

Community-based Instruction

Community-Based Instruction and Learning (CBI) is an evidence-based teaching practice that involves real-world learning experiences in natural community settings. It is designed to help students with disabilities acquire, generalize, and maintain functional, academic, social, and life skills necessary for greater independence, inclusion, and post-school success. Rather than only simulating tasks in the classroom, CBI takes learning into real environments—like shops, banks, public transport, and recreational venues—where skills are needed and used in everyday life.

How It Should Be Done: Effective CBI Practices

1. Person-Centred and Purposeful Planning

Select community settings and tasks that are meaningful to each student.
Link tasks to students' PATH or Individual Learning Plan (ILP) goals.

2. Curriculum Integration

Align CBI activities with Australian Curriculum (ACARA) learning areas or General Capabilities.
For students on GIL (General Capabilities in Learning), integrate functional and life skills through the Personal and Social Capability, Literacy, and Numeracy continua.

3. Skill-Specific Teaching

Pre-teach skills in school before applying them in the community.
Use task analysis, modelling, prompting, and fading to support skill acquisition.

4. Use Natural Reinforcers and Community Partners

Encourage authentic community interaction (e.g., ordering food from a server, asking for assistance).
Work with local businesses or councils to facilitate access and inclusion.

5. Reflection and Follow-Up

Engage students in reflective discussion after each session.
Embed evidence of learning into portfolios, student-led conferences, or progress reports.

Curriculum Connections: ACARA & GIL

ACARA – Australian Curriculum

CBI links naturally with General Capabilities, especially:

- Personal and Social Capability – managing relationships, making decisions, contributing to community life.
- Literacy – reading signs, asking questions, understanding instructions.
- Numeracy – money handling, time awareness, distance and quantity estimation.

Critical and Creative Thinking – navigating new challenges in real time.

GIL – General Capabilities in Learning (QLD Special Schools)

For students not accessing age-equivalent content, CBI aligns with:

- Community and Citizenship strand
- Living Independently and Safely
- Functional Numeracy and Literacy
- CBI enables the application of skills in real settings, a key focus of GIL.

Why It Is Important

Promotes Skill Generalization: Skills taught in the classroom are more likely to transfer when reinforced in real settings.

Increases Independence: Students develop practical competencies to manage daily tasks and navigate community systems.

Enhances Inclusion: Builds confidence and capability for students to engage in meaningful community participation.

Supports Transition Goals: Critical for preparing students for post-school options—employment, volunteering, supported living, or recreation.

Improves Motivation: Authentic contexts boost engagement, relevance, and ownership of learning.

Examples of CBI Activities

Community Location	Skills Targeted
Supermarket	Identifying items, budgeting, social communication at checkout
Public Bus	Reading a timetable, paying fare, road safety awareness
Café	Ordering food, using money, interacting with staff
Library	Locating items, following rules, using community resources
Council Offices	Participating in civic duties, requesting information
Op Shop or Workplace Visit	Work sampling, interacting with volunteers/employers

Summary for Teachers

“Community-based learning is not an excursion—it is a curriculum-aligned, goal-driven opportunity for students to become active participants in their community, developing the skills that matter most for life beyond school.”

How It Should Be Done

-  Person-centred and purposeful planning
-  Curriculum integration
-  Skill-specific teaching
-  Use natural reinforcers and community partners
-  Reflection and follow-up

Examples of CBI Activities

Community Location	Skills
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Curriculum Connections



ACARA—Australian Curriculum



GIL—General Capabilities in Learning

Why It Is Important



Promotes skill generalization



Increases independence



Enhances inclusion



Supports transition goals

Improves motivation

Here is an extensive list of Community-Based Instruction (CBI) options, aligned with the 8 learning areas of the ACARA Version 9 curriculum. These examples are specifically adapted for students with intellectual and other disabilities and are suitable for use in special education and inclusive settings. The activities help students apply curriculum concepts in authentic, real-world contexts.

1. Mathematics

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Supermarket shopping	Budgeting, estimating cost, counting money, calculating change
Café visits	Reading prices, comparing costs, using money and receipts
Public transport trips	Reading timetables, calculating travel time, understanding sequencing
Op shop purchases	Applying discount percentages, rounding to nearest dollar
Bank visit	Understanding saving, deposit/withdrawal concepts
Planning an outing	Budgeting, time planning, using maps for distance/time

2. English including but not only Literacy

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Library membership and borrowing	Locating books, understanding cataloguing, using library systems
Reading signs in the community	Functional literacy: signs, menus, maps, labels, forms
Ordering at a café or food outlet	Verbal communication, reading menus, understanding sequences
Writing shopping lists or bus trip reports	Recount writing, procedural text, sequencing
Following community instructions	Listening comprehension, interpreting verbal directions

3. Science

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Visiting botanical gardens or parks	Observing plant life, life cycles, ecosystems
Recycling centre or landfill tour	Environmental impact, sustainability, human impact on earth
Cooking in the community (e.g., BBQ at park)	Heat transfer, states of matter, safety with materials
Petting zoo/farm visit	Animal classification, habitats, care needs
Weather observation during outings	Collecting and recording data, making predictions

4. Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Museum or cultural centre visit	Exploring history, identity, community roles
Civic building visits (e.g., council, post office)	Understanding government services, roles in the community
Mapping community walks	Geography: mapping skills, spatial awareness, symbols
Visiting places of worship or cultural importance	Understanding diversity and values
Neighbourhood walk with historical focus	Then vs now comparisons, storytelling, landmarks

5. The Arts

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Art gallery visit	Interpreting visual art, describing impressions, exploring technique
Live performance or theatre trip	Responding to drama/music/dance, understanding audience roles
Community mural creation or public art tour	Art in public spaces, collaboration, meaning in design
Photography in the park	Framing, perspective, creative expression
Dance class or movement session in a public space	Responding to music through movement, improvisation

6. Technologies (Design and Digital)

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Visiting electronics or tech shops (e.g., JB Hi-Fi)	Exploring device use, comparing technologies
Taking photos using tablets during outings	Capturing, editing, saving digital content
Using maps and GPS apps	Navigation, interpreting icons, digital literacy
Using self-checkout kiosks	Human-computer interaction, procedural processes
Participating in a community-based cooking class	Designing recipes, evaluating processes, using equipment safely

7. Health and Physical Education (HPE)

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Gym or pool sessions	Physical activity, following routines, using facilities
Walking or cycling tracks	Road safety, stamina, mapping, environmental awareness
Shopping for healthy food	Nutrition, food group awareness, reading labels
Ordering from a menu with health in mind	Making healthy choices, decision-making, consequences
First aid station visit or guest speaker	Health awareness, safety response, personal wellbeing

8. Languages (Other than English)

CBI Option	Linked Skills
Visiting cultural precincts (e.g., Chinatown, Italian Quarter)	Cultural immersion, exposure to signage and language use
Ordering food in the target language	Speaking/listening practice, real-world interaction
Talking with native speakers or guests	Social interaction, greetings, asking for items
Attending multicultural festivals	Cultural appreciation, traditions, music, food
Label reading or signage translation practice	Vocabulary building, functional literacy in context

Integration with GIL (General Capabilities in Learning)

Across all learning areas, CBI fosters:

Personal and Social Capability: Managing relationships, decision-making, emotional regulation.

Literacy & Numeracy: Functional skills in context (money, time, communication).

Critical and Creative Thinking: Real-life problem-solving, adapting in unfamiliar settings.

Final Note for Teachers

To be most effective:

- Ensure explicit links to ILPs, GIL targets, and the Australian Curriculum learning intentions.
- Use a task analysis approach for each outing.
- Incorporate pre-visit lessons and post-visit reflections.
- Build in community partnerships to sustain real-world relevance and post-school readiness.



COMMUNITY BASED INSTRUCTION



MATHEMATICS

Supermarket Shopping

- Budgeting
- Estimate Costs
- Counting Money
- Calculating Change

ENGLISH

Library Membership

- Functional Literacy
- Locating books
- Understanding Cataloguing

SCIENCE

Visiting gardens

- Observing Plant Life & Life cycles
- Ecosystem
- Environmental Impacts

H.A.S.S

Cultural Centre Visit

- Exploring history, identify and community roles
- Understanding diversity and values

THE ARTS

Art Gallery Visit

- Interpreting visual art, describing impressions
- Exploring technique
- Creative Expression

TECHNOLOGIES

Visiting Tech Shops

- Exploring device use
- Comparing Technologies
- Digital Literacy

HPE

Gym Sessions

- Physical Activity
- Following Routines
- Food group awareness
- Health Awareness

LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

Cultural Hub Visit

- Cultural Immersion
- Speaking and listening practice
- Vocabulary building

Here is a cross-curricular unit of work designed for special school students aged 10–14 who are working at a Prep-level (Foundation/Level A–B). The unit incorporates Community-Based Instruction (CBI) across as many learning areas of the Australian Curriculum Version 9 as possible, with activities tailored for engagement, accessibility, life skill development, and functional learning.

Unit Title: "Living and Learning in My Community"

Unit Duration:

6–8 weeks, with 1–2 community visits per week.

Target Group:

Students with intellectual and/or multiple disabilities, aged 10–14, working at Prep/Foundation (Level A–B).

Unit Focus:

To develop students' functional communication, social interaction, literacy, numeracy, independence, and community awareness through real-life experiences in their local area.

Curriculum Learning Areas & Activities

Mathematics (Number, Measurement, Money)

CBI Activity: Shopping at the supermarket or school canteen.

Skills:

- Matching coins/notes.
- Identifying numbers and prices.
- Using a visual schedule or token economy to count items.

In-school support:

- Money play with real and toy coins.
- Role-playing shopkeepers/customers.

English (Literacy)

CBI Activity: Visiting the library and café.

Skills:

- Recognising signs and symbols.
- Requesting items using visuals, AAC, or speech.
- Listening and responding to greetings.

In-school support:

- Shared reading of community-themed books (e.g., "Going to the Shops").
- Sentence construction using visuals or symbols (e.g., "I want a muffin").

Science (Biological and Earth Sciences)

CBI Activity: Walking to the local park or garden.

Skills:

- Observing plants and animals.
- Exploring weather changes and seasons.
- Caring for living things (e.g., watering, not picking flowers).

In-school support:

- Growing seeds in the classroom.
- Nature sorting games (living/non-living, hot/cold).

Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS)

CBI Activity: Visit to council offices, post office, or museum.

Skills:

- Recognising roles of community workers.
- Exploring old vs. new (e.g., transport).
- Participating in a mini "mail run" to post letters/cards.

In-school support:

- Dress-up as community helpers.
- Classroom post box for letter writing.

Languages (Chinese)

CBI Activity: Visit to a cultural precinct or event.

Skills:

- Listening to different greetings.
- Experiencing music, food, or visuals from another culture.

In-school support:

- Songs, greetings, and visual displays in the focus language.
- Cooking activities with cultural themes.

The Arts (Visual Arts, Drama, Music)

CBI Activity: Attending a public art display or music performance.

Skills:

- Responding to colour, sound, movement.
- Creating artworks based on a community visit.
- Participating in movement or song in response to environment.

In-school support:

- Collaging community places.
- Role-playing people in the community (e.g., bus driver, librarian).

Technologies (Design and Digital)

CBI Activity: Using self-checkouts or digital signs (e.g., library kiosks).

Skills:

Making a selection on a screen.

- Scanning or touching a button.
- Using switches or tablets to take photos of community signs.

In-school support:

- Simple apps for matching community places or signs.
- Switch-access games about transport or shopping.

Health and Physical Education (HPE)

CBI Activity: Walking to and using a playground or community gym.

Skills:

- Practicing road safety (stop, wait, walk).
- Gross motor movement on equipment.
- Recognising safe/unsafe behaviours.

In-school support:

- Obstacle courses or movement songs based on community travel.
- Safety games with visuals (e.g., "green for go").

Weekly Structure (Example)

Week	Focus Site	Community	In-School Learning	CBI Visit Goal
1	Supermarket		Money play, food words	Buy 1–2 items
2	Library		Story about libraries	Borrow a book
3	Park		Explore nature objects	Collect leaves
4	Post Office		Write/draw postcards	Post them
5	Playground		Road safety songs	Use crossings safely
6	Art Gallery		Colour mixing	Name colours seen
7	Café		Practise ordering	Request snack/drink

Week	Focus Site	Community	In-School Learning	CBI Visit Goal
8	Council Visit		Dress as community workers	Say thank you

Assessment Ideas

- Photo portfolio of participation and engagement.
- Work samples: art, photos, symbol writing.
- Observational checklists (e.g., requesting help, matching money, walking safely).
- Reflections using symbols or visual choice boards.

General Capabilities Addressed

- Personal and Social Capability: Interacting respectfully, managing transitions.
- Literacy: Recognising symbols, using communication systems.
- Numeracy: Identifying quantity, using sequencing.
- ICT Capability: Using assistive tech or touch screens.