

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The Participation of Secondary Students with Severe Disabilities in School Clubs

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Abstract:	<p>The purpose of this study was to examine how secondary students with severe disabilities (i.e., severe intellectual disability or autism, multiple disabilities) participate in extracurricular school clubs. Using a qualitative multiple case design, the experiences of three high school students were examined. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews. A single-case inductive open-coding strategy was utilized across all data sources in which codes and categories emerged, and a final cross-case thematic evaluation was conducted. The cross-case thematic analysis resulted in the following four overarching themes: (a) going with the flow; (b) social obstacles: on the outside looking in; (c) supports provided: too much, too little, just right; and (d) safety in numbers.</p>

The Participation of Secondary Students with Severe Disabilities in School Clubs

Educational reformers, as early as the 20th century, were imagining creative solutions for keeping students involved in safe activities after school. With the inception of extracurricular programming, students were provided with opportunities to engage in constructive activities with their peers such as sports teams and school clubs (Kleiber & Powell, 2005; Osgood, 2005). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, extracurricular programs continued to grow in strength across the nation and researchers began investigating outcomes associated with participation (e.g., Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1992). Today, a body of research exists that provides evidence of the positive impact of extracurricular activities on students' academic achievement, social-emotional development, sense of school membership, and self-esteem (Fredricks, 2012; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Kleiber & Powell, 2005; Lipscomb, 2007; Wretman, 2017).

For students with severe disabilities (i.e., individuals with extensive supports needs who qualify for their state's alternate assessment and have been diagnosed with autism, intellectual, or multiple disabilities) there is emerging consensus that involvement in extracurricular activities holds great promise. Benefits from participation have included a deepened sense of belonging, improved social relationships, enhanced communication, and the development of new skills (Agran et al., 2017; Brooks et al., 2014; Cadwallader et al., 2003; Pence & Dymond, 2016). Furthermore, the importance of students with disabilities participating in extracurricular activities is underscored by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973). IDEA requires Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to consider the supplementary aids, services, and supports students with disabilities need to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities (Sec 614 (d) (1) (A) (i)). Section 504 requires that students with disabilities have the same opportunities to participate in

and benefit from extracurricular programming as peers without disabilities (Sec 104.37 (a) (2) (c) (2)). These mandates charge school districts with the responsibility of ensuring opportunities for all students, including students with the most significant disabilities, to participate in extracurricular programming.

Investigations into the participation of students with severe disabilities in school sponsored extracurricular activities have sought to describe the types of activities in which students participate, the amount of time they are engaged in activities, the supports students receive, and the extent to which students participate in disability-oriented activities. In general, students with severe disabilities participate most frequently in sports and school clubs. Dymond et al. (in press) found that most middle and high school students with severe disabilities were reported to participate in sports and fitness activities (66%) or school clubs (50%) while only 17% participated in special events and 8% participated in the performing arts (e.g., choir, band, drama). Kleinert et al. (2007) found slightly lower rates of participation in extracurricular activities, likely due to the broader focus of their study on K-12 students. Students with severe disabilities were reported to participate most frequently in school clubs (43%) followed by choir (22%), sports teams (18%), drama (8%), and band (7%). Only one study has investigated participation within a specific type of school sponsored extracurricular activity. Pence and Dymond (2016) examined the involvement of middle school students with severe disabilities in school clubs and identified sporting and gaming clubs as the most common type of club in which students participated.

Information is emerging about the amount of time students with severe disabilities spend in extracurricular activities and the types of supports they receive. Dymond et al. (in-press) found that 69% of high school students with severe disabilities participated in extracurricular

activities less than 3 hours per week. Within school clubs, Pence and Dymond (2016) noted that most middle school students with severe disabilities participated in school clubs weekly (49%) or monthly (43%) and meetings typically lasted over 1 hour (46%) or 45 min (32%). Similar to time spent in activities, variations also exist in the types of support students with severe disabilities receive during extracurricular activities. Kleinert et al. (2007) noted that the supports provided to K-12 students with severe disabilities were contingent upon the types of activities in which the students participated. These supports were almost always provided by an adult (parents, special or general education teachers, paraprofessionals). In contrast, Pence and Dymond (2016) discovered that peer support was overwhelmingly considered the most frequent type of support provided to students during school clubs, followed by modified instruction and one-on-one adult assistance.

A final area that has been investigated is the involvement of students with severe disabilities in disability-oriented activities (i.e., extracurricular activities that only include students with disabilities). Cadwallader et al. (2003) found that few students with disabilities participated in disability-oriented groups at schools; however, students with severe disabilities participated more frequently than students with mild disabilities, with approximately one-fourth of students with severe disabilities belonging to disability-oriented groups. Dymond et al. (in press) described similar results. Students with severe disabilities were reported significantly more likely to have participated in at least one activity that only included students with disabilities compared to students with mild disabilities.

Research investigating the participation of students with severe disabilities in extracurricular activities to date has been limited to survey data. Currently missing from this literature is an in-depth exploration of students' actual participation in extracurricular activities.

This information could assist secondary school personnel to improve how they structure extracurricular programs to enhance the involvement of students with disabilities with their peers. Changes to the ways in which students participate in extracurricular activities might also provide students with severe disabilities greater access to these programs as stipulated in IDEA (2004).

To address existing gaps in the literature, this study investigated the involvement of students with severe disabilities in school clubs. Secondary students with severe disabilities were selected as the focal group for this study because of their low levels of extracurricular involvement as compared to students without disabilities and students with milder disabilities (Agran et al., 2017; Cadwallader et al., 2003). School clubs were selected because they are one of the most frequent extracurricular activities in which students participate (Dymond et al., in-press; Kleinert et al., 2007) and are typically open to all students, allow for a variety of students with different strengths and abilities to participate (including those who might not excel academically at the same rate as their peers), and provide additional opportunities for participation and learning not readily available in other extracurricular activities. The overarching research question that guided this study was, “How do secondary students with severe disabilities participate in school club activities?”

Method

A multiple case, qualitative design was utilized to answer the research question (Stake, 2006). Data sources included interviews with special education teachers, club sponsors, and parents of students with severe disabilities; observations of students with severe disabilities during school club activities; and document reviews of school club information and IEPs.

Case Selection

Three cases were purposefully selected. One student with severe disabilities served as the focus of each case (Stake, 1995). Additional participants included the student's special education teacher, parent(s), and club sponsor. To identify cases, the lead researcher (first author) sent a recruitment email to special education teachers in one Midwestern state who worked in middle and high schools located within five nearby counties. Thirteen teachers expressed interest in the study and completed a telephone screening interview with the researcher. Teachers were eligible to participate if they (a) were a certified special education teacher; (b) had a minimum of one year of experience teaching students with severe disabilities; (c) worked in a public, integrated middle or high school setting; and (d) had at least one student on their caseload with a severe disability that participated in a school club with peers without disabilities. A severe disability was defined as having extensive support needs (i.e., autism, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities) and meeting eligibility criteria for the state's alternate assessment. A school club was defined as (a) being a student-based organization tied to academic, social, hobby, or special interest; (b) requiring regularly scheduled meetings that are facilitated by a club sponsor; and (c) having membership that is open to all students.

Three teachers met inclusion criteria. Due to the historical underrepresentation of students with the most extensive support needs in extracurricular activities (see Agran et al., 2017; Cadwallader et al., 2003), when more than one student qualified for the study the teacher and researcher worked together to select the student with the most significant disability (i.e., intellectual, communication, behavior, physical/mobility). Each teacher was then asked to send a recruitment flyer and consent form home to the parents of the identified student and provide the researcher with the name of the club sponsor. The researcher emailed the club sponsor directly to recruit participation. Criteria for case selection consisted of agreement by the special

education teacher, club sponsor, parent(s), and student with severe disabilities (per parent consent for student) to participate in the study; and no more than one case from any school site.

Three cases (one associated with each teacher) met selection criteria.

Description of Cases

Gray. Gray was a 17-year-old African-American male who was a member of the Mighty Hawks, a pep club that led cheers at school sporting events. This club was sponsored by a seasoned advanced math teacher who developed the club with a fellow colleague and had been the primary club sponsor for the last 10 years. The club included approximately 60 students that spanned across all grade levels. Members of the club met only when there was a school sporting event (e.g., basketball home games, volleyball tournaments), and participated by actively cheering during team events in a designated student section. Gray had participated in the Mighty Hawks every year of high school and was the only student with a disability in the club. At the time of the study, the Mighty Hawks was the only school club in which Gray participated, although in the prior year he was in a club devoted to teen safety. Outside of school, Gray was active in Special Olympics and had participated since elementary school. His Special Olympics coach, Sam (a peer without a disability), was also a member of the Mighty Hawks as was his older sister Dede.

Gray attended Oak Grove High School which was located in a rural community. The school served 324 students, sponsored 14 athletic teams, and offered several clubs (exact number unknown). Gray received special education services for other health impairment (i.e., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]) and intellectual disability. He communicated orally using short sentences and had typical development of fine and gross motor skills. Gray received special education services in a self-contained classroom with six other special education students

for most of the school day, and participated in two elective courses (i.e., physical education, art) each day with his peers. A paraprofessional was typically present in the elective courses and supported multiple students with disabilities in each course. Gray understood basic functional math skills needed for daily living and could follow oral directions with prompts. His IEP transition goals focused on preparing simple meals or snacks and gaining skills for living in a supported apartment. An additional priority for Gray was working on anger management strategies for handling feelings of frustration, disappointment, sadness, and rejection in a safe manner.

Erika. Erika was a 14-year-old Non-Hispanic White female who participated in Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), a club that focused on family living. FCCLA's primary emphasis was to aid students in development of important life-skills, including critical thinking, interpersonal relationships, and career readiness. The club was sponsored by the Family and Consumer Sciences teacher, who had held the position for the last five years. Meetings were held in the club sponsor's classroom the first Tuesday of each month. Typical meetings centered on the concepts of food, fellowship, and fun with peers. This particular chapter included 30 club members ranging from freshman to seniors, including two students with specific learning disabilities. Annual membership dues were \$20 and helped to defray costs. Club activities included a variety of events such as decorating socks for children, preparing food for a teacher luncheon, parties, fundraisers, conventions, and field trips. FCCLA was the first and only school-based club in which Erika had ever participated. She was not involved with extracurricular activities outside of school, although she had previously participated in Special Olympics and Girl Scouts.

Erika attended Meadowdale High School which served 400 students, supported 10

athletic teams, and offered 12 clubs. The school was located in a rural community. She received special education services for an intellectual disability and speech impairment. Her primary form of communication involved the use of short phrases or words, although she also occasionally used a picture communication system. Erika walked independently. Activities requiring fine motor skills were challenging for her, including movements such as tying her shoelaces or using scissors to cut paper. Erika spent most of her day in a self-contained classroom that included six other students. A paraprofessional accompanied her to lunch as well as elective classes (i.e., choir, art). IEP goals involved skills related to transition (i.e., work habits), math (i.e., basic numerical expressions), literacy (i.e., reading basic one syllable words), functional life skills (i.e., cooking, reacting appropriately in crisis situations), and speech (i.e., using strategies to increase speech intelligibility).

Riley. Riley was a 13-year-old Non-Hispanic White female who participated in Key Club, a club focused on school and community service. This was the first year that the club sponsor, a business teacher, had served as the club sponsor. The club had 35 active members and Riley was one of two students with an intellectual disability that participated in the club. Key Club meetings were held in the club sponsor's business classroom twice each month for 45 minutes. Student members were asked to pay a yearly membership fee of \$12 and complete 10 community service hours each fall and spring semester. Club activities included fundraisers, making blankets for children in hospitals, and wrapping holiday gifts for community members in need. This was Riley's first year participating in Key Club. She also participated in a weekly bowling club for students with disabilities that was sponsored by her special education teacher. Prior to high school she was on her middle school's cheerleading team for two years. Outside of school, she participated in Special Olympics and had competed in the long jump since

elementary school.

Riley attended Riverdale High School which served 600 students and was located in a rural community. The school sponsored 27 clubs and 19 athletic teams. Riley was born with a rare neurodevelopmental disorder called Williams-Beuren syndrome and qualified for special education services under the category of intellectual disability. She communicated by speaking short sentences. Oftentimes, Riley had an unbalanced and slow gait, due to her head and neck region being consistently tilted to the left side of her body. Riley spent most of the school day in a self-contained classroom that included five students. She also was enrolled in chorus for one period each day and received support from a paraprofessional during participation in this class. She regularly attended lunch with her peers, but typically sat at the table with other students and adults from the self-contained classroom. Riley's IEP goals emphasized daily living skills (e.g., brushing teeth, cleaning a bathroom) and functional math skills (e.g., using next dollar strategy). Her IEP transition plan included additional benchmarks for gaining (a) employment skills through volunteering and (b) independent living skills through participating in leisure activities like shopping and family outings.

Data Collection

The lead researcher collected data concurrently across all three cases over a six-month period. The order of data collection for each case was: (1) document reviews; (2) interviews with the special education teacher and club sponsor; (3) observations of the focal student during club activities; and (4) interviews with the special education teacher, club sponsor, and parents of the focal student. Teachers, parents, and club sponsors received a monetary gift card at the conclusion of the study.

Document reviews. To improve contextual understanding of the cases, each student's

IEP was reviewed to obtain demographic information (i.e., age, disability classification), a list of current goals, and a summary of present level of performance and support needs. Preliminary information about each school club was gathered by reviewing school websites, student handbooks, school club brochures, and school club meeting minutes. Data, including student demographic information, were recorded as case notes on a document review form.

Interviews. Five in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted within each case. Given the time available for the study, the perspectives of students with severe disabilities were not sought; instead, parents, special education teachers, and club sponsors were interviewed because of their intimate knowledge of these students. Each interview was audio recorded and took approximately one-hour to complete. An initial interview occurred once with each teacher and once with each club sponsor to learn more about the school club and the focal student's participation (e.g., types of activities, supports provided, level of engagement). After multiple observations of the student, follow-up interviews were conducted individually with each participating teacher, club sponsor, and parent(s) to gather additional perceptions about the student's participation since the prior interview (e.g., level and type of involvement, quality of student's participation, effectiveness of supports provided, factors that facilitated or hindered involvement). Semi-structured interview protocols were developed based on the extant literature on students with severe disabilities and extracurricular activities. All protocols were piloted with non-participants in the study who shared similar roles and backgrounds as those participating in the research project. Minor revisions were made to the wording of one protocol. Interviews included initial rapport building questions, followed by open-ended questions that included targeted probes to clarify participants' meanings, views, and experiences (Brinkmann, 2013).

Observations. Students were observed until data saturation was reached (Patton, 2015).

Gray was observed on six occasions (i.e., 3 boys' football games, 1 girls' volleyball game, 1 girls' basketball game, 1 boys' basketball game); Erika was observed on five occasions (i.e., 3 club meetings; 1 club party; 1 service activity); and Riley was observed on five occasions (3 club meetings, 2 service activities). The purpose of these observations was to capture rich descriptions about how focal students participated in club activities. Data were collected using running field notes recorded in a notebook. While conducting observations, the researcher acted as a non-participant 'onlooker' that stayed within a comfortable distance of the focal students, so as not to interfere with the students' involvement in activities (Patton, 2015). The duration of individual observations ranged from 50 minutes to three hours, depending on the length and nature of the club activity. After each observation, field notes were reviewed for accuracy, elaborations were made, and an overall summary was written. The researcher also completed a contact summary sheet to capture personal insights and reflections in order to bring awareness to potential biases (see Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Analysis

Each individual case was analyzed separately and then a cross-case analysis was completed. To begin single-case analysis, the lead researcher and a graduate student independently developed descriptive and interpretive codes for the first case using an inductive open-coding approach and the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). One data source (e.g., initial teacher interview) was analyzed at a time. The researcher and graduate student met face-to-face to discuss and compare their initial codes until a mutual understanding could be reached regarding each code's label and definition. All emerging codes and definitions were recorded in a master codebook. To apply codes, the researcher and graduate student independently re-coded the data source using the master codebook and then met

to compare and discuss the coded data. If the two agreed on the applied codes, analysis for that data source was considered complete. However, in the case of disagreements, they continued discussing and refining codes until they could reach full agreement. The exact same coding process was repeated for each data source in the first case. Codes that emerged from the first case were used to code the second and third cases, while still remaining open to any new codes that emerged.

Following each single-case analysis, a cross-case evaluation was conducted (Miles et al., 2014). Analysis began by reviewing codes from each case. Codes from across all cases were merged into new categories that represented all three cases. These major categories were then clustered by themes that cut across data and cases. The development of the cross-cutting themes aided in the synthesis of findings, leading to emerging new understandings about the multi-case.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Several measures were taken to ensure credibility and trustworthiness (see Brantlinger et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2005). First-level member checks were conducted after initial interviews by emailing a summary of responses to participants and asking for feedback, while second level member-checks were utilized during follow-up interviews by asking participants to reflect on their responses from the first interview. A researcher identity journal was employed throughout the entirety of the study that enabled the lead researcher to challenge her personal assumptions and potential biases. Peer debriefing occurred during weekly meetings, with a second researcher deliberating with the lead researcher to discuss emerging codes, categories, and themes, and check for consistency in the application of codes. Data triangulation was central to the analysis, involving the comparison of findings from multiple sources for inconsistencies, overlapping ideas, and unsupported understandings.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative inquiry, the process of self-disclosure of one's personal position in relation to the research problem is essential (Stake, 2006). We therefore make explicit our experiences and beliefs regarding the participation of students with severe disabilities in extracurricular programs. Over the span of two decades, the researchers have served as special education teachers of secondary students with severe disabilities, sponsors of extracurricular activities that included students with and without disabilities in public school settings, and university special education faculty. These experiences have guided our culminating views regarding the capacity of students with severe disabilities to serve as active participants in school-sponsored activities that include students with and without disabilities. We also believe that students should be afforded the same opportunities for involvement in extracurricular programs as their same-aged peers, and we presume that all students will receive some level of benefit (e.g., social/emotional gains, academic improvement) from participation.

Findings

Four overarching themes emerged that capture the breadth and range of participants' experiences across the cases: (a) going with the flow; (b) being on the outside looking in; (c) supports provided: too much, too little, just right; and (d) safety in numbers. Table 1 provides examples and salient quotes for each of the four themes.

Going with the Flow

In general, club sponsors viewed their primary role as facilitators, whose purpose was to manage the logistics of club activities (e.g., making copies, securing a location for an upcoming meeting). They did not see their role as one that did anything extraordinary to ensure the involvement of students with severe disabilities; instead, they believed these students should be

able to go with the flow of activities and participate like all other club members. Going with the flow required students with disabilities to participate independently, with little guidance and few individualized supports. One club sponsor was even prepared to keep a student from participating in activities if this student was not able to participate like his peers, “The student has to behave appropriately or won’t be allowed [to participate].” The club sponsor went on to explain that as a sponsor, she had “signed up for this, not for that” alluding to the idea that her responsibility was only to those students who had the ability to participate without needing assistance.

Club sponsors also struggled with understanding their role in helping to include students in club activities. Admittedly, some club sponsors believed that they lacked a general understanding of students with severe disabilities and the know-how to include them. The Key Club sponsor remarked, “I don’t have any experience with children with disabilities...I am not sure how to handle [them].” The pep club sponsor found herself questioning Gray’s aptitude for completing difficult cheers when she stated, “I don’t know what his intellectual capability is...some of the cheers that require a little more processing...maybe he wasn’t capable of [doing] that.” Consequently, students had limited involvement in activities in part due to the club sponsor’s uncertainty of students’ skill levels and aptitude.

With little direction or guidance given on how to participate in club activities, students with severe disabilities were left on their own to make decisions about their involvement. As a result, students participated in ways that were much different than their peers and commonly displayed behaviors that made them appear odd, out of place, or even confused. For Gray, this meant performing wildly animated skits by himself at the back of the cheer line or spending several minutes pacing back and forth behind the line. Other times, students would arbitrarily

participate in activities without having a true understanding of what they were experiencing or why they were experiencing it. For instance, during club meetings, Erika signed her name to every sign-up sheet that was passed around the classroom without any awareness of what she was actually signing up for. While engaged in service activities, Riley often failed to understand the purpose of what she was doing and asked questions of peers and adults like, “Why are we doing this?” “Who is this [blanket] for?”

Going with the flow also meant that individuals in the club (i.e., club members, club sponsors) seldom provided students with choice in how they participated. Instead, students were told things such as, “I’m going to help you, this is your job,” “Do this next,” “When you’re finished with that, start this.” Other times, students appeared bored because they were given tasks to complete that were too simple. For instance, while participating in the service activity of wrapping presents for community members in need, Riley worked with a peer partner to wrap several presents. Although there were multiple opportunities for Riley to participate in different ways (e.g., cutting the wrapping paper, putting the bow on the present) and make choices (e.g., selecting the present, choosing the wrapping paper), she only participated by handing her peer pieces of tape for the entirety of the one-hour activity. Not surprising, Riley yawned frequently and complained of a headache only after a short while of starting the activity.

Being on the Outside Looking In

Due to the social nature of clubs, membership required a certain level of social finesse that students with severe disabilities did not always possess. As outsiders looking in, students frequently witnessed their peers having fun interacting in club activities, as they experienced feelings of isolation and detachment from a distance. In each club, there was an unwritten social code and etiquette that peers naturally followed; however, as a result of students’ limited

understanding of these social rules, they were not always able to adhere to the same standards as their peers. For instance, Erika was observed not following the same ‘rules’ as her peers while participating in FCCLA meetings. On several occasions she remained seated during the choral reading of the club’s motto while everyone else stood. She also engaged in other activities (e.g., throwing away trash, asking to go to the bathroom) while officers read their monthly reports and she often shouted out random thoughts during meetings (“I like basketball,” “I’m bringing candy”) while peers listened without interrupting the speakers. Erika appeared to be unaware that she was participating differently than her peers and was seldom redirected by the club sponsor or other club members seated within close proximity.

Even though many of the clubs provided ample opportunities for socializing, students with severe disabilities still struggled as outsiders unable to fit in with their peers because of their limited social skills. For example, Gray repeatedly struggled to interact with pep club members at sporting events. After several failed attempts at getting his peers' attention, Gray would walk away from the group and wander around the school grounds by himself for long periods of time. In an effort to socialize with community members, he would inappropriately yell “Boo!” from behind them, tap them on the shoulder, or give them a large high-five in the air. Oftentimes, while still roaming the grounds, Gray would watch the pep club participate while occasionally pausing to perform the cheers with them from wherever he was standing. Gray’s peers never tried to prevent him from leaving the group or encourage him to stay with the group. Erika experienced similar challenges in socializing appropriately with peers. During monthly FCCLA meetings, club members frequently socialized while enjoying lunch together. Although Erika was consistently seated at the same table with several peers, she seldom made eye contact or attempted to speak to them. Besides an occasional “hello” from a nearby peer, Erika spent most

meetings eating alone or talking with the club sponsor. When Erika did try to communicate with others, they often asked her to repeat what she was saying. Riley also struggled to interact with peers during Key Club meetings. For instance, in an attempt to socialize with peers, Riley frequently greeted club members by saying “Hi, how are you doing?” Despite her ability to initiate an interaction, she was unable to sustain a two-way conversation for any length of time, often appearing to run out of things to say.

Club sponsors and special education teachers perceived students as having few social skills. One club sponsor reported, the student “just doesn’t have the social IQ that’s necessary” to participate in activities. In addition, another club sponsor explained her dismay for including students in activities when they did not have the necessary skills to participate: “That’s probably been the biggest issue...when we have any of those lower kids involved [in club activities], is the social issues.” Despite awareness that students lacked the necessary social skills to participate in club activities, club sponsors and special education teachers seemed to believe that students would just organically pick up skills while present at activities. Instruction on social skills was never observed.

As outsiders, students also had few established social networks in their clubs. Although having stronger peer ties would have likely helped to socially include students, these connections rarely existed beyond a few familiar peers (e.g., sibling, childhood friend). Nonetheless, familiar peers did not appear to be of much benefit to students. For example, Gray’s sister, Dede, was a senior leader in the pep club and a strong participant at club events. Unfortunately, Dede rarely had any type of interactions (e.g., eye contact, physical contact, providing directions) with Gray at athletic events or when seated with the pep club. There was only one occasion where Gray and Dede were observed to interact. Dede openly scolded Gray in front of club members for

damaging the club's mascot costume. After the confrontation, Gray was so emotionally distraught that he left the game for the remainder of the evening. This negative encounter may have resulted in Gray feeling socially stigmatized from the group.

Students with severe disabilities experienced additional social obstacles to developing relationships with peers. Although they perceived club members as being their friends and spoke often about their excitement and eagerness to spend time with them, in actuality, peers rarely socialized with students during club activities except for an occasional greeting (e.g., "Hi," "How are you?"). One club sponsor described this experience as a "social incongruity" or a social mismatch between students and their peers. This club sponsor believed that since peers were so "cordial and nice," that the student believed that everyone was her friend. However, across cases, club members seldom appeared to have the same mutual feelings of kinship as experienced by the students. As a result of this mismatch, students might have inaccurately believed that peers wanted to socialize with them as friends (e.g., talk to them, sit beside them) during their involvement in club activities.

Supports Provided: Too Much, Too Little, Just Right

Students with severe disabilities received a wide variety of person-provided supports during club activities. Individuals providing support included special education teachers, club sponsors, club members, and parents. Given that clubs were predominantly facilitated by club members, it seems appropriate that club members would also support the participation of students with severe disabilities; however, ongoing peer-support was only utilized in one case. In most cases intermittent support was provided by adults (i.e., special education teachers, club sponsors, parents) and entailed simple verbal prompts (e.g., "go get scissors," "put your name on this line"). Only one special education teacher delivered additional types of prompting (i.e.,

gestural, physical). Although a range of accommodations and support needs (e.g., adapted materials, visual aids, use of sign language) were listed on each student's IEP, students only received person-provided supports during their club involvement.

Too much support was given to Erika during FCCLA, as she received intensive on-going supports from her club sponsor. For instance, while selling tickets the club sponsor instructed Erika to stay with her and complete simple tasks like tearing off tickets to hand to customers, even though Erika was fully capable of contributing in other ways (e.g., collecting money, greeting customers). Sometimes the club sponsor would take over tasks, such as taking the sign-in sheet from Erika and signing her name to it. Erika also seemed to have an overreliance on the club sponsor. For example, Erika would persistently tell the club sponsor to complete activities for her (e.g., throw her plate away, get her ice), even though she was capable of completing these activities independently. Due to the intense level of supports that Erika received from the club sponsor, she appeared to become socially isolated from her peers. Club members consistently kept their distance from Erika and rarely spoke to her at meetings beyond an occasional informal greeting. Peers also did not offer any additional supports that might have contributed to increasing Erika's involvement in activities.

Too little support was provided for Gray during pep club. Consequently, Gray primarily participated by himself in club activities even though he might have benefited from having the same types of supports (e.g., scheduled breaks, visual aids) that he received in other inclusive contexts (i.e., physical education, art classes). Although infrequent, peers provided support on occasion. For instance, a club member would redirect him (show him the correct hand signals for a cheer, tell him to calm down when he became too animated) or help with simple tasks (e.g., putting on boxing gloves, adjusting his costume). The type of peer provided support appeared to

be very natural and most likely resembled the kind of assistance that club members would provide to anyone. Support from the club sponsor or special education teacher seldom occurred. The club sponsor acknowledged her discomfort with supporting Gray and noted that she sought help from the Vice Principal if she had any concerns about Gray's behavior. Meanwhile the special education teacher relied on the club sponsor to let her know if Gray needed extra support and she rarely prompted Gray to return to the pep group when she witnessed him roaming alone at athletic events. Gray's mother attended some of the games. When she was present, she provided basic prompting (e.g., making a Shhh! motion, waving her hand and shaking her head no) to help Gray understand how to participate. Remarkably, even with little assistance during activities, Gray still managed to participate by reciting simple cheers, making the correct hand motions, and on one occasion leading other club members in a cheer.

Riley was the only student who appeared to receive the right amount of support while engaged in club activities. Oftentimes, peers offered their assistance by simply walking up to Riley and asking her if she needed help with anything. Peers that were more familiar with Riley also facilitated her partial participation in activities. For example, Riley's lunch buddy Rae, assisted Riley to make blankets for sick children by tying two strands of material together and then instructing Riley to pull the strands tightly to make a knot. During this activity Rae continuously provided simple instructions and encouragement. At one point, Rae faded supports while allowing Riley to finish a task that she had mastered on her own. In addition, the special education teacher provided occasional modeling (e.g., demonstrating how to use hand-over hand) for peers and the club sponsor. Over time, the club sponsor became comfortable assisting Riley with simple tasks (e.g., showing her how to tear scotch tape from a dispenser) after spending several weeks observing how the special education teacher interacted with the student.

Safety in Numbers

Across cases, club sponsors, special education teachers, and parents appeared to agree that students needed some level of adult supervision while participating in school club activities. Concerns for safety ranged from minor to more serious in nature. While the FCCLA sponsor voiced her concern for potentially harmful materials in the kitchen (e.g., sharp knife, hot stove) that Erika might use, the pep club sponsor felt uneasy about Gray's past history of touching (e.g., tapping shoulder, giving a hug) females he did not know well. Parents, especially, felt the need for their children to be closely monitored. Riley's parents were concerned with their daughter sharing too much personal information with peers that she did not know well. Gray's mother also voiced her concerns for Gray's safety while involved in activities. She openly acknowledged that "we struggle with his safety . . . everyone he's ever met is his friend."

Participants rarely discussed whose responsibility it was to ensure the safety of students as they participated. In fact, only one club sponsor and special education teacher reported that supervision was part of their responsibility. The pep club sponsor described her role as "standing in the outskirts as a chaperone, making sure things are safe," while Riley's special education teacher believed that "making sure she [Riley] is safe" was her responsibility. Some participants might have even been unaware of the lack of supervision. For instance, Gray's special education teacher had a false sense of security about Gray's safety while involved in activities. She reported believing that the club sponsor was "keeping a close watch" on Gray, when in reality, this rarely occurred.

Despite participants' beliefs about the need for ongoing supervision, students were seldom closely monitored by adults. The lack of monitoring posed potential safety issues for some students, including Gray. Gray was constantly on the move when present for school club

activities. He would walk around the school grounds, unattended, for anywhere between 10 to 30 minutes at a time. Although the pep club sponsor had previously reported supervision of students as part of her duties, she was rarely within close view of the group. Instead, supervision typically took the form of the club sponsor or head principal walking beside group members to say hello, performing a quick check-in and then moving on. On one occasion, Gray appeared to be victimized by a peer who was not affiliated with the club while walking around the outskirts of the football stadium by himself. Gray was approached by a male peer who he appeared to recognize from his high school. While standing in the midst of multiple teenagers, the male peer told Gray to complete several inappropriate tasks as he and the others watched (i.e., hug a female peer who was standing outside the group, hug an adult stranger). As Gray completed each of the tasks, he was openly mocked in front of the group. Gray appeared to enjoy the negative attention, most likely unaware of the actual nature of his interactions.

Apart from adult monitoring, club members provided an extra layer of supervision for students with severe disabilities. Overall, peers seldom initiated interactions with students, except during circumstances where safety was a concern. For example, Key Club and FCCLA members frequently volunteered to escort Riley and Erika to school club activities, as they understood that these students could easily become directionally lost on their own. There were times when Gray would become so animated (i.e., running and jumping) that he posed a physical threat to others and club members would need to calmly redirect him. Ultimately, students with severe disabilities were the safest when they were participating side by side with their peers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how secondary students with severe disabilities participate in extracurricular school clubs. Four themes emerged: (a) going with the flow; (b)

being on the outside looking in; (c) supports provided: too much, too little, just right; and (d) safety in numbers. In general, students participated in the same types of activities as their peers (e.g., attending meetings, performing community service) and attended most club events; however, students with severe disabilities seldom demonstrated the skills necessary to be active participants, and club members typically did not engage with students in substantive ways during club activities. Furthermore, special education teachers and club sponsors provided limited support or monitoring of students during their participation, and concerns for students' safety was at times problematic.

Differences in Participation

Students with severe disabilities generally had less involvement in club activities as compared to their peers, in part, because they did not always have sufficient supports in place or the required skills necessary to complete tasks independently. Many of the skills not observed (e.g., carrying on a two-way conversation, communicating an activity preference, taking turns during a game), would have helped to enhance students' extracurricular involvement. No club sponsors or special education teachers provided specific skill instruction before, during, or after club activities although these participants held strong beliefs about the importance of students learning skills needed for adulthood. A related study by Pence and Dymond (2016) provides additional insights into this issue. The authors reported that although special education teachers valued including students with severe disabilities in school clubs, they did not view student involvement as a time for providing instruction on priority skills. Results from the current study and Pence and Dymond (2016) illustrate how one's values do not always align with actual practice. To this end, these findings continue to highlight the critical importance of teaching highly valued skills in extracurricular settings.

In many ways, although students with severe disabilities participated differently than their peers, this difference did not appear to influence the enjoyment that students received from participation. In fact, students were viewed as fellow club members in each school setting, and were generally accepted by club participants, irrespective of students' differences in skills and abilities. These results complement the literature on extracurricular participation of students without disabilities (see Bohnert et al., 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006), as many of these youth were also reported to have received enjoyment from extracurricular participation, in addition to other intrinsic benefits (e.g., improved athletic skills, increased socialization with friends).

Findings from this study also support what is currently known about peer interactions in extracurricular environments and provide additional context for understanding differences in participation among students with disabilities. According to Brock et al. (2016), peers might be less willing to interact with students that have complex communication and support needs. Brock et al. postulate that because peers lack understanding about students with severe disabilities, they simply choose not to interact because they are uncertain how to do so. In the current study, peers were hesitant to interact with two of the focal students. These findings signify a greater need for preparing peers for participation in extracurricular activities that include students with severe disabilities. Essentially, peers may require an introductory level of preparation in order to understand how students with severe disabilities communicate and learn simple techniques for how to interact with students during club activities.

Club sponsors' limited understanding of techniques for including students with severe disabilities might also account for differences in student participation. All of the club sponsors were general education teachers with very limited understanding about the typical characteristics and support needs of students with severe disabilities. General education teachers also never

received training from the special education teachers prior to or during student involvement in activities. As a result of club sponsors' limited knowledge and experiences, they oftentimes appeared to question their own aptitude for including students. Cameron and Cook (2013) have emphasized this concern in their work, as they argue that educators are susceptible to acquiring negative perceptions about their own abilities when unsure of appropriate strategies for working with youth with disabilities. Despite what the general education teachers might have been experiencing related to their own competencies, most of them were still willing to include students in club events, and in some instances, enhance their own knowledge of students with severe disabilities by observing peer interactions and requesting additional resources.

Issues Related to Supports

Person-provided support was the only type of assistance students received during their involvement in club activities. Although research has shown that students with severe disabilities rely heavily on peers and other adults to support their involvement in extracurricular activities (Eriksson, 2005; Kleinert et al., 2007), this finding was somewhat unanticipated given the fact that students had a range of accommodations listed on their IEPs (e.g., visual schedule, extended wait time). Most club meetings took place during the school day when staff (e.g., paraprofessional, special education teacher) could have been available to provide additional support. Due to the limited types of supports provided to students, one might question how other types of supports could have benefited students' involvement. At a minimum, students should be provided with at least the same types of support that they receive during the rest of the school day. In fact, IDEA (2004) requires that IEP teams give consideration to the supplementary aids, services, and supports, that students with disabilities will require for participation in extracurricular activities (Sec 614 (d) (1) (A) (i)). The literature on extracurricular participation

of students with disabilities also describes the need for collaboration among important stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, club sponsors) about how to best support students' involvement in extracurricular activities (Agran et al., in-press; Pence & Dymond, 2016; Swedeen et al., 2010). Findings from this study also support this notion, as club sponsors and special education teachers seldom collaborated to discuss focal students' participation in activities.

Understanding the impact of adult-provided support is also necessary when determining the quality of students' participation. One student frequently received intense, ongoing, and unnecessary support from the club sponsor. Over time, this student appeared to develop an overreliance on the club sponsor by asking the sponsor to complete simple tasks that the student was capable of completing. Consequently, as a result of these intense supports, the student became withdrawn from her peers and seldom spoke to club members seated within a short distance from her. The literature is replete with findings demonstrating that excessive use of adult-driven support, typically from paraprofessionals, can lead to social isolation from peers (Broer et al., 2005; Carter, Swedeen, et al., 2010). This finding underscores the importance of intentional collaboration with all adult support providers, to ensure that these individuals are trained appropriately for supporting and including students with severe disabilities. It is also important for adults to be cognizant of the influence that their presence may bring when supporting students, especially in a non-academic environment such as club settings, as peers are oftentimes less willing to socialize with students with severe disabilities when adults are within close view (Carter, Sisco, et al., 2008; Giangreco, 2007).

Previous studies have shown that adults are typically the individuals providing support to students with disabilities during extracurricular activities (e.g., Kleinert et al., 2007; Eriksson,

2005); however, there appears to be a trend towards increasing the role of peer-supports (Pence & Dymond, 2016). Findings from the current study provide some evidence to support this shift, as one student, Riley, periodically received natural supports during participation in club activities. Interestingly, peers who were familiar with the students (e.g., sibling, childhood friend) were not always the individuals who chose to offer assistance. This finding diverges from related literature that recommends selecting peers for support who have an established relationship with students (Brock, et al., 2016). The authors postulate that the nature of the individuals' disability might become a potential factor when familiar peers are making decisions about whether or not to initiate interactions. For example, given Gray's extensive challenging behaviors, Gray's sibling might have chosen to socially isolate from him to avoid further social stigmatizing from peers.

Limitations

When interpreting these results, several limitations should be considered. First, this study was limited to three exploratory cases that focused on students who participated in school spirit, family, and service clubs. All cases were similarly located in rural communities at small high schools (less than 500 students). Selection of additional participants, types of clubs (e.g., hobby, academic), and locations (e.g., small urban communities, large urban areas) could have yielded new insights and strengthened transferability of the findings. Second, interviews with special education teachers, club sponsors, and parents did not accurately capture the views of all individuals with knowledge of the focal student's involvement in school clubs. Perspectives from paraprofessionals, club members, administrators, as well as the students themselves, might have yielded additional important insights. Third, the methodology used throughout the course of this study was in close alignment with multi-case research (see Stake, 2006). Although the

study conformed primarily to this methodology, there are other perspectives and methods for conducting multiple case study research (e.g., Shkedi, 2005; Yin, 2009) that were not considered in this study.

Implications for Research and Practice

The findings from this multiple case study offer insights into the participation of three students with severe disabilities in school clubs with peers without disabilities. Replication of the current study with additional students in different types of clubs and within other locations (i.e., suburban/urban high schools) may help to further clarify how students participate in school clubs. Research should also examine whether the presence of peers without disabilities affects student participation; specifically, whether differences exist in how students participate in school clubs that include students without disabilities compared to school clubs that only include students with disabilities. Findings from the current study also suggest three new areas for research. First, students with severe disabilities did not receive instruction before, during, or after club activities, and they frequently seemed unsure about how to participate. Interventions that demonstrate effective methods for teaching social and task-related skills within the context of school clubs are needed. Second, all students received person-provided supports during school clubs; however, these supports ranged in effectiveness and did not include the types of supports present on each student's IEP. Future research might explore how special education teachers determine the types of supports provided to students with severe disabilities during school clubs and how they view their role in designing and offering support. Third, peers were oftentimes hesitant to interact with students with severe disabilities during club activities. Researchers should seek to understand the role that peers play in supporting students with severe

disabilities in school clubs and the reasons certain peers choose to interact with students who require substantial supports to engage in activities.

Our findings suggest several implications for practice. An overarching recommendation is that special education teachers, club sponsors, the student, the student's parent(s), and others as appropriate, engage in formal collaborative planning prior to the student's participation in school clubs or other extracurricular activities. This planning should include clarification of (a) the club's activities, (b) how the student will participate, (c) supports the student needs to participate, (d) safety concerns and how they will be addressed, (e) roles and responsibilities of persons involved with the club, and (f) how club members will be taught to collaborate effectively with the student. Importantly, students with severe disabilities should have the opportunity to learn and practice skills during club activities, thus the plan should also identify skills on which the student will receive instruction to enhance participation in the social and task-oriented aspects of the club. Those who serve as club sponsors must also receive appropriate training to understand how students with severe disabilities can participate and benefit from school clubs, and how they can best structure activities to support students to be active, engaged members. This plan should be revisited regularly and adjusted as needed to ensure the student's success, safety, learning, and overall enjoyment of the club.

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