Spring 2016

Understanding the Push-In/Pull-Out Method: Why Support Matters for Socialization

Christina L. Raiti
Trinity College, Hartford Connecticut, christina.raiti@trincoll.edu

Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

Understanding the Push-In/Pull-Out Method: Why Support Matters for Socialization
Christina Raiti 2016
Senior Research Project
Educational Studies Program
Trinity College, Hartford CT
Faculty supervisor: Jack Dougherty
Last updated April 13, 2016

My research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in order to answer: How do the social dynamics of children with autism change as they transition throughout the day from general ed to special ed settings in a Hartford public school? Findings are based upon coded observations of three third-grade students with autism for more than twenty hours in various classroom settings, and also thematic analysis of interviews with three of their classroom educators at the site in Hartford, Connecticut. The findings show that students with autism are more likely to have positive physical and verbal interactions in structured environments rather than unstructured environments throughout the day.

Intro

Since the IDEA in 1975, federal law has required that all children, disabled and non-disabled, receive a free and appropriate education. This law ultimately led to the creation of inclusion. This method allows children with special needs to spend time in the general education classroom for a specified amount of time. There have been many different types of inclusion methods throughout the years and there is much discussion as to which method is the most effective. However, most research has focused on the evaluation of these methods using academics as a scale. This included everything from test scores to reading scores to academic skill gains. My research moves the literature forward by studying the social outcomes of this inclusion method. My research question combines research methods in order to convey a rich story from the accounts of everyone present in the push-in/pull-out method at a Hartford school that I refer to by a pseudonym, ESPY Elementary. How do the social dynamics of children with autism change as they transition throughout the day from general ed to special ed settings in a Hartford public school?

Based on observations of three students with autism and interviews with both general and special education teachers at ESPY Elementary, I argue that more positive interactions occur in structured versus unstructured environments, and that the presence of a paraprofessional is more likely to produce positive interactions. It is not as critical for the student with autism to be in a general ed setting or a special ed setting, (which was originally the question I posed), but the importance lies within the structure of the activities occurring in both spaces that affects the child's ability to socialize. If

aspects of the plan are missing, such as the paraprofessional, then the program will produce a lesser amount of positive occurrences.

What You Need to Know About Special Education

In order to understand my research question, it is crucial to first understand a few key terms and concepts embedded within the historical context. Historically, people with disabilities have experienced injustice, experienced unfair, and sometimes cruel treatment, and have been denied rights provided to others. For a large period of time, children who were disabled were denied full and fair access to educational opportunities. Federal lawmakers changed this in 1975 by passing one of the most important educational laws entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This law called for a free and appropriate public education for all children who have disabilities. The law consisted of six parts: zero reject, nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation, free appropriate public education, Least Restrictive Environment, procedural safeguards, and shared decision making. For the purpose of this project, the most important clause is Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which refers to the method of educating special ed students with nondisabled students to the maximum extent possible.

After passage of IDEA, methods evolved and the idea of LRE led to the creation of a method titled "inclusion", a term used today and in my subject school, which describes the placement of special ed students into the general ed classroom with the appropriate support services. Moving forward, different methods of inclusion have evolved in the classroom and have varied from school to school. Once the IDEA law

was passed, students with disabilities were immediately thrown into general ed classrooms. This often happened without warning to general ed teachers and without time for proper training. Methods such as partial inclusion, co-teaching, consultation/collaborative teaching, special education class (partially self-contained), and push-in/pull-out methods have been used in public schools across the country. Currently, the Hartford Public Schools are using the push-in/pull-out method. This is a method often used in general ed classrooms regardless of the presence of children with disabilities. The push-in/pull-out method is a combination of a specialist coming into a classroom in order to give the appropriate help and a child being taken out of the classroom for another teacher to provide him/her with the necessary help. It varies based on the individual and the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). An Individualized Education Program refers to the details of a student's education that is created by a team in order to make sure the student receives the most effective education specific to the individual. Most schools that use the push-in/pull-out method require a paraprofessional. A paraprofessional is an individual who is given a specific aspect of a professional job but is not fully qualified to practice the professional job. For example, a paraprofessional may have studied to be a teacher but is not qualified to actually teach. He/she focuses on specific skills associated with the teaching profession. In terms of a paraprofessional in the push-in/pull-out method, this refers to an adult who is specialized in helping or assisting children with extra needs in all types of classrooms.

Literature Review

To begin, there have been thousands of studies done on the inclusion process and particularly on the push-in/pull-out method and the benefits it provides to children with autism.   However, these studies all vary from my own in a variety of different ways.   The researchers I found focus on academic rather than social gains, have a larger impersonal sample size, and have only one type of data. I break my analysis down into three components: academics vs. social outcomes, intimacy and quality, and qualitative combined with quantitative. Within these subsections are the studies that differ from my own and explanations as to how my research moves beyond theirs.

Academic vs. Social Outcomes

After long hours of research and meeting with a research librarian, I have come to the conclusion that most researchers are interested in the academic gain of the inclusionary method. A possible reason for this could be the current testing movement in the United States and scholars are most interested in how our schools can bring the children with disabilities up to speed. However, after working with children with autism, I have realized it is more about providing them with the social skills necessary for life rather than helping them achieve an A on a test. For this reason, my research aims to tackle the social outcomes of the push-in/pull-out method rather than the academic outcomes.

A psychological study was one of the only ones I was able to find using social gains as a measure for success. However, Blew intended to analyze the types of social skills obtained in an out of the school context. I will be observing interactions in a school setting for my approach. Blew's study looked at two children with autism who

were paired with two children without autism. Specifically, it marked the consumption of social skills through modeling, baseline, and peer tutoring. It was found that the children with autism benefited the most from the peer tutoring. The goals of the social skills were based on community learning skills. This is relevant to my research because it allowed for an understanding of the benefits children with autism could potentially have when being included in a general education class. Taking these studies a bit further and in another direction, I will be exploring the social effects of inclusion on children with autism in a school setting, and I will add the teachers' perceptions.

Next, a study based on the assessment of inclusion reports students' academic gains in response to a model of inclusion. Douglas Marston and David Heistad used three types of methods in order to evaluate an "effective model". This study looked at 670 students who had learning disabilities, who again could have varied in severity. They used a state standard measurement, qualitative data, and surveys. While the range in data collection is more similar to my own study, this study once again solely focuses on academic gains. Mine moves forward by addressing social outcomes, which is the sole purpose of the inclusion method.

Lastly, a study focusing on paraprofessionals in the classroom once again based its outcomes on academic gains.   It examined academic improvement with the use of the paraprofessional over time. Rebecca Mazurik-Charles and Candice Stefanou addressed the need for an aide in the classroom. It showed that not only did an adult need to be present, but the adult needed to be trained in the inclusionary method. This study included seven children who were chosen nonrandom sampling and varied in grades. This study showed that there was no gain over a long period of time but that

gain was present in short periods of time. My research varies because I choose not to do a longitudinal based study in that there are too many outside factors and previous history that is next to impossible to find on children in Hartford. My study has nothing to do with gain over time, but looks at current gains in the classroom on any given day. I touch on change over time in the interviews with the teacher but it is not my basis for evaluation and results.   Once again, my study also does not focus on academic gain but it focuses on social gain.

Intimacy and Quality

The sample size is not the most important part of the study because more subjects are always ideal. However, I argue it is how you analyze the sample size that matters most. Most of the studies I found throughout my research focus on a much larger sample size and are unable to reenact close intimate interactions. Instead, in my study, I chose a sample size of three because I wanted my research to tell a story of intimate interactions. Through my observations and interviews, I want the teachers to be able to not only relate to the push-in/pull-out model, but also relate their experiences with the individual children. My analysis will be more thoughtful and intimate because I am able to make connections within the participants.

To begin, I used a study that was based on academic gain among students with autism. Quantitative researchers, E. Michael Foster and Erin Pearson looked at older children and chose to look at a total of 484 students over a long period of time. The results show that there is no academic benefit for being in a general ed classroom in terms of college education and receiving jobs.   In my own study, I only looked at three

boys, which allowed me to focus on key observations. This allowed me to look at intimate interactions between the students and their peers and the students and their teachers.   It also allowed the teachers to make a specific reference to how the program affects an individual child with autism rather than just any child with a disability. I was able to gain a more intimate understanding of the population.   Lastly, my research varied from this other study because I chose to focus on the social gains of the child rather than on the academic gains.

Another qualitative and quantitative study with a large sample size looked at pull-out programs that focused on older children who were learning disabled, but not necessarily autistic. Patricia Rea, Virginia McLaughlin, and Chris Walhter-Thomas looked at eighth graders with learning disabilities. This study included all types of learning disabled children in two middle schools, which ending up being a large sample pool over 500. They used qualitative and quantitative data. My research will move beyond this by comparing the teachers' perceptions to my observations and looking for social occurrences instead of evaluating academic gains or loses.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative

Most of the research on this topic either contained numerical values or strictly observations and interviews. With a close analysis, I will then be able to use two means of data in order to answer my question.   This method, dealing with both numerical values and interview transcripts, will lead to a fuller, richer analysis.

A study based on peer mediation is useful to my project in several ways. McConnell was able to pick a specific mediation program and study its effectiveness through observation. This study differs from mine in that it used one means of data to evaluate the effectiveness of a model. Scott McConnell's research focused on out of school interventions where the children with autism gain from different types of interventions. McConnell acknowledged that there were interventions provided as services so it did not qualify as full inclusion. McConnell used strictly observational data in order to determine whether or not the model was effective. My study varies from this study because I am combining two types of data (qualitative and quantitative) to depict interactions within a system, rather than labeling the system as effective or ineffective.

A study based on lack of support and lack of communication is important for my background because those were two major themes I found in my interviews. Douglas Marston touched on the theme of lack of support in the classroom and lack of communication between teachers. While Marston only used interview data, my study compares two types of qualitative data: teacher interviews and classroom observations. I intend that my project will be closely related to this one considering the type of research is anthropological and educational based.

Overall, my study uses previous literature to add to its legitimacy, but varies in a couple of different ways. I will be looking at a smaller sample pool as compared to all of the above studies, use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, and will analyze social outcomes rather than academic outcomes. My study adds intimacy, and is able to tell a story through using interviews. The sources above that used

quantitative data used in such large quantities that there is no way to decipher whether or not the teacher and the children are connecting and working together to produce the best results. I am looking at specific teachers and specific children so I will be able to make an association I can analyze the specific interactions that are happening between the teacher and the student in the given classroom. With these differences in approaches, I hope to obtain a more thoughtful analysis.

Methodology

In order to answer my question, I conducted both a qualitative and quantitative study. I have two sources of data: observational data of three boys and three open-ended interviews with the special ed and both general ed teachers. I strictly observed and had informal conversation with three boys in the third grade at ESPY Elementary School and I followed them each for three hours a day. The boys were not randomly selected. Instead, they were chosen specifically based on the school's spectrum of autism. They all fall in the same category on the spectrum (towards the right, meaning high functioning, NOT highly autistic). It is important to note that I only studied boys in one section of the autism spectrum, therefore my results may vary for children based on other levels of functionability and other types of disabilities and/or gender differences. My time consisted of 28 hours of classroom environment, including special activities (i.e. gym, music, etc.), and lunch/recess environment. The reasoning for the variation is to ensure the social interactions remain constant in transition periods in potentially stressful social situations. My study received research ethics approval by the Trinity IRB.

Throughout my observations, I wrote notes and coded patterns. I used a combination of direct interaction and selective verbatim excerpts of specific conversations. For direct interaction, I was primarily interested in two categories: people and their actions. In the category of the people, I used X, Y, Z which represented the students with autism, T for the present teacher, S1 for a general ed child and depending on how many general ed children X interacts with, I used the appropriate amount of S2, S3, etc.   My actions consisted of V for verbal and P for physical communication. I then added a + or a - to symbolize if the interaction was positive or negative. I then tallied the total + and - in each setting and calculated the percentages. For example, in the general ed classroom, I looked for the amount of times the student with autism initiated positive verbal communication. The code for this would read X initiated V with S2 +. At the top of every page of notes, I noted the date and what type of class it was (i.e. music, art, special ed setting) and what type of structure the class was partaking in.

Two examples:

Code	Meaning
X V S1 +	X initiated a verbal interaction with a general ed student and it was a positive interaction

| Y P T - | Y initiated a physical interaction with the teacher and it was a negative interaction |

I will compare my observations with my open-ended interviews that I will be conducted with the special ed teacher and both of the boys' general ed teachers. My interview guide was designed to first explore the background of the current method of

inclusion. I discovered how to work with the teachers in not only finding how it functioned, but how it was effective.   As my observations grew, I asked both sets of teachers the same questions in order to make them comparable and generalizable. For example, if I asked both the special ed and gen ed teacher how the child responds to group work in his/her classroom, I then directly compared both answers to my observations. Throughout my transcribed interviews, I looked for reoccurring themes dealing with social dynamics of student X and other students. I used broad interview questions with possible follow-ups depending on where the conversation progressed to.

Analysis of Observations

Student Interactions

Despite the popular belief that children are shaped by the classification of the classroom they are in (meaning general ed vs. special ed), analysis of my observations suggests that positive and negative social interactions vary based on the structure of the activity rather than the name of the classroom.   At first, I intended to mark my notes to decipher whether or not it was a general ed setting or a special ed setting. I soon realized, however, that it varied within the settings and this method was not precise enough as the percentages based on class type hardly varied. For the sake of my research, I created two types of possible settings. The way I define these settings are as follows:

1) Structured -- the teacher plays a significant role in facilitating the classroom discussion, group work or lectures.

2) Unstructured -- the teacher allows the students work independently, does not assign partners or groupings, or the children are totally on their own (free-time).

It is also necessary to decipher my personal difference between positive and negative social interactions. Considering the goal is not always to enhance academic function, positive interactions can be appropriate physical or verbal interactions of the child with autism with a teacher or other student in the classroom that are socially appropriate. With this being said, a comment about video games may be deemed as inappropriate in a classroom setting when there is work to be done, however, for my study, I chose to mark that as a positive interaction because it is a positive social gain towards normalcy for the child with autism.

Based on twenty-eight hours of classroom observation, children with autism have a higher percentage of positive verbal and physical interactions in structured settings. In structured settings, seventy-two percent of the interactions involving the autistic children were positive, whereas, in an unstructured environment, seventy-one percent of the interactions were negative. For example, structured activities appeared in both general ed and special ed settings: Ms. F's circle time in the morning, Ms. B's pull-out reading crew, gym activities, etc. The settings varied between special ed and general ed.

Environment Type	Total	Positive	Negative
Structured	288	72%	28%
Unstructured	259	29%	71%

The pattern above clearly appeared, even though I spent about an equal amount of time observing both structured and unstructured settings (53 percent and 47 percent of my total observation time, respectively). The pattern below represents my observations of the three children combined. In addition, when looking at the children individually, the same pattern is present.

Students	# of occurrences	Structured	Unstructured
Xavier	201	70%	15%
Yari	150	75%	18%
Zane	196	72%	20%

In structured environments, such as work time with intense teacher supervision and presence of the paraprofessional, Yari was able to stay on task with the helpful reminder of the teacher every now and then. Yari would occasionally become distracted with tying, untying, and retying his shoe but with an adult to keep him on task, the positive interactions outnumbered the few negative physical interactions. Students at the table would tap Yari on the shoulder and ask if he needed help. On one occasion, Ms. A extended herself to Student 1, a general education student, and asked her if she had any advice for Yari. This immediately sparked a positive verbal interaction between the girl and Yari.   She tapped Yari on the shoulder and said, "Remember Yari, you have to write down the notes in the right column and draw picture in the left. It's okay we all do it wrong sometimes." Yari replied, "Thank you," and proceded with the assignment.

In a structured environment, the teacher works with the paraprofessional and aides in creating a positive social interaction between the child with autism and the class. During carpet time in the morning, the students had just finished counting with Ms. F, and it was time for the show and tell leader of the day. During the presentation, Ms. F had to redirect Xavier multiple times to make sure he was paying attention rather than tying his shoes. After the presentation, the presenter had to pick which student would be next. After Xavier was not called on, he became frustrated and told the paraprofessional, "I never get picked and sometimes I don't think it's fair." The paraprofessional told Xavier to raise his hand and explain how he felt to the class. Ms. F asked the class how this made them feel and they all had sad faces. One by one, they apologized to Xavier. A little girl went up to Xavier, gave him a hug, and said, "We're so sorry we hurt your feelings, Xavier. You can be the next presenter". This instantly put a smile on Xavier's face and Ms. F finished the interaction by complimenting him on how he shared his feelings with the class in a respectful way and added how that was a huge part of relationships with friends. The teacher and the paraprofessional were able to create a positive interaction and helped mediate a negative social situation. It makes one wonder if anything positive would have come out of this situation if the paraprofessional had not recognized Xavier's frustration and had not worked with the teacher to create a learning experience for everyone.

With teachers having a full classes and numerous responsibilities, it is not always possible for them to catch every occurrence. In unstructured activities, such as individual work, Zane struggled a great deal. Often, Zane would get a stern warning from Mrs. B. "Zane feet down, ruler away, take out the book please," she would say in a

stern voice, and yet Zane still seemed clueless as to what the assignment was. This was a scenario where the students were not allowed to talk at their desks because it was silent individual reading. Therefore, Zane could not benefit from the verbal cues that could have been given by the students around him. In this setting, Zane ended up playing with his ruler on eight separate occasions. This severely distracted him from his work, led to the coding of multiple negative interactions, and was not caught by any individual other than myself in the classroom. By no means was this the teacher's fault. She had twenty-five other students who were standing on line at her desk getting their work checked to worry about. It was physically impossible for her to catch all eight occurrences especially when dealing with greater issues of two children arguing and one jumping out of his chair doing splits! In this case, a paraprofessional would have been helpful in order to make the environment semi-structured and keep Zane on task.

In another unstructured activity, Yari was observed as being removed from the classroom activity. One day in health class, the class won a "Workout Wednesday," which meant a workout video series was played from the smart board and students were able to stand in an area near their desks and dance for the entire period. By my definition, this was an unstructured classroom setting because the teacher was at her desk and had no interaction with the students. During this time, Yari was not involved in the dancing. He sat in his desk chair and then proceeded to pick his nose, tie his shoe, and get up to use the trash can for a total of ten times throughout the workout series. In fact, this seemed to cause more disruption to the entire class because students were wondering what was wrong with Yari and were becoming frustrated by his lack of participation.

During art, a totally unstructured environment, Zane sat by himself in the corner, when the students were told to choose their own seats. He quietly did his work but there was only one verbal interaction during the entire class period. In fact, Zane's lunch snack was taken away because the art teacher deemed his verbal interaction to be negative and disruptive to the class. The art teacher said, "Zane how dare you talk in my classroom. Hasn't anyone taught you manners? Give me your snack and you can pick it up after class if you're lucky." After this, Zane returned to his seat in the corner and for the remainder of the period by playing with the colored pencils instead of working on his landscape.

After examining the difference between structured and unstructured environments, I looked at the percentage of the positive structured interactions and the positive unstructured interactions with the presence of a paraprofessional. In ESPY Elementary, there is not enough funding for each child with autism to have his/her own paraprofessional. However, as stated by Ms. F, she is fortunate enough to have a hearing impaired student with a mental disability who is required to have a paraprofessional. The paraprofessional, Ms. A, is able to circulate throughout the classroom and give help to the children with autism when needed.   Of the positive interactions occurring within a structured environment, forty-two percent were with the help of the aide in the classroom. Of the positive occurrences occurring in an unstructured environment, eighty-five percent were with the help of an aide.

Type of Environment	Positive Total	Percent of positive with aid present
Structured	72%	42%

Unstructured	29%	85%

With this being said, the children with autism were socially more productive with the presence of Ms. A. There is not as much need for the aide when the students are in a structured environment and the teacher has the ability and the time to give extra help or reminders. However, the structured positive interactions were still aided by the help of the paraprofessional, which suggests that children with autism who are mainstreamed may often need a push from an adult to initialize social interactions with the other children in the classroom. This is not to say social interactions will not occur without the presence of the paraprofessional, but the positive ones are enhanced by adult supervision.

Teachers' Perceptions

Throughout the course of this project, I conducted a total of three interviews. Two interviews were face-to-face, and the third was done via email due to uncontrollable circumstances. Ms. F and Ms. B are the two general ed teachers and Ms. H is the pull-out teacher who is trained with special education methods. After transcribing all three interviews, I have found that there were four major recurring themes. First, the lack of support was a problem for all teachers involved in this study. Second, they identified the lack of collaboration between the general ed and the special ed teachers. Third, the teachers all mentioned the need for redirection of the child's attention. Lastly, the lack of disruption was a theme present in all of the interviews, but did not align with my observations. These main ideas support my findings in justifying why positive

interactions are occurring in structured environments and justifying the need for paraprofessionals in the push-in/pull-out method.

Support

By standard definition, the push-in/pull-out method suggests the need for the presence of a paraprofessional. The role of the paraprofessional is an aide that can either be trained or untrained and accompanies the child with autism from the special ed classroom setting to all of the general ed classroom settings. While working at the school, I quickly discovered that the children with autism did not have paraprofessionals. This became a common theme present in my interviews. After trying to find out the reason as to why there was a lack of a paraprofessionals, I speculated that it was a combination of lack of funding, a language barrier between the parents and the school, and the abundance of children with learning disabilities in the school. The language barrier factor could lead to a possible lack of paraprofessionals because if the parents do not realize their child does not have a paraprofessional, then they may not realize there is a need to demand one. In addition, with the abundance of children with learning disabilities in the school, then even with a decent amount of paraprofessionals, there still may not be enough for one to one scenarios. In this case, students who need a para may not be receiving one.

In my interview guide, I asked teachers if they felt it was appropriate for the children with autism to be included in the general ed class. This question automatically sparked answers dealing with the presence and importance of paraprofessionals. It becomes obvious that the use of a paraprofessional aids positive interactions, even in

unstructured environments, where children with autism struggle. In my first interview,

when asked if the general ed classroom was most appropriate for Xavier and Yari, Ms.

F, a general ed teacher, replied by strongly agreeing that it was appropriate for the

children to be mixed in with their peers. "Unfortunately, Xavier does not have a para,

Yari does not have a para, Yari could use a para, but my para that works with another

student is very available to him and that makes the situation work." This sad, yet true,

fact is an issue with this model in the school. It can be effective if all the given

components are lined up. In my observations, I note several times where the use of a

paraprofessional could be helpful. In certain scenarios, where the teacher cannot

physically give all of her attention to all of the class, a para could keep the child on track

and focused.

In addition, Ms. F mentions that part of the reason Xavier and Yari fit in so well is

because in general her class is low functioning. She also inferred that with a class

below the functioning level, sometimes there is not enough time to attend to the needs

of all the students (disabled and non-disabled). When interviewing Ms. B, the issue of

lack of support also surfaced without me directly asking the question. Ms. B stated that

her para is only part time and her general ed students act as supports who are able to

help Zane when the para is unavailable. Ms. B's class is smaller and has a better set

up for Zane. Ms. B also mentioned the importance of a para when dealing with

collaboration. She states, "the curriculums that we're working in are very different,

they're working on skills and very specific hit right on the standards." She then followed

up by explaining if there was a person to stay with Zane in both settings he could

transition between the two more easily. Ms. H, the special ed teacher, agreed with Ms.

B in stating that the curriculum happening in both classrooms was extremely different. She felt that a paraprofessional would serve as an extension of her to transfer the skills they've learned in the special ed classroom over into the general ed classroom.

Lack of collaboration

Lack of collaboration between the general ed teachers and the special ed teachers seemed to be a significant issue within the school. When asked how often Ms. B is in contact with Zane's special ed teachers, she responded, "as far as curriculum goes, I wish it were more, I would call it rare at this point. It's kind of a sad fact but right now it is." She then added that the special ed staff works on specific IEP goals and strategies to help the children "survive" in the general ed classroom, but the learning in both spaces are still very "separated and different." Ms. H (the special ed teacher) once again agreed with Ms. B but added that she has an idea of what the curriculum is but does not feel it is her job to focus on that when there are so many other basic skills (below the level of the general ed class) that the children need to learn.

General ed teachers mentioned that the only use for collaboration were issues dealing with behavioral problems rather than anything that is curriculum based. Ms. F had a similar viewpoint to Ms. B on collaboration but in a different way. Ms. F stated that they do not collaborate in terms of curriculum, meaning they do not know what is going on in each other's' classrooms, but if there is a behavioral problem then she uses the social workers for support. She explained that the role of the special ed supports is mainly to focus on the IEP goals. All teachers are aware of the curriculum but not in

depth, and "In terms of collaborating, it's really Ms. M, the social worker, who I spend most time with because for me it's really just behavioral things. So they can get the academic supports they need in the classroom." stated Ms. F. In addition, Ms. B added that in her "past life" she worked for five years in an English Language Learning class (ELL) in an out of state school. The philosophy of the school was team teaching meaning; "they (the special ed teachers) were always a part of the curriculum, always doing the same exact stuff". They still considered this to be a push-in/pull-out method but they were always in constant communication. "When the teachers work with each other in a team setting, I found it to be more effective," concluded Ms. B.

Redirection

Redirection is the need for a teacher to remind the student of the task at hand and stop him/her from whatever behavior he/she is engaging in other than the appropriate one. When I use the term redirection, I am referring to an issue that the child with autism faces within the general ed and the special ed classroom. Considering lack of focus was quite common in the classroom, I asked questions dealing with the benefits and gains of this method and all of the teachers responded with the need for redirection. It is also important to note that the word "redirection" did not once occur in my interview guide. Ms. F stated, "Xavier is very very capable he's just the type of kid that needs to be redirected often. Not so much for being off task it's just forgetting what it is that his focus is." She also explained that when he is focused he does "fabulous"; the only problem is that he cannot stay focused. "...Yari, functions on a little bit of a lower level and really needs to be kinda walked through slow increments step by step how to check in." This relates to the privilege and necessity of having the

paraprofessional in the classroom to be able to redirect the student when necessary. Ms. B talked about redirection as well, but with a bit of a twist. She agreed that Zane's main issue along with his temperament was redirection. However, she said that he has become better with that skill by working with his social worker. She spoke about redirection in terms of academics and in terms of meltdowns. She began by calling his friendships "roller coasters" because other kids become frustrated with his need to correct them and vice versa. Ms. B explained that he has the friendships present but once he flies off the deep end with them, "I need to be able to calm him down and redirect his attention to what was going on in the class when something like that happens". She proceeded to explain how the redirection of his attention allows him to refocus on work and lose the obsession of his anger with friends.

Disruption

I define disruption in my terms as any distraction or inappropriate behavior that affects other students or the teacher, initiated by the student with autism. This is crucial because one of the largest critiques of the inclusion method is the effect it could have on the general ed classroom. The consensus of the general education teachers was that the students were only disruptive when they had meltdowns. Other than that, they were of little to no distraction to the class in any way. When asked about the positive and negatives of the model in terms of the general ed students, both general ed teachers brought up disruption with a positive connotation.

Ms. F acknowledged, "[Students Xavier and Yari are] very very accepted, no one would even think twice about it…" Ms. F described how students responded positively when

Yari had a meltdown. "He'll crawl under his desk and he'll stay there or he'll go somewhere else and he'll shut down. And the class they'll go right to him, rub his back say something to him … So that's probably the closest thing to a distraction. But umm I think they both gain from the behavior." What is important to see is that the teacher is emphasizing social positive interactions but it does not account for the academic disruption it caused. Other than that, Ms. F never mentioned Xavier and Yari as distractions again.

Ms. B mentioned distraction when talking about Zane and the way he socializes within the classroom. However, she did not refer to Zane as a distraction to others but touched on how he easily becomes distracted and others are able to pull him back in. Ms. B suggested that the other students do not see him as an outsider but as an equal that is struggling. When they do notice he's struggling, "they do try to help, or I can tell them what to try or I just give him space and they'll try to give him space. umm I wouldn't say he is distracting them. It is an important skill for both parties to obtain. All of my students argue, they're in third grade (laughs)"

Comparisons between Observations and Interviews

When comparing my observations and interviews, I found that there are more positive interactions occurring within a structured setting rather than in an unstructured setting and why this is happening. I also found that there is extreme importance in having a paraprofessional present for the instances where unstructured environments are inevitable. When beginning my interviews, I had hoped to find that the teachers had

felt the same way. I soon realized it was not as apparent to the teachers because they were only able to see the students in one setting, never both. There was no way to decipher whether or not positive interactions were occurring due to general ed vs. special ed time or because of structured vs. unstructured environments. My interviews reflected themes dealing with roots of the positive and negative interactions, which helped me understand why a structured environment is suited for more positive interactions and why the children with autism struggle in an unstructured environment.

With the presence of a paraprofessional, the teacher would be able to focus her attention in other areas with the majority of the class and use less time redirecting the students with autism. The importance of support and the lack of support were major recurring themes within my observations and interviews. As I mentioned, during group circle time, when Ms. F had to take class time out to redirect Xavier multiple times for tying his shoes, this could have been prevented. If there were a paraprofessional present, it would no longer be a burden of the teachers and she could focus on the lesson with the entire class. In addition, earlier I presented my findings of the positive interactions that took place when the paraprofessional was in the classroom. It is important to note the para that was present was not assigned to my subjects but positive interactions would most likely increase if Xavier, Yari, and Zane had their own. I think it has become obvious that for this model to be effective, the students cannot be thrown into a classroom alone. Of all the positive interactions in both structured and unstructured environments, most would not have been possible without the paraprofessional and could have caused more disruption if students were forced to help on their own.

As I mentioned in my interview analysis, all of the teachers felt a paraprofessional was necessary. This is a service that must be demanded by a parent if it is not automatically provided. After picking up clues from the teachers, I have speculated that with the high number of students with disabilities, there simply is not enough money to have a paraprofessional for all of the children. Due to the language barrier, it is possible that Xavier, Yari, and Zane's parents may not even know this problem exists and may not realize it is necessary to be persistent about requesting one. Even if the school had an average amount of funding, it could still be possible that a child with autism may not receive a para due to the large number of disabled children in ESPY, which leads to the high demand for paraprofessionals.

Lack of communication between general ed and special ed teachers was a common problem mentioned throughout the interviews. I only noticed it was a problem in my observations after the interviews highlighted it. I noticed the lack of communication in regards to the general ed teachers and the special ed teachers in the classroom. Often the tasks in both classes were quite disconnected and it became obvious they were two separate spaces for learning. In terms of lack of collaboration, this was a very common theme among my interviews and a less apparent one among my observations. It was harder for me to notice it before I spoke with the teachers. Collaboration was present in terms of behavioral problems but completely irrelevant and nonexistent in terms of curriculum information. Considering I was looking at social interactions, I did not always pay much attention to the specific curriculum in place. However, I did notice that there was a very strict curriculum running parallel

through both general ed classes and it completely varied from the skills being taught in the special ed setting.

It seems as if the special ed and general ed teachers only collaborate when there are behavioral issues which does not seem to be enough for Xavier, Yari, and Zame. In reality, the students with autism need more than the average skill set to be a part of the general ed classroom. They also need specific help with the work they are given relevant to the curriculum occurring in the general ed classroom. When the general ed students were learning about climate, both Xavier and Yari had issues comprehending the World Atlas they were asked to read and accompanied by a work sheet. When they received their pull-out services in the same day, one might think that they would continue to read the atlas. However, the pull-out teacher thought they had only worked on math and pulled out a random short story to practice reading comprehension. If the teachers had been working together, the pull-out teacher could have not only worked on a specific IEP skill, but it could have pertained to the general ed classroom to further enhance the child's understanding within the broader context. The lack of collaboration makes it more difficult for both teachers. As I mentioned above, social skills are not enough. The children need supports relevant to the curriculum they are learning in the general ed classroom.

The teachers all touched on the need for constant redirection in the classroom. This held constant with my observations. However, similar to collaboration, I was not aware of the redirection until I found it embedded within my interviews. I did not ask questions dealing with redirection, but when I asked about distractions, all of the

teachers mentioned it. They basically argued that the students were able to be functioning in their classrooms but constantly needed redirection, meaning they needed a reminder as to what it was they were supposed to be doing. Most of the teachers claimed this was the root of most of Xavier, Yari, and Zane's problems. They were unable to stay on task and rather than a lack of understanding of the material, they lost track of what they were supposed to be doing with the material.

Throughout my observations, there were multiple times where Xavier, Yari, and Zane would stare off into space, play with their school supplies, or simply find another stimulus (i.e. tying shoes) rather than accomplishing the task at hand. It was obvious that it was never intentional, but they just could not stay focused. In unstructured environments, this was worse because the amount of down time when the teacher was not looking was increased dramatically.

Redirection works parallel with the lack of support in the classroom and its importance. The amount of times the student needed to be redirected may not be eliminated by a para but it could limit the amount of time the student is unfocused if someone other than the teacher were present to tackle the problem sooner.   The theme of redirection lends itself to the last theme, disruption. If redirection goes undetected, (whether because the teacher has a line of students at her desk, is dealing with other behavioral issues, or has implemented silent time and is simply not scoping the room to see who is actually looking at their paper) the lack of focus of the student with autism can ultimately cause disruption among the students around him.

Disruption is the most unique theme. All of the teachers felt that there was a very minimal level of disruption but if anything, they could easily diffuse it or the students around the child would diffuse the situation. In this case, I think the teachers are mistaken because they overlook the individual distraction occurring in the unstructured environments, which are uncontrollable areas.

During part of my time in Ms. F's class, Xavier was seated at the table furthest away from the teacher's desk. During individual time, Xavier would completely space out, however, he was silent, and therefore it was not obvious enough for Ms. F's to notice. Xavier would play games with his ruler, get up to use the trash, would repeatedly turn pages in a book, and would tap his pencil loudly. This sparked interest among the other third graders at Xavier's table. Ultimately, Xavier's behaviors were not disruptive enough to distract the entire class. These behaviors would often go unnoticed, yet his entire table was distracted. One time, Xavier was playing a game with his eraser and his pencil at his desk, when the children were supposed to be finishing their landform posters. One by one, every student at the table began to play the same game with their eraser and their pencil. Ms. F had no clue because ultimately, this was a silent game, and it appeared that the children were working. This is a problem for multiple reasons. First, Xavier never finished his work and that alone went completely unnoticed. Perhaps a paraprofessional could have halted this behavior before it escalated. Second, it harmed all of the children at Xavier's table. Not only did Xavier not finish his work, but also all of the students at the table were distracted and began to engage in silent interactions with one another. You could argue this would be a positive interaction based on the way I defined my positive and negative interactions,

because Xavier was making friends. However, he was not even engaged with his classmates at the table. He simply was unengaged from his work, his attention was engaged elsewhere (his eraser and pencil), and without even noticing his own behaviors, he distracted the entire table. By the end of this scenario, Xavier still had zero idea that all of his tablemates were playing the same game and he still was unfocused on his work. If Xavier had engaged in conversation about life or making plans after school, it would still be a distraction to the other students, but I could at least deem it a positive social interaction because he would have been gaining social skills. However, the other students were distracted from their own work due to a negative physical interaction initiated by Xavier.

Conclusion

Once I found the distinction between the structured and unstructured environments, I had hoped the teachers would portray the presence of that same theme in their interviews. I ultimately realized that teachers were unable to create that distinction because they were only present in one classroom therefore, they could not say it had anything to do with the type of setting in comparison to the title of the classroom (special ed versus general ed). The teachers provided me with themes that served as justifications as to why the positive and negative behaviors were actually happening in these settings. Considering most of the positive interactions were taking place within the structured environment, given the right circumstances, schools should lean towards more structured rather than unstructured time throughout the day. The push-in/pull-out method needs all of its supports in order to function properly, meaning, a paraprofessional, collaboration between the teaching staff, and the ability to keep

disruption under control. Ultimately, it is not whether the students are transitioning well

between settings, but it is how they respond within the given environments and how the

teachers can perceive these interactions and facilitate them. If the percentage of

positive to negative social interactions for children with autism is so apparent, why

wouldn't the school lean more towards structured settings for collaborative

classrooms? It seems simple, but schools seem to be focused on positive and negative

interactions happening in titled spaces rather than in individual activities happening

within those spaces. In order to promote more positive social interactions for children

with autism, schools should create more structured settings in both general ed and

special ed classrooms.

Work Cited

Blew, P A, I S Schwartz, and S C Luce. *"Teaching Functional Community Skills to Autistic Children Using Nonhandicapped Peer Tutors." Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis 18, no. 4 (1985): 337–42.*

Foster, E. Michael, and Erin Pearson. *"Is Inclusivity an Indicator of Quality of Care for Children With Autism in Special Education?" Pediatrics 130, no. Supplement 2 (November 1, 2012): S179–85. doi:10.1542/peds.2012-0900P.*

Hale, Heather. *"Peer-Mediated Interventions to Facilitate Social Interaction for Children with Autism'," no. PsycEXTRA Dataset. (n.d.).*

"Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).". Accessed December 3, 2015. http://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/disability/idea.aspx.

Kauffman, James M., and Daniel P. Hallahan. *Handbook of Special Education. Routledge, 2011.*

Marston, Douglas. *"A Comparison of Inclusion Only, Pull-Out Only, and Combined Service Models for Students with Mild Disabilities." The Journal of Special Education 30, no. 2 (July 1, 1996): 121–32.*

Marston, Douglas, and David Heistad. *"Assessing Collaborative Inclusion as an Effective Model for the Delivery of Special Education Services." Assessment for Effective Intervention 19, no. 4 (July 1, 1994): 51–67.*

Mazurik-Charles, Rebecca, and Candice Stefanou. *"Using Paraprofessionals to Teach Social Skills to Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the General Education Classroom." Journal of Instructional Psychology 37, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 161.*

McConnell, Scott R. *"Interventions to Facilitate Social Interaction for Young Children with Autism: Review of Available Research and Recommendations for Educational Intervention and Future Research." Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 32, no. 5 (October 2002): 351–72.*

Rea, Patricia J., Virginia L. McLaughlin, and Chriss Walther-Thomas. *"Outcomes for Students with Learning Disabilities in Inclusive and Pullout Programs." Exceptional Children 68, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 203–22.*

"Special Education Terms and Definitions," accessed December 1, 2015, http;//www.understandingspecialeducation.com/special-education-terms.html.

Interview Guide

1. So when I came to the school, I learned about this push-in/pull-out method of inclusion. Can you please explain it in your own words?

Prompts

Can you explain a little more about how you personally use it?

1. What do you believe the pros and cons of the push-in/pull-out model are in terms of students with autism?

   What about pros and cons for their general ed peers?

Prompts
what about "disruption? is disruption in the classroom a problem?
is social stigma a concern?
what about tolerance?
what about friendships?
what about social gains?

do you have any examples?
can you tell me more?

3. How do you think student X is responding to the push-in/pull-out method?

Prompts
Has student X made friends in your class?
what about tolerance?
what about friendships?
what about social gains?

4. Tell me more about your interactions with the other teachers who work with student X
prompts
who are these teachers?
do you typically see them during the week

5. As a teacher can you tell me about the opportunities and challenges of using this method?
prompts
do you have time to aid social interaction?