

### **Preamble**

Before I began, I had expectations, predictions, and questions I needed to answer professionally before engaging in the observations. I knew that the sites I was going to observe were not inclusion but ‘pull-out.’ Since the format of these sites was ‘pull-out’- I was interested in the model and how it contrasts with inclusion.

The expectations or predictions extend from my knowledge of neurodiversity and inclusion practices, which the district regarded as a ‘new’ (often unexplored) practice. I expected to see the RSP teachers with very little knowledge of inclusion but lots of knowledge of pulling out students from their general education classes and the students exhibiting some evidence of dissatisfaction from being separated from their peers. I expected some of the RSP teachers to implement technology to the degree of displaying information. I predicted that the classes showed some element of calmness connected to mindfulness. I also predicted that being this is a pull-out, there was a curriculum with progress monitoring that they are utilizing. The questions I had were: 1) do you prefer pull-out as a method? And why? 2) If they used technology, what do you use it for? 3) do you practice mindfulness? Why/why not?

### **The DSE Perspective.**

Moreover, I was VERY interested in observing these sites with the DSE (disability studies in education) lens I gained from my studies at my previous university. Disability studies in education (DSE) aligns with the social model thinking. The social model was developed by disability rights activists in the 1970s and 90s, which states that if societies provided accessibility

for people with disabilities, those people would not be restricted from full participation in the world around them (Coiser & Ashby, 2016).

Teachers are in loci parentis for students—they are often the only adults in a children's classroom. What is a teacher to do when a student's life is made harder due to their race—is the response only reactive? What a teacher waits until an effect is observed? Or is the teacher's response proactive—to try to make changes before or as the difficulty is raised? If the reaction is solely reactive, then the damage is already done. So, with that said- yes- from a DSE perspective looking at a pull-out model- I was incredibly interested in seeing the issues I studied as raised by DSE.

I will discuss each site's pros, cons, and recommendations. I will also mention what elements I will implement in my practice.

**Site 1: [REDACTED] format: Push-out)**

The day started at a location very far from my elementary school. As I entered the room, I was greeted by the RSP teacher, [REDACTED]. I looked at the room for evidence of anchor charts, stations, and technology. All were immediately present except for the technology used (I think there was one projector). The first group was four 3rd graders being serviced by one of two instructional aides (this person was a peer at ULV, and she knew who I was). As the aide was helping the kids to work on identifying CVC words- the teacher said to me that these kids were functioning 'low.' In my mind, I thought of the issues of labeling students through the lens of the DSE framework. This perspective stems from issues with labeling, homogeneously grouping, and segregating students with disabilities (Coiser & Ashby, 2016) and the issue of limiting

binary "... in which all students are expected to fit into one of two categories" (Annamma, Boele, & Klingner, 2013. p. 1279). Still, there is diversity in human capabilities, and as a result, we need to reconstruct the normal ideology into a more expansive understanding of human variability (Annamma, Boele, & Klingner, 2013). Within this binary, normal-for-a-particular-individual is seen as abnormal within a majoritarian context; this contextualization of what is normal/abnormal is then removed, and "abnormal" is mistakenly seen as objectively abnormal—the label is then re-applied on the level of the specific individual, rendering a pathology on the individual/racial level. Institutionalized perception of what is considered normal is, in fact, abnormal. So- yes- I took it with a grain of salt when he used 'low' functioning. I would rather hear, "these kids have some strengths and weaknesses- their current weakness is in CVC words." In his defense, I do not believe he was being 'offensive' on purpose. The usage of "low" or "high" (functioning) is used all the time by special and general education teachers and principals etc... but these terms are not capable of the ideology of inclusion that I belong too as an RSP teacher. These terms reflect the status-quo that has been used for so long that everyone uses them without knowing what it could mean to a child or family's self-esteem.

At any rate, a new group of students (2nd-grade students) came in, and the RSP teacher took over the lesson and directly taught multiplication and division. The teacher asked the students to take out their composition books and their blank multiplication table worksheet and told them very sternly, "go- do it. Let's go!!!" With the knowledge of mindfulness practice- I felt that that was not the way to go because that prompting appeared rude (and those signals would direct stimuli to either fight, flight, or freeze), and sure enough, a kid to the upper right protested (fought) and did not want to do it. The teacher responded directly, "you will do as I say- let's go! We don't have enough time." The student did eventually do what he wanted but I do wonder if

the student continued out of a routine of compliance. I would have explained why we do this, encourage him politely to try and if there is a need for consequences to refer to a behavior monitoring incentive chart, reduction of class points, or something along those lines. The lesson unfolded as the teacher segway into division terms and then relating the concepts to real life. I liked that because lessons ought to reflect real-life problem solving. To check for understanding, the teacher asked the students to rise and recite what they learned directed at me and the other RSP teacher observing the lesson. By that time the observation ended.

### **What Would I Implement in My Own Practice?**

I would implement interaction of the students within a lesson and explain the whys and how these lessons relate to real life. I currently do not have an aide, but if I had one, I would use aides in the same way in focusing on needed skills.

**Site 2:** [REDACTED]; **format:**

#### **Push-out)**

The following school was another site with a push-out. The first noticeable thing I saw was that the room was spotless and (out of all of the sites) the most neuro-friendly (I could tell with the reduction of visual clutter and the diversity of alternative forms of seating etc.). The teacher was very well organized, and there was substantial evidence of structure in the format of visual anchor charts and routines. The 5th-grade student explained to me and the other observer the routine and where lesson materials are stored, reinforcing the degree of structure. I wondered

if the teacher would implode if her structure broke from human variability from the student (or herself?).

I also looked for evidence of technology. There was a projector, and the teacher used her laptop to reference her notes. But other than that, no technology was used in the lesson. The lesson came from a printout from "Teachers-pay-teachers" (a packet one purchases off a site that involves learning words connected to the student's reading level). Out of curiosity, as the other observer and the teacher were chit-chatting about where one finds resources- I brought up how the district has implemented the PBIS award system with e-commerce/scanning cards to provide incentive points for prizes... the response from both was, "we prefer the old paper format because it feels like real-money to the kids."

Although I saw their point (there are advantages to tangible items as opposed to digital- especially with kids who respond to physical objects), at that time, I wanted to ask the student how he felt about that- especially when the student brought up something related to technology- and his eyes perked up as we talked about a digital award system and purchasing from an online school store. I felt there is an apparent push-back with accepting tech based on one's personal feelings and limitations towards tech from some teachers. Also, another impression I got was alignment with low-tech "comfortableness"- in contrast to kids- kids absorb and respond to tech far more than adults do. A fixed mindset is problematic because it inhibits the child's exposure to the reality of the world they live.

### What Would I Implement in My Own Practice?

The dilemma I face as a “push-in”/inclusion teacher was becoming apparent—I rarely have access to my special needs kids outside of the general education classroom (so that is a pro of push-in and a con of inclusion). So therefore, it would be tough to implement what I liked: a room with various pieces of furniture for flexible seating and the ability to have access to my students (versus being embedded into a general education classroom, where the general education teacher controls the lesson and pacing is not individualized for the student). I could implement, however, the teacher’s degree of organization and the resources she used.

### Site 3: [REDACTED] format: Push-out)

The RSP teacher was not in today, there was a sub. So therefore, my observation entailed viewing the room and viewing what the sub was doing with the one student present. Of all of the locations I observed this one had evidence of mindfulness such as a “zen place” surrounded by energy rocks and fliers reflecting to inhale and exhale. I wanted to ask the RSP teacher if she studied mindfulness because it is a practice which in my opinion is largely overlooked and if it was implemented then that would be a gateway into inclusion and neurodiversity.

Burnett (2013), Jennings (2015), and Immordino-Yang (2016) describe mindfulness practice as a state in which you bring awareness to the present moment, in which one’s experiences and decisions about future behavior are profoundly shaped, in the here and now rather than dwelling on the past. There are many benefits to implementing mindfulness with students such as self-regulation (Jennings, 2015). Self-regulation is showing focused attention to the present moment. The practitioner is bringing mindful awareness to the breath and working

towards maintaining focused attention on breathing. Gerbarg et al. (2020) remind us that "breathing entrains the brain," so, in other words, the brain is listening to the lungs.

Site 4: [REDACTED] format:

### **Push-out)**

This site was also a 'push-out' model. The teacher's classroom environment was very similar to all the other classrooms- so I saw anchor charts and centers, an instructional aide etc. Four 5th-grade students entered the room, and the lesson entailed a series of steps (reading, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing)- I could tell this was connected to their IEP goals. The teacher was stern and adaptive to the students- which I liked. I asked the teacher if she preferred push-in or pull-out... she said she wanted "pull-out." Still, she did not give a reason why. I assumed it was because she has access to her students and can focus on their individual needs and address their IEP goals... again, however, I would have loved to ask the students directly how they felt about being pulled out of their general education classrooms. Other than that, no technology was used- the teacher used the whiteboard, graphic organizers, and cards.

### **What Would I Implement in My Own Practice?**

I like how adaptive she was in explaining and checking for understanding with the kids she taught her lessons. She kept the pacing orderly and explained what they were doing. I would have liked to hear her activate prior knowledge better and use technology- even a video clip. I could tell one of the kids was a visual learner and needed a differentiated experience tied to his learning intelligence.

### Conclusion

Overall, the experiences I had were valuable. I came into these observations' predictions and expected certain things with the 'pull-out' model, which seemed to align precisely with my thoughts.

The cons I faced were the lack of technology and the dilemmas of the 'pull-out' format. I understand that pull-out is an aspect of how credential programs taught individuals in the past but current research in neurobiology and diversity conflicts with these views. For example, when viewing ability groupings, Dudley-Marling & Gurn (2012) say there are assumptions humans typically distribute in a bell-shaped curve (i.e., some children are labeled academically as "low," most are "average," and others are "exceptional"). But the problem Dudley-Marling & Gurn (2012) explained is that the standard curve does not align with human differences. Human traits do not fit within this construct of a 'bell-shaped distribution.' And the research found that low or even null performance is frequent, and high or moderate performances are rare. "No instructional intervention is successful with all children all of the time... even if various interventions are effective on average" (p. 1020).

So, the point is- I am not surprised at what I experienced. On the one hand, I see the benefits of the pull-out model (e.g., immediate access to kids and the ability to target needed skills) but is the side-effect of the pull-out model worth it? (e.g., the possibility of the child feeling segregated from their peers and losing out on the general education curriculum when pulled?). As an RSP teacher trained in inclusion, neurobiology, and mindfulness, I am sometimes conflicted because I would love more access to my special needs kids when needed (aka pull out), especially with how I would LOVE to implement technology, but I often cannot because the general education teacher sets the tone for how deep technology is used, but is that the right



approach for the student? I feel that inclusion is new to the district, and there should be mandatory inclusion training for the general education teacher and dedicated PLC time for inclusion planning. Without these things, it becomes difficult to fully implement the power of inclusion to students with special needs. I feel that the push-out method, albeit excellent for the RSP teacher, is not needed for students who need help with their academics because of their identified disabilities.

Another con would be the use of technology. In all the classrooms- technology took a backseat. I would have liked to see technology used as an instructional tool. I get the sense that since COVID ended, things have gone back to business as usual, and I wondered why during my visits. I heard briefly from [REDACTED] that the students who “were low” were low due to the academic regression inherent in COVID. This statement implied that “we are going back to business as usual.” I am conflicted as a professional in educational technology because I have read the research that teachers trained in online education have not had the same regression as teachers who were not trained in online education across the country. My own experience online was not as dire as what everyone else was saying. Note to self this is an ongoing interest worth looking into and testing a hypothesis.

The pros overall essentially were in how the RSP teachers used their resources to drive their lessons. I was very interested in how they receive these resources and how they use them such as a graphic organizer for letter blending as used by [REDACTED]. I also liked the active engagement and connections to real-life problem solving from [REDACTED] and the apparent implementation of mindfulness environments from [REDACTED]. Lastly, I also loved how [REDACTED] was both stern and yet gentle to her students and adapted the lesson to fit the curiosities of her students.

I will say that I felt like the outlier as an inclusion teacher... it was an eye-opener to experience what other schools are doing in the district... and it was also an eye-opener to see how all DSE perspective views these formats and the status quo. I feel that if the district wants to implement inclusion (as previously stated), they need to provide training and expose both RSP and general education teachers to the ongoing current research and reasons why inclusion is still the better model to use because 1) it is in the law and 2) we need to move away from segregating practices and drop labels in favor of celebrating neurodiversity and inclusion.

### References

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