for playing on a small team. Although Marcus struggles to learn the fundamental skills during the unit, he really enjoys moving around the playing area with his peers, and they enjoy his presence too. Despite his enjoyment, Mrs. Clemens has noticed that he is falling behind in terms of motor skill development.
On the surface, it seems that Marcus’s APE services are allowing him to be successful in GPE. He enjoys class activities, even if he is not performing the skills correctly. Marcus is being included in the planned activities; however, he is not effectively learning the skills required to participate in soccer. Has Mrs. Clemens successfully included Marcus in GPE? Is GPE the correct placement for Marcus? Are soccer skills even useful for Marcus to learn? How can Mrs. Clemens determine the best course of action for her student? This article explores one approach to meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities using a systematic approach to decision making called the achievement-based curriculum (ABC).

The ABC Model: The Process of Decision Making

Like Mrs. Clemens, many teachers encounter challenging situations that require thoughtful decision making when including students with disabilities in GPE. The ABC model (Kelly & Melograno, 2004) can systematically improve the efficiency of this decision-making process so that students like Marcus can receive APE that is inclusive (integrated within GPE) and effective (by helping students to acquire skills that promote physical activity in and outside of school). Importantly, the decisions that are made should result in meeting the unique needs of all students, including students like Marcus (Kelly, 2011). The ABC model includes five steps: program planning, assessing, implementation planning, teaching and evaluation.

Step 1: Program Planning

Program planning refers to what content the student should learn and when it should be mastered. Before planning what should be taught, it is important to consider how long it will take to learn the desired skills so that the teacher can cover all of the necessary content. In the scenario presented in this article, let us assume that Marcus has been following the GPE curriculum for the past six years. This curriculum was not designed for him, and although some of the content has been modified for him, his needs are still not being met. This is evident in his lack of skill development in comparison with his peers.

A needs assessment should be completed to help decide what content is most appropriate and important for Marcus to learn by the end of his GPE/APE experience. This needs assessment can take into account Marcus’s interests and strengths, his parents’ desires, and even the availability of community-based activities. For example, Marcus enjoys playing basketball and his parents would like him to pursue this activity. There is a noncompetitive community league in town, and Marcus would be able to participate if he had the requisite skills. One area of emphasis in his program, therefore, could be basketball skills. Because he would also need to work on a team to play basketball, integrating communication skill development would also be an important goal for his individualized education program. Marcus’s program will contain less content than his peers’ program to ensure that he is able to successfully master the skills to meet his needs.

Step 2: Assessing

After identifying the most appropriate program for a student through the needs assessment, a baseline assessment of the desired skills should be conducted to determine where the teacher can begin instruction. To carry out this assessment, a tool such as the Test of Gross Motor Development, Third Edition (Ulrich, in press) can be used. Going back to the example, an assessment reveals that Marcus has trouble with the follow-through element of a basketball shot. He also tends to lock his legs while shooting, adversely affecting his force generation. With this knowledge, Mrs. Clemens can then start to plan the content specifically for Marcus.

Step 3: Implementation Planning

Once a teacher understands the current skill level of a particular student, he or she can start planning the instruction to focus on the missing focal points of the skills that the student needs to learn. This planning should take into consideration the student’s objectives, the targeted focal points, how class time will be distributed, the use of instructional activities, and the grouping of the students. For example, Mrs. Clemens is going to use her class’s upcoming basketball unit to help Marcus with his shooting proficiency. She already has determined the missing focal points from his shooting skills and plans to have the class participate in station activities so she has time to provide extra instruction to Marcus. One activity she plans to use includes a stool at a specific height that will provide tactile feedback to let Marcus know he bent his knees enough for his shot attempt. Mrs. Clemens plans on having the students work in pairs at the stations while assigning a student with whom Marcus is comfortable as his partner.

Step 4: Teaching

Teaching turns the planning into action. The emphasis of this step of the ABC model is to ensure that all students have opportunities for high levels of on-task behavior related to their specific learning objectives. As teachers manage the class, they
should provide students with explicit feedback on the skills they can and cannot perform. The teacher must continuously assess and make changes during the lesson to ensure that each student has the opportunity to reach his or her targeted objective. Mrs. Clemens chose to use stations because it provided her with time to informally assess how the students are progressing. This also allows Marcus to have extra time at the shooting station instead of rotating because Mrs. Clemens recognizes, through assessment, that he needs more time to reach his objective of improving his shot.

**Step 5: Evaluation**

The final step of the ABC model involves evaluation of the student and program. Student evaluation concerns each student’s progression and achievement related to the desired objectives. This information can be sent home in the form of parent reports and can help teachers track the progress of students like Marcus. Then, by examining all of the students’ evaluations, a teacher can evaluate the program. Did the class as a whole meet the objectives of the curriculum? If teachers notice that students are generally not meeting the objectives related to a certain skill, they may have to rethink how much time they designate to the skill or whether it was developmentally appropriate for the class. For example, if Mrs. Clemens notices that Marcus and his classmates struggled with dribbling a basketball, she may need to give them more time to practice that skill. She may find a solution in simply increasing the time spent on dribbling by adding additional stations in the future.

**Conclusion**

Physical education is a diverse and dynamic environment. Students enter the classroom with a broad range of skills, and teachers are expected to assist each of those students toward mastery. By utilizing the ABC model, physical educators can assess and modify the curriculum to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities like Marcus. It would be inappropriate to hold Marcus to similar standards as his typically developing peers while knowing he will not acquire the necessary skills to participate in those activities or be able to move on to more advanced skills. By utilizing the ABC model, physical educators are able to assess what is best for students and what they each need to work on. In this way, teachers can feel more confident that they are providing adapted instruction that is both inclusive and effective.

**References**


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**Submissions Welcome!**

Readers are encouraged to send “Advocacy in Action” submissions to column editor K. Andrew R. Richards at advocacy@shapeamerica.org.

The purpose of the Strategies column “Advocacy in Action” is to provide tangible, real world examples of grassroots and national-level advocacy activities taking place in the fields of physical education, health education and physical activity. Submissions should be written in a conversational, practical tone. Columns should be 1,000–1,300 words, or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages.