Summer 2018

Social Skills and Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities: Can Community Based Instruction Help?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to determine how Community Based Instruction (CBI) affects the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. Existing literature is limited in findings related to the influence of CBI on middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. This qualitative study was completed using interviews and observations. Participants included students, teachers, and paraprofessionals from a middle school in Southern California. The findings of this study are intended to support the use of CBI in middle school special education classrooms and to demonstrate how a functional program can improve the social skills of students with moderate to severe disabilities. Educators and administrators who may want more information on CBI and its benefits may also utilize the findings.
Keywords: Community Based Instruction (CBI), severe disabilities, Autism

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The ability to navigate throughout one's own community is essential to one's ability to thrive in the community and in life. For typical individuals, navigating the community may seem like a necessary and mundane part of life. However, for individuals with disabilities, navigating the community in a functional way can be difficult and filled with many adversities such as how to navigate public transportation, how to complete a monetary transaction or how to access one's local public library or park. Recent research indicates that children who have learning disabilities often have significant difficulty developing social skills (Siperstein, 2009). In addition, the severity of one's disability directly impacts the cultivation of those skills (deBildt, 2005). Social skills impact our quality of life so heavily that those who lack them may ultimately experience a lower quality of life if those skills are not effectively developed. A prime example of this is spending time in the community. Spending time out in the community is beneficial to students with disabilities because it aids understanding of typical social exchanges and builds social skills. It also gives students the opportunity to learn about resources available in their local neighborhoods. Examples of community living skills that may require specific instruction are: learning how to utilize the public bus system, purchasing groceries and selecting leisure activities. While some of these tasks may seem mundane for non-disabled individuals, they may require intentional instruction for many individuals with disabilities.

Community Based Instruction (CBI) may be a strategy to support those with developmental disabilities become more self-sufficient in that they too can functionally participate in social interactions within the community. There is a gap in research when it comes to the specific details of the types of influences that CBI may have on the fostering of social skills. Research

has yet to determine exactly how CBI impacts the social skills development of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The purpose of this study is to understand how CBI affects the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. Parents who wish to educate themselves of the benefits of CBI may utilize this research. Teachers and school administrators who may be interested in how to organize a functional CBI program or how to improve an already existing program can also utilize the information provided.

This research plans to answer the following question: how does Community Based Instruction (CBI) influence social skills among middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Literature Review

This literature review discusses Community Based Instruction (CBI) and the lower expectations that educators place on students with more severe disabilities regarding their ability to participate in CBI. It examines several suggested methods of CBI implementation and various difficulties experienced when implementing a functional CBI program. This literature review also considers the advantages and reasons for CBI as well as reasons for continued research on this topic.

Low Expectations
Recent research suggests that individuals with moderate to severe disabilities are often held to lower expectations. Pickens and Dymond (2015) found that approximately 25% of special education directors interviewed in their study felt that CBI was not appropriate for students with moderate to severe disabilities (p. 301). Similarly, Roessler & Foshee (2010) found that low expectations of students with disabilities were one of the major factors negatively influencing the development of students' social skills (p. 23). Perspectives of special education directors play a pertinent role in the success of a functional CBI program and will also play a highly relevant part in the following research.

Langone, Langone & McLaughlin (2000) uncovered similar results in their study, finding that teachers held adverse beliefs regarding students with difficult behaviors being allowed to participate in CBI, indicating that negative behaviors should be completely "eliminated before participating in CBI" (p. 24). Because the following research will examine the effects that CBI has on social behavior, some negative behaviors are an essential part of the research process. According to Langone, Langone & McLaughlin (2000), teachers who had no experience with CBI held more pessimistic views of CBI and believed that students would not generalize skills learned in the community even if they participate in a functionally sound CBI program (p. 29). Are teachers thinking about students' safety and level of benefit they will receive from the program or are their lowered expectations pre-determining their students' failures? Students must first be given an opportunity to succeed in order to have any chance at doing so.

Barriers to Implementation
In addition to low expectations and negative perspectives held by teachers and special education directors, recent literature indicated other various barriers to implementing a successful CBI

program (Pederson, 2015). A major contributing factor is the predisposition towards inclusive general education placements for students with disabilities (Siperstein, Glick & Parker, 2009, p. 97). Pickens and Dymond (2015) also explain that IDEA 2004 places greater emphasis on academic achievement, rather than life, functional and social skills (p. 292). This may be a determining factor related to why directors and administrators appear less willing to approve a functional CBI program. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) similarly mandates that students receiving special education services access general education curriculum (Walker, Uphold, Richter & Test, 2010, p. 264). Because of this emphasized mandate, students with moderate to severe disabilities are less likely to participate in CBI and learn the life and social skills necessary for post-secondary life. There is an increased focus on in-class core curriculum time, making it difficult for many teachers and administrative staff to understand the relevance of CBI and the benefits it can have on students, especially when paralleled with in-class instruction time.

Walker, Uphold, Richter & Test (2010) also found that because of NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004), present barriers to implementing a CBI program that include a lack of administrative support, lack of community resources needed to design socially applicable experiences to students and lack of staff to provide meaningful instruction (p. 264). Pickens & Dymond (2015) had similar results, finding that the most barriers to CBI establishment and implementation include "insufficient staff and inadequate public transportation" (p.290). Other concerns that burdened the implementation process include liability and scheduling (Pickens & Dymond, 2015, p. 292). Concern of possible behaviors that may occur in the community were also expressed in a study by Zion & Jenvey (2006), who reasoned that historically students with disabilities have struggled to adapt to others' emotions and new social situations. Considering the possible positive outcomes of a consistent CBI program, these concerns are worth sorting out.

In addition to lack of administrative support, transportation and scheduling issues, teachers also find it difficult to implement CBI in an "optimal way" (Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012, p. 60). If school administration is concerned about scheduling and students losing in-class time, teachers will have more difficulty executing a CBI program that is regularly and consistently scheduled. This then raises the concern that students with more severe disabilities need repetition, variety and consistency to learn in the most optimal way possible. Langone, Langone & McLaughlin (2000), determined some ways in which teachers were able to overcome the barriers of developing a CBI program (p.28). These include persistence, showing school administration positive results of other CBI programs and in one instance, a meeting with the superintendent when no progress was made at a lower level of administration (p.25). These barriers and methods used to overcome them can be great resources for educators when they find themselves struggling to implement a well-designed CBI program.

How In-Class Instruction Relates to CBI
Another topic frequently noted in the literature focused on how teachers are expected to implement the CBI instruction itself. Should teachers only teach core subjects inside the classroom and save all CBI for outside of class? Should they expose students to CBI both inside and outside of the classroom? And finally, what types of CBI activities should be implemented to ensure the best possible learning outcome for students?

Teachers with no CBI experience felt that in-class instruction needed to parallel the topics in the general education curriculum, making it difficult to leave time for instruction that would benefit skills necessary for CBI (Langone, Langone & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 24). This concern was addressed by Dukakis, Valkanos & Brinia (2013) regarding vocational training. The study emphasized the direct correlation between teaching a subject or area of concern in class before introducing it to students out in the community. Teachers in the study by Steere & DiPipi-Hoy (2012) felt that CBI trips into the community must be frequent in order for students to reap any benefits from these trips (pp. 62-63). This especially applies to students with more severe disabilities because they need repeated exposure to social situations in the community in order for learning to be most effective. Frequent CBI trips offer the repetition with variety that many students with disabilities need in order to completely grasp a concept.

Other teachers in the study believed that role-play should supplement CBI. Students who struggle with social skills can engage in role-playing activities that relate to the current social skills being focused on in class and/or in the community (p. 63). For example, if students were going on a CBI outing to the local grocery store, teachers could first model an appropriate role-play activity, underlining the social skills necessary such as greeting the cashier with a "Hello, how are you?" and saying "Thank you" when the transaction is finished. After modeling this activity, the teacher could have two students act out this transaction in front of the rest of the class or even have students complete this activity in small groups. An activity such as this could then be discussed, focusing on the students' strengths and weaknesses.

Another supplement to CBI that teachers in the study believe to be valuable for those who struggle with social skill development related to social narratives (p.63). Social narratives tell a story and focus on a particular social skill. These stories may include photos of students in that class inside to make them more engaging and to help students envision themselves using that particular social skill. Teachers who are partial to this method feel that it is best for students who understand what social skills are, but who may have difficulty with the practical steps of implementing the skills (DiPipi-Hoy, 2012, p. 62). Like any other teaching method, social narratives may be more effective for some students than others.

In addition to the above methods of supplementing and implementing CBI, Steere & DiPipi-Hoy (2012) have also suggested that teachers take notes during the CBI outings to determine students' strengths and weaknesses. This may seem difficult to some teachers with CBI experience, as the outings can be more than enough to keep a teacher busy without being concerned with note-taking. If this is not a feasible option, ask an aid who is also attending the CBI outing to take thorough notes on any strength and/or weakness she has seen and that any adult on the trip reports to her. This can then guide both school based instruction and community based instruction, allowing teachers to provide students opportunities to improve areas of weaknesses and fine-tune areas of strength.

In addition to these specific methods of implementation, Alberto, Cihak & Gama (2005) suggest that scheduling is a key factor for successful CBI implementation (p. 327). Their study suggested that CBI must be well planned and thoroughly supplemented with other instructional methods. Classroom-simulated instruction and concurrent instruction in the community and in school are some examples of the suggested methods of scheduling (Alberto, Cihak & Gama,

2005, p. 327). No matter which method an educator chooses, scheduling that is consistent and frequent is essential.

Purposes of CBI
One of the main purposes for instituting a CBI program is the lack of social and life skills training students receive post-high school. For example, if students can learn to manage their time during CBI outings, this will help prepare them to manage their time when they apply for jobs and need to report to work on time (DiPipi-Hoy, Jitendra & Kern, 2009). E.C. Bouck (2010) found that only 24% of individuals with moderate to severe disabilities in her study received life skills training or therapy after high school and only 10% of individuals with moderate to severe disabilities receive relationship skills training post-high school (p.1098-1099). This indicates that if students do not receive social and life skills training during primary and secondary school, it is highly likely that they will never receive this training. Even if individuals do receive this training post-high school, it will be more difficult to explain a concept that is brand new to someone at the age of 18, as opposed to providing this training to an individual who has been practicing these skills since their early primary grades. IDEA requires every student with an IEP to have a transition plan by age 16, which indicated the importance of students acquiring these skills early on (Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2006).

E.C. Bouck (2010) also discovered that when social and life skills are provided to individuals after high school, they are not adequate and often do not relate to necessary training after school (p. 1093). If training does not relate to the actual skills necessary to individuals after high school, is it really doing them any good? Overall, E.C. Bouck's study (2010) suggests that students with disabilities benefit from a life skills curriculum, yet few individuals receive this type of instruction in school (p.1100). This appears to be a prime example of the impact a functionally sound CBI program can have. Without CBI, students may never be exposed to the actual environments in which they will one day need to utilize their social skills. Without CBI, students are likely to complete high school never having any social or life skills training in any setting other than a classroom.

Individuals with disabilities lag far behind peers without disabilities in terms of employment. When individuals with disabilities are employed, they are often employed with far less hours than their non-disabled peers and receive lower wages. They are more likely to be living in poverty and rarely receive medical benefits from their employers (Pickens & Dymond, 2015, p. 290). This is another reason why CBI is vital to individuals with disabilities. When exposed to the different community settings, students are more likely to form an idea of what they may want to do when they complete high school. This is more likely to happen at the high school level. According to Pickens & Dymond (2015), high school special education teachers have reported that CBI and Community Based Vocational Instruction (CBVI) helps students learn work behaviors, job skills, increased self-determination and independence.   These high school teachers also reported that CBI and CBVI assisted students in "identifying vocational goals and interests and provided opportunities for socialization with typical peers" (p.291).

It has also been found that students with severe disabilities struggle to generalize skills learned (Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012, p. 60). This is why teachers and administrators at school site, elementary, middle and high school, should consider implementing a CBI program that offers

frequent outings into the community.   The intent of CBI is for students to learn functional skills within the most natural environments and contexts (Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012, p. 60).

Methodology

This study involved qualitative data collection. Qualitative research is useful for this study because it allows in depth to expose ways in which CBI can be utilized. Qualitative research is very specific and focuses on all of the complexities of the particular group and issue being studied; in this case middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Participant Selection
Participants were contacted in person on the school campus where the research took place to inform them of the intended research. A consent form detailing the study was also provided. The form explained the overall scope of the research, the research process including the research methods, what the researcher hoped to discover and whom the researcher believed could benefit from the findings. The participants were receptive to the focus of the study and quickly agreed to be part of the study. They shared the same desire as the researcher to expose how CBI can affect the social skills of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The researcher earned the necessary training certificate and approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved to research this group. The researcher maintained confidentiality and protected the privacy of all participants through the entirety of the study.

Participants were selected using a convenience sample. Participants were students and educators at the school site where the researcher teaches, which also makes this a purposeful sample because students at the school site were easily observed.   In addition to the classroom teacher, other participants included two classroom paraeducators who work with all eight students on a daily basis. The classroom teacher is a Caucasian female in her late thirties. This was her first year as a full time teacher of record. One of the paraeducators is a Lebanese female in her fifties while the other is a Latina in her early twenties. The two paraeducators have worked at this particular school site as para-educators for a combined total of fifteen years. This also made it easy for the researcher to contact educators to schedule interviews (Creswell, 2002). Below, Table 1 provides the participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	Occupation	Experience	Education
R.C.	Latina	23	Para-educator	5 years as para-educator	Will complete B.A in May 2016
L.K.	Caucasian	39	Special Education Teacher	First year teaching 2 years of long-term substituting 10 years of behavioral therapy	Has completed B.A. and preliminary education specialist credential
A.K.	Lebanese	54	Para-educator	9 years as a para-educator	Some college

Research Design
The researcher chose to complete a qualitative study on this topic because of the detailed information that an in-depth interview could yield. The researcher was not trying to quantify anything or find any statistics. Conversely, she sought to gain insight and draw conclusions from the words people use when answering interview questions and the actions of students during observations that took place in various locations. Data for this study was conducted using two methods: interviews and observation. Interviews took place at a location that is not on school campus (i.e. a coffee shop or local eatery). Observations took place during times that were convenient and preferable to the teacher of the student participants. Nothing was purchased for this study. However, participants were compensated with gift cards to a coffee shop. Because this research may be valuable to participants who work with these students daily, the researcher will also offer the findings of this research to them once the research has been completed.

Interviews
Teachers and para-educators were interviewed regarding the changes they have seen in their students' social skills since participating in a comprehensive and consistent CBI program. The researcher asked questions such as "How would you describe Student A's social skills before she began participating in CBI?" and "How would you describe her social skills now that she is currently participating in CBI?" Interviews were approximately thirty minutes each. Interviews took place in a local coffee shop that was quiet enough so that the participant and researcher did not become distracted. The volume level and atmosphere was calm so that interviewees felt comfortable speaking their most true and genuine thoughts without fear of any repercussion or negative consequence. The researcher audio recorded the interviews using a mobile device with the permission of each interviewee. She then transcribed each interview in full into a Microsoft Word document.

Observation
Observations took take place in the classroom where children could be observed in an environment in which teachers and students are familiar and feel comfortable. Observations also took place out in the local community during CBI outings. Before observing students, the

researcher was sure to greet them and let them know she would be visiting the classroom sporadically and joining them on their CBI outings. This way, students were well aware of the researcher's presence and not distracted by it. While observing, the researcher took notes on the actions and behaviors observed. Notes were fact-based, and attempts were made to remain unbiased and objective by taking fact-based notes without any inference of the motivation behind behaviors. Overall, this research took place in the classroom at the school site in Orange County, CA, in the lunch area where most social opportunities present themselves and in the local community where students and staff go on their CBI outings. Students, teacher, and para-educators participated. Social skills were monitored throughout the course of the research. Notes about students' social interactions were made during observations. This research addressed and explored the quality of social skills among middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. This research also exposed how CBI influences social skills among these students.

Data Analysis
Data was collected for this research via observations and interviews. The teacher and para-educators were interviewed, answered questions about a Community Based Instruction (CBI) program that was initiated at the school site, how it was structured and what social skills they saw the students exhibiting during the CBI outings as well as on the school site campus. The researcher also observed all eight students in the special education classroom on the CBI outings, during their thirty-minute lunch period, and during their general education elective periods, which totals approximately thirty-six hours of observation. Each observation that took place inside the special education classroom was approximately thirty minutes long. Each CBI outing, including the walk to and from the destination, took approximately two hours. The observations that took place in the general education class were approximately forty minutes per session.

Data Preparation
Before arriving at these themes, the researcher audio recorded the interviews with the teacher and two para-educators. After audio recording the interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read each transcription in their entirety one time through. After reading them each one time through, the researcher analyzed which themes were recurring among all three participants. Once the researcher had a reasonable idea of some recurring themes, she read through the transcriptions once again, looking for specific similarities in ideas and language. The researcher utilized first-cycle coding methods; the first method used was in vivo coding by creating a code from similar expressions spoken by the para-educator and teacher during the interviews. The researcher also used descriptive coding by summarizing each topic of interest. As the text was read through a second and third time and these similarities were found, the researcher gave each theme a code name. These codes were titled and color-coded, making it easy for the researcher to distinguish which code(s) applied in certain sections of the interview transcriptions. After creating and color-coding the themes, the researcher read through each interview transcription two more times each to be sure no relevant themes or codes were ignored. When writing about the codes, the researcher applied interpretations to the data for each portion of the coding and analysis process.

Coding
Throughout the duration of the interviews, observations and coding and analysis process, the researcher found several recurring themes. The researcher used a combination of In Vivo coding, beginning with first cycle coding (Saldana, 2009) and Descriptive Coding (Saldana, 2009). The themes that naturally arose included social norms, travel time, math skills, cooking, social skills practiced during CBI, who students socialize with and "hopes for the future." In Vivo coding was used to create the theme "hope for the future." Two participants stated the exact phrase "hope for the future" during their interview with the researcher when discussing the social skills they hope the students will have learned. They expressed that certain skills could aid the students in living as independently as possible once they are finished with school.

The researcher felt that this exact phrase spoken by participants spoke directly to the research question of whether or not CBI can improve the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. The participants expressed that their hope for the future was that the students could put the skills they learn at school and out on CBI outings into practice in their own personal lives at home with their parents now. Additionally, they expressed their hopes that the skills would carry over into their own adult personal lives so they would live independently. These themes were relevant to the research question of how CBI can affect the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. They were also created using descriptive coding. With descriptive coding, the researcher summarized each topic that repeatedly arose in both the interviews and observations. The following themes were revealed through the analysis: social norms, travel time, math skills, cooking, social skills practiced during CBI, and individuals with whom students socialize.

Trustworthiness/Reliability
Trust was established in several ways throughout this study. The researcher held multiple interviews with multiple participants. Multiple collection tools were used which include observations and interviews. The researcher audio recorded all interviews and transcribed each interview verbatim. The intent of the study was to show that CBI can positively affect the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities, was made clear to the participants. The researcher also assured participants that all names and places where research took place would be kept confidential. Therefore this study involved very little risk. There was no potential risk of physical or psychological harm because students were simply being observed and teachers were interviewed only to their own personal level of comfort. All of the above factors created a trustworthy rapport between researcher and participants.

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine whether community based instruction influenced the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. The study was conducted at a public middle school in one of the largest school districts in Orange County, California. Students involved in the study were 7th and 8th graders who spent more than 50% of the instructional day in a self-contained special education classroom. During the study, the researcher answered the following question:

How does community based instruction influence social skills among middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities?

Chapter 4 provides the results of this study. The chapter begins with social norms, which explain the theme that recurred during the interviews. Next, the themes of travel time, math skills, cooking, social skills practiced during CBI and socialization are explored and discussed in relation to the research question. Then, the theme of "hopes for the future" and independence are discussed in detail. Finally, chapter 4 concludes with a summary of the results of the research.

Social Norms
Social norms were a repetitive concern indicated by both the special education teacher and one of the para-educators. During the interview with the special education teacher, L.K., she stated that during CBI, "students are exposed to social norms such as how to greet someone, appropriate ways to ask for help and how to handle certain unpredictable situations such as seeing a person with a dog walk by." A situation like this has the potential to be a trigger to some students and may incite anxiety or fear. Para educator R.C. stated during the interview, "There are a lot of teachable moments for the students that come up when we are walking around the community." This suggests that CBI offers many opportunities for students to learn social norms during the weekly CBI outings. Learning social norms appeared to be one of the top concerns of the teacher and para-educator, focusing especially on how to handle unexpected social encounters. These social encounters usually occurred during the travel time to and from the weekly CBI destination.

Travel Time
The travel time to and from the destination was another recurring theme throughout interviews with the participants. The significance of this theme was also found during the observations that took place on the CBI outings. During the time that students spent walking to and from that week's destination, they were given a chance to converse about school, friends, family, weekend activities and anything else of interest to them. It was an opportunity to practice initiating conversation, taking turns during conversation, maintaining eye contact during conversation and working on appropriate responses to one another. The para-educator A.K. stated, "The kids have a lot of social opportunity just on the walk to and from wherever we are going. That's kind of like their time to socialize without structure." This statement is a representation of how important it was to the staff in this classroom that students had unstructured social opportunities where they could practice skills they had learned prior. Travel time during CBI seemed to be just as, if not more, important than the skills learned at the destination itself. The researcher also observed similar behaviors. When out on a CBI to a local eatery, student A.N. expressed to student L.H. "I'm going to order chicken strips. What are you going to get?" This gave student L.H., one of the least social students in the class, a chance to respond and continue in some peer-to-peer conversation.

Math Skills
A consistent skill that was practiced and applied at every CBI destination was math. The skill of math in this context included budgeting, totaling costs, finding the best bargains, calculating and estimating time, counting money, calculating and confirming the accuracy of change given to students by the cashier. As observed by the researcher, students utilized math skills when

estimating a budget for items needed from a particular location such as a local grocery store. In class, when estimating and budgeting, student A.V. said "I have three dollars. I think I'll be able to buy one snack and a gift for my mom." During the researcher's CBI observation, students decided which brands to buy to get the most product for their money. In the store, they discussed amongst themselves about which product they should buy. For example, before making her final decision, student J.P. asked teacher L.K. "These chips are the best deal right?" They also learned and practiced how to pay for items and count money in order to be certain that correct change was given after the transaction.

The researcher noted students practicing their time skills by estimating how much time they would have at each destination. The majority of students knew what time they needed to be back to school and were prompted by staff to calculate how much time they would have at the destination and what time they should leave to give themselves enough time to walk back to school. The special education teacher also expressed the importance of this skill by saying "The kids learn to be responsible by estimating how much time they have. Some like to ask what time it is and how much time we have until we get back. Now, most students know to simply ask for the time so that they can estimate it themselves." The researcher was surprised to see how often this is a very real-life skill that anybody with any type of schedule would use and need on a daily basis. It was clear from the observations of the researcher and the interview of the special education teacher that keeping a schedule and following it independently is a skill that is highly valued inside and outside of this classroom.

Cooking
In this research, the theme of cooking included the following: deciding what to cook, making a list of grocery items needed, calculating a budget, finding the most valuable prices at the store, navigating the store to find the necessary items, paying for the items needed for cooking, preparing the food items bought at the store, using those items in a safe and sanitary manner in the classroom, eating the food that was prepared, cleaning up and storing leftover food properly. The researcher observed students practicing all of these skills on an average of one to two times per month in combination with weekly CBI outings. Students observed in this research were not only learning the entire process of cooking for themselves, but also how to budget and shop for healthy foods at a reasonable price. The special education teacher stated how important she felt cooking was when she stated that "Cooking the ingredients we buy at the store really brings CBI and life skills full circle. It's almost like a mini project where every week students get to choose what to cook and buy the ingredients which are skills within themselves, but then they also learn the life skill of cooking which is extremely valuable." The para-educator shared similar views and expressed "The kids get to cook, which they love. They are having fun while learning and it doesn't really get any better than that." Based on observations and interviews, the researcher found that CBI did not happen in an isolated manner. Many skills were interwoven into the program and cooking was the most common skill that was practiced and applied after the CBI outing.

Social Skills Practiced During CBI
The theme of "social skills practiced during CBI" refers to the skills that are exclusively put into practice during CBI. A major common theme conveyed by participants was safety within the community. Specific examples given during the interview with the para-educator included

learning to obey the safety and community signs on the streets such as "walk," "don't walk," "stop" and "beware of dog." During observations, the researcher heard several students point out these signs while simultaneously gesturing along with it saying, "Wait, the red hand means stop" and "Look both ways first. Are there any cars? No." Students practiced navigating their communities on a weekly basis. Another example of social skills practiced during CBI given by a para-educator was that students treated each other with more kindness while at the park engaging in structured sports games together. Teacher L.K. stated, "The students argue less during CBI outings compared to the amount of arguing that takes place here on campus." Students appeared to understand that CBI was a privilege and behaved in a friendlier and less argumentative manner than while in the classroom.

The researcher observed that many of the students wanted to be in the front of the group when walking to their CBI destination. The skills of patience, respecting personal space and saying "excuse me" if and when a student passed by another student, were regularly demonstrated during every CBI outing. The special education teacher stated, "A lot of the kids tend to want to be in front of the group, but now they know that they will have to walk in the back of the group if they are not polite or don't say 'excuse me' when passing by another student." Once the destination was reached, options were often presented to students; whether it was the option of which game to play at the park or which section of the store they wanted to head toward first, students learned to make decisions together by discussing amongst themselves and received advice from adults when solicited. The social skills that emerged and were practiced during CBI included such activities as community safety, politeness, manners and personal space were not only noted by participants, but also observed by the researcher on multiple occasions. During CBI, students practiced these skills with one another and then practiced the same skills on campus with their typical peers as well.

Socialization
The theme "Socialization" refers to how students put their social skills into practice both on campus with their peers and off campus with other members of the community. Many of the skills practiced during CBI were not only applied on the CBI outings themselves, but also at the school site. For example, para-educator R.C. stated in an interview that she noticed students greeting friends they have made at lunch "more often than in the beginning of the year." The researcher observed similar skills in the general education elective classes. Students with moderate to severe disabilities called on their general education peers for help in class, which was encouraged by both the general and special education teachers.

Additionally, students had the opportunity to be social with their typical peers every day during lunch as observed by the researcher. Typical students who were part of a club called the Kindness Club would sit, eat and converse with the special education students during lunch. Most of the special education students enjoyed this time and were very open and friendly, greeting their peers properly and asking friendly and appropriate questions such as "how are you?" or "how was your weekend?" The skills practiced during CBI were clearly being applied onto the school campus, which demonstrates the students' ability to generalize the social skills they have learned. While students were improving their social skills that were being used on campus, they were also getting the chance to socialize with members of the community such as cashiers, grocery store clerks, members of the community at the park and local small

businesses. These social skills are likely to positively impact each student's independence and in turn, their futures.

Hopes for the Future/Independence
Another theme that arose during the course of this research was "hopes for the future" and independence. A common hope that was expressed by both the classroom teacher and para-educators was that all of the students would one day have the ability to live independently. Para-educator A.K. expressed that she "just hope[s] students will be able to feed and clothe themselves, shop for groceries independently, keep a clean living space and obtain and maintain a steady job." The teacher, L.K., also expressed her hopefulness by genuinely stating, "I hope so much that they will be able to wake up on their own and follow a schedule throughout the day. This schedule would include cooking breakfast, making their beds, going to work, visiting with family and doing household chores." It was made clear to the researcher that although CBI is taking place when students are in middle school, it has the accompanying educators thinking into each student's future and how it may affect their independent living skills.

Summary

Of these skills listed, scheduling and shopping for groceries and within the context of consumer math skills, were two that were consistently practiced throughout the CBI program. Students were very aware of the time they needed to be back to school and how much time that gave them to spend at the destination. Shopping for groceries happened at least once per month throughout the duration of this study, giving students ample practice with that life skill.

In addition to the hopes that were expressed during participant interviews, the researcher observed the teacher and classroom staff conversing on several occasions about possible jobs the students could maintain and what their living situation might look like after high school. Overall, it was understood that there was an emphasis on the future of each student and his/her independence was the overall long-term goal and purpose for CBI at this school site.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, this study focused on whether or not CBI influences the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. It also focused on how CBI affected their social skills, specifically in the school setting. The researcher observed the students at their school site for a total of approximately thirty-six hours. In addition to observing the students, the researcher also interviewed the special education teacher and two para-educators who work with the students daily. The researcher interviewed the educators several times to discuss student progress throughout the duration of the study as well as when CBI trips occurred throughout the school year.

As the study progressed, the researcher observed different themes that consistently arose; for example, socialization and math. These themes were frequently present because students were given both ample opportunities to socialize informally during CBI and practice their math skills, specifically time and money skills as they related to the students' CBI outings and daily schedules. Moreover, these skills were reinforced by the

adult participants who were interviewed. They informed the researcher that they felt CBI gave students an opportunity unlike many others available on campus, which are valuable and can benefit them in their post-high school and adult lives.

How does Community Based Instruction (CBI) influence social skills among middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities?
After extensive observations in various locations including the classroom and local community, the researcher gleaned that CBI increased the amount of self-initiated socialization during CBI outings. This increase was especially noticeable in comparison to the average school day on the school site campus. This socialization did not only happen among students and between students and staff, but also between students and local community members. These community members included families at the park, local store-owners, grocery store cashiers and local residents in general.

A pivotal example of student interaction with a community member took place during a monetary transaction. The student, J.C., was ready to purchase an item and looked to the teacher for help, saying "Help me, please." Inferring that J.C. could not complete this transaction independently, the teacher turned and began to walk away from the student hoping to force him to interact with the cashier and complete the transaction. This action indeed forced what otherwise would have been a prompted interaction. J.C. responded to the cashier's greeting and completed the transaction independently. He also waited for his change, which, as stated by his teacher, had been difficult for him to remember on past occasions.

The experience of completing monetary transactions is a prime example of a skill that can be practiced by students out in the local community. Students can hone these skills in the classroom by practicing their addition and subtraction skills, specifically with money. However, being out in the community and having real life experiences where these skills are put into practice cannot be substituted in the classroom. The teacher, L.K., later informed the researcher that when she walked away from her students during that transaction, she was trying to force the cashier to interact with her student instead of the cashier assuming that she would speak for J.C. to help him complete the transaction. The teacher, L.K., informed the researcher that this was not the first time she had done this. She said she noticed that the further away she was in proximity to both the cashier and her students, the more independent her students acted and carried out social interactions.

Practicing these skills in the community displays how valuable they are and that the environment cannot be substituted on the school campus. On the school campus, teachers and para-educators are there to facilitate and provide instruction as well as to prompt students until they are able to solve the task at hand. However, once students venture into the local community where they live, they gain the opportunity to undertake these tasks independently and more often than not, they rise to the occasion.

Similar to the research of Langone, Langone and McLaughlin, (2000) who found that 67% of teachers in their study said they saw a decrease in inappropriate behaviors during CBI outings,

this study revealed that fewer negative behaviors occurred during CBI outings. Participants in this study also stated that they noticed students' behavior was generally more positive on CBI outings when compared to their behavior inside the classroom. Para-educator A.K. stated, "I think they feel more comfortable during CBI and they know that it is a privilege. That is why I think they behave better than they tend to at school." The researcher's observations indicated the same information. Students seemed happier, more respectful and more comfortable with less pressure to perform well on assignments or obtain correct answers.

The researcher also gathered sufficient data from the interviews held with the teacher and para-educators. Much of what was observed by the researcher was reaffirmed during the interviews. For example, when asked about the social opportunities during CBI, para-educator R.C. stated, "I notice the students initiating conversation and being themselves more while we're out on our trips. It seems like they feel more comfortable in a setting that is different from the classroom." The teacher, L.K. made a similar point saying, "I don't think my students would be as social as they are here at school if it weren't for CBI." The students were presented with more social opportunities during the CBI outings. The teacher and staff reviewed what happened during the CBI outing so the skills were constantly reinforced on campus.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included duration and location. This study could have consisted of a pre and post treatment, meaning the students could have been observed and the staff interviewed prior to ever having been exposed to CBI at all. The researcher could have then observed students and interviewed staff throughout the school year as well as the following year to get a more long-term view of how CBI may have affected each student's social skills. Also, the researcher could have observed a class of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities at more than one school site to see how the location of the school may have impacted the social skills of students. The difference in staffing may have also played a part in the outcomes.

Conclusion

In working to find an answer to this question, the researcher found that Community Based Instruction positively influences the social skills of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities. Skills that have been practiced and improved over the course of this study include counting money and correct change, telling and estimating time, calculating the most affordable prices, following directions, making eye contact, following safety and community signs while out in the community, greeting people, taking turns, working as a team, making decisions together, using manners, respecting personal space, conversational skills with peers and adults and conflict resolution. Students appeared to enjoy the CBI outings and greatly benefited from it in terms of social skills, including grocery shopping, following a recipe and math skills. Both para-educators and the special education classroom teacher noticed improvements in student behavior, specifically in terms of group decision-making and expressing disagreement. Overall, this study has found CBI to have a positive impact on student behavior.

Implications for Practice

This study was intended to help any K-12 teachers who might be considering starting a CBI program on their campus. While this study took place on a middle school campus, the researcher recommends starting CBI at the elementary level. If students were exposed to CBI at the elementary level, even as often as once or twice per month, they may be able to focus more of the complexities of the social skills once they reached middle school. Students typically do not gain exposure to CBI until secondary school and are expected to apply the skills that are practiced out in the community as well as function independently all within four to six years. If students began CBI earlier, they may be able to cultivate their social skills at the elementary level and refine those skills once they have reached the secondary level.

In addition to beginning CBI earlier, providing professional development to teachers, para-educators and administrators, may be beneficial and lead to more administrative support. If entire districts understood the benefits, more students with disabilities would be exposed to a consistent and age-appropriate CBI program throughout the entirety of their school careers. This study may also be helpful for parents to understand the rationale for CBI programs.

Implications for Research

In order to improve future research on Community Based Instruction, researchers may focus on CBI at the elementary and high school levels. They may also interview parents regarding the social skills of students and how they feel CBI has influenced the social skills of their children. Completing a longitudinal study with students who begin CBI at the elementary level and continue it throughout secondary school may provide more in-depth results. Furthermore, researchers completing a longitudinal study may observe how their social skills progress throughout the K-12 school system and into post-high school life.

If a follow up study were to be conducted, the researcher may want to consider having a control group of middle school students with moderate to severe disabilities and a group who is participating in a consistent and functional CBI program, so that the two groups can be compared and contrasted. The researcher would observe and accompany both groups during their CBI outings and interview the teacher and staff of both groups regarding their experiences with CBI. Future researchers may want to include school administration in their study. This could provide an understanding of why some school sites do not have CBI programs.

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