

Learning disabled and gifted: The social and emotional aspects of inclusion

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Abstract

This article explores how students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities share experiences involving the social and emotional aspects of inclusion. Inclusion refers to the inclusion of students with special needs into a K-12 general education classroom, which is the inclusive classroom. The inclusive classroom is defined in special education as a classroom that includes students with special needs with their average-achieving peers for one hundred percent of instruction throughout the school day. Placement of students with special needs into inclusive classrooms and basing this placement on the students' needs are related to establishing and placing the students in their least restrictive learning environment. This environment is determined by the student's individualized education plan team, which sets and helps the student reach attainable goals in his or her education. Using labels to identify both students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities within the inclusive classroom leads to the negative stigma surrounding these students and may contribute to their shared social and emotional experiences. The available literature suggests, but does not specifically compare, the shared experiences these two groups of students face regarding the effects of inclusive classrooms and are as follows: (a) lack or delay in acquiring developmentally appropriate social skills, (b) low self-esteem and feelings of loneliness, and (c) a lack in motivation or behavioral problems. Research was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews of two participants. Two male adults who experienced inclusive classrooms throughout their K-12 education, one a student with a learning disability and the other a student with gifted abilities, were interviewed. These semi-structured interviews displayed two firsthand experiences in K-12 inclusive classrooms, aligning with the available literature's suggestions and establishing a more concrete comparison of these two groups' social and emotional experiences.

Keywords: learning disabled, gifted, inclusive classroom, K-12 education

Introduction

The inclusive classroom setting of special and general education encompasses many types of students. Looking into inclusion of students with gifted abilities and students with learning disabilities in general education, these two groups of students are often only viewed on opposite ends of an academic spectrum. The students with gifted abilities are placed on the higher end of the academic spectrum, while the students with learning disabilities are often placed on the lower end of the academic spectrum when compared to their same-aged peers. However, it is also seen that the inclusive classroom leads to shared social and emotional experiences for these two groups of students. Is the inclusive classroom setting the best solution for these students with divergent special needs? Furthermore, are these students placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to maximize and reach their academic and personal potential? Is the LRE of the inclusive classroom able to ensure positive experiences and a supporting environment provided by the students' teacher and peers? These questions led to the investigation of inclusive classrooms, specifically focusing on the social and emotional

experiences of students with gifted abilities and students with learning disabilities.

Literature review

The goal of special education is to determine what the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the student with special needs is and to place the student in this environment, which is thought to be the setting in which the student will maximize and reach his or her potential, both academically and socially. The LRE is defined as the "setting most like the one in which other students are educated, in which a student with a disability can succeed when provided with the needed supports and services;" this leads to "the presumption in current law that the LRE for most students is general education" (Friend, 2013). This definition leads most educators and professionals to push for the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom, creating the inclusive classroom. The LRE is established and specifically defined in light of the students' needs by supportive individualized education plan (IEP) teams. The IEP team includes the

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student, the student's parents, the student's teacher, whether a general or a special education classroom teacher, the school's psychologist or counselor, and the school's principal. The IEP itself is the growing and changing plan for the student's education that will help the student reach the goals set by the IEP team.

Inclusion is the overall goal that is set for students with special needs as it focuses on helping students with special needs acquire the skills and abilities needed to succeed in the same environment as their same-aged, average-achieving peers. Inclusive classrooms encompass students with and without special needs and are considered general education classrooms. Students who are placed in inclusive classrooms are educated by the general education teacher throughout the day and may or may not receive other services, such as being pulled out for part to the day to receive additional resource training or individualized academic help. In many cases, including the special needs student in the general education classroom is the only option for a school. Traditionally, however, inclusion is the way that the "adults and students in a particular school think about teaching and learning for all students" (Friend, 2013). Inclusion of exceptional youth and children, whether they be diagnosed as gifted or have a learning disability, is all based on the idea of creating the LRE for the student's learning, yet literature is limited to "addressing codes, standards, and statements of principals and beliefs" (Wheeler & Richey, 2014). Wheeler & Richey (2014) also discuss how it is "surprising to find that natural environments and inclusion receive little attention in ethical codes and standards." This expresses the concern that, although inclusion is the goal of special education, there are minimal guidelines and procedures regarding how to effectively decide on the LRE for students with special needs. This directly affects students with special needs who are often placed in inclusive classrooms, such as students with gifted abilities and students with learning disabilities.

Students with learning disabilities are most often educated in the inclusive classroom as their disability is classified as mild, rather than moderate or severe, and affects specific academic abilities rather than physical abilities. The federal definition of learning disabilities, according to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is as follows:

"a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculation, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia" (Friend, 2013).

Giftedness is defined on a state-by-state basis as no nationally accepted definition is clearly stated within IDEA. However, giftedness is defined by the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) as "someone who shows, or has the potential for showing, an exceptional level of performance in one or more areas of expression" (Friend, 2013). These two definitions are important for the correct identification of special needs students. Inclusion may be the most effective placement, or LRE, for students when the teachers know what each group of students needs in order to succeed in an inclusive classroom of their same-aged or average-achieving peers.

Currently, the Turlock Unified School District of Stanislaus County in California identifies their students with gifted abilities by using a test that only determines one aspect of giftedness: the intellectual performance and capability section. This excludes musical and artistic forms of gifted abilities such as writing abilities and expression through the arts. Students with learning disabilities are identified using IDEA's definition administered by a team of professionals working alongside both teachers and parents of these students. Inclusion is present within many of Turlock Unified School District's elementary schools, where a system of pulling out students for resource help and modified instruction is utilized most frequently. However, this pull-out system may contribute to social and emotional stigmas created by the labeling of these students. Ideally, students should be placed into an inclusive classroom where the teacher has the ability and knowledge to diversify curriculum to the varying needs of the students. With appropriate accommodations and modifications to curriculum and assignments, students will be better able to achieve their IEP academic goals. However, negative social and emotional aspects of the inclusive classroom may still ensue. These social and emotional aspects include lack or delay in developmentally appropriate social skills, low self-esteem and feelings of loneliness, and a lack in motivation or behavioral problems.

Both students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities can lack or have delays in the development of social skills, leaving them with fewer friends and at a higher risk for bullying. Friend (2013) discusses this deficit of interpersonal relationships among students with gifted abilities and learning disabilities as an insufficient ability of correctly receiving, interpreting, and responding to same age peers or others in the inclusive classroom setting. Pavri & Luftig (2000) also address the lack of social skills and delayed social development of these students, pointing out that they are rejected and ignored by these same-aged peers because of an inability to interact. Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm (1996) consider the low peer acceptance and alienation that occurs among students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities with their average achieving peers, arguing it is a persistent issue in inclusive classrooms. This is because these students are placed at a higher risk for dropout than the accepted and sociable

average-achieving students. Students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities share this delay of social skills that hinders peer acceptance as they experience inclusion in the general education classroom. This hindrance in social skills parallels with these students' self-esteem.

Low self-esteem, along with feelings of loneliness and depression, are common in students with learning disabilities and can also be common in students with gifted abilities. Friend (2013) discusses the trouble that students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities have when making and keeping friends. As both groups of students vary in social skill level from their same age peers, friendships are hard for them to form and maintain. For example, students with gifted abilities often find it easier to have conversation and relationships with adults or students older than themselves due to their increased maturity and knowledge level. Pavri & Luftig (2000) address the concept of perceived loneliness among students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities, saying that these students more frequently had feelings of individual loneliness within the inclusive classroom when compared with their peers. Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm (1996) look at self-concepts and self-perceptions of students with learning disabilities, finding that they have significantly lower academic self-concept scores than their average or gifted classmates. Low self-esteem and feelings of loneliness experienced by the students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities in the inclusive classroom result from deficits in social development. With low self-esteem and lack or delay in social skills, students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities begin to feel disengaged with their peers and activities in the inclusive classroom.

Motivation lacks in both students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities, due to frustration that can lead to behavioral problems. Friend (2013) explains the commonly displayed and continual actions of learned helplessness from students with learning disabilities. Learned helplessness is seen in students when they tend to give up on tasks before even trying, putting little to no effort into their learning as they feel they will fail anyway. The gifted, on the other hand, often have no challenge presented to them within the inclusive classroom's academic content, and tend to lose focus and motivation in this way. Behavioral problems arise from these feelings of frustration and boredom on both ends of the academic spectrum represented by students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities in the inclusive classroom. Pavri & Luftig (2000) talk about disruptive or withdrawn behaviors of these students who can become aggressive and negative towards those peers who actively reject them. Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm (1996) saw that achievement and behavior influence the students' motivation within inclusive classrooms. Students with learning disabilities

and gifted abilities share a lack of motivation when they are placed in inclusive classrooms, if for different reasons.

Inclusive classrooms, however, can also have positive effects on the social and emotional experiences of students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities. Friend (2013) refers to a commonly used term of the least restrictive environment (LRE) as the best environment for all students to experience learning. Seeking and seeing the value in these students with special needs, while also respecting and supporting them is needed in the inclusive classroom from general education peers and teachers alike. Pavri & Luftig (2000) addresses both positive and negative effects of inclusion, discussing the possible positive relationships and self-concepts that may result from the inclusive classroom environment. Yet, there is still a possibility of average-achieving peers and general education teachers who are not as accepting of various learning styles within the inclusive classroom. This is simply due to lack of knowledge regarding these students' special needs. Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm (1996) explain positive effects of placing these students into inclusive classrooms, as they can provide improvements of overall social skills and acceptance of peers as this is a common goal of inclusion. Inclusion can combat the alienation and rejection that is more frequent within classrooms and schools who use the pull-out system, which separates the students with special needs from their same-aged peers for specialized instruction.

Inclusive classrooms have the potential to have positive effects on these students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities, but require acceptance and understanding of these social and emotional aspects. Overall acceptance and understanding of each of these types of students in the inclusive classroom is needed and must be displayed by both teachers and students of the inclusive classroom. Inclusive classrooms may not have continual positive effects if the teacher does not actively accept and display this acceptance of diverse learning styles of both students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities to the average achieving students in the general education classroom. Inclusive classrooms can have negative effects on the social and emotional aspects of students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities depending on how the teacher addresses their special needs, as well as how the classroom environment support diversity, respect, and friendships between all types of students in the inclusive classroom.

Method

A convenience sample of two participants, one who self-identified as having gifted abilities and one who self-identified as having a learning disability, participated in semi-structured interviews. These participants are two male adults who were educated in inclusive classrooms for their

K-12 education. The first participant is a twenty-four year old male who was diagnosed in the third grade as a student with the learning disability of dyslexia and attended public and private school in general education or inclusive classrooms in his K-12 education. The second participant is a twenty-three year old male who was diagnosed as a student with gifted abilities when he was in the sixth grade and attended public school in general education or inclusive classrooms throughout his K-12 education. They both attended California schools from 1998 to 2011, leading their stories to align comparatively. Being that both were educated throughout their K-12 experience in inclusive classrooms, it was hypothesized that they experienced similar social and emotional experiences as a student with a learning disability and a student with gifted abilities.

Data collection of these semi-structured interviews was qualitative; the interview procedure involved speaking to the two participants at separate times in a one-on-one environment. As the interviews were semi-structured interviews, the questions allowed for further discussion as conversation occurred. The length of the interview for each participant was from thirty minutes to one hour. The qualitative data collected focuses on the responses of the two adult participants to prepared questions (Figure 1). The participants' responses were based upon reflections on their experiences in K-12 inclusive classrooms in efforts to answer these questions about social and emotional aspects of their learning experiences, such as social skill development, self-esteem, and motivation. The participants' experiences throughout their educational journeys were discussed in-depth as they related to each of these social and emotional aspects. Each case study gives great qualitative insight regarding the participants' experiences and personal observations of the inclusive classroom setting, providing firsthand accounts of experiences in the inclusive classroom.

Pseudonyms were given to each participant; Participant 1 is named Mark and was identified as a student with a learning disability known as dyslexia, while Participant 2 is named John and was identified as a student with gifted abilities. No incentives or compensation was offered and their participation was voluntary. All data was collected through handwritten notes taken during the interviews, as well as voice recordings of the interviews. The voice recordings of the semi-structured interviews were partially transcribed for use in this article. The interview questions are included as Figure 1.

Results

The following narratives are detailed accounts of the two participants' experiences as former students with special needs. They provide insight into student perceptions about labels, the inclusive classroom, and whether or not they feel they were placed in the least restrictive

environment required to support their academic, social, and emotional development.

Participant 1- Mark: Diagnosed with a learning disability

Mark is a former student who is now twenty-four years old and was diagnosed with dyslexia, a learning disability, when he was in third grade. Mark was raised by both of his parents and has an older brother and an older sister. He grew up in Rancho Santa Margarita of Orange County, California. Mark was educated first in public schools K-6, then in private schools 7-12 in Rancho Santa Margarita. Mark considers his family to be white upper class, in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Mark described his family as "very supportive" of his education and special needs, explaining how they "paid for some private tutoring and help with [his] dyslexia." Mark quickly answered that his interests and hobbies consist of soccer, as well as baseball and *League of Legends*. Mark graduated from CSU Stanislaus and is now an Associate Accountant for a very successful local business.

Mark's feeling toward school varied as he went through his education. Mark explained that he felt "great" at school in elementary, but only "alright" in middle school, and finished by describing high school as "it sucked" for the reason that he was "picked on because of his size." Mark academic performance was average, with A's in subjects he enjoyed and was good at like math, but B's and C's in other subjects. Mark's overall GPA in high school was a 2.9 on a 4 point scale. Mark recounted that his dyslexia made him "hate reading and all the other subjects that had a lot of reading in them." However, when asked if he would have rather been placed in a specialized class for his dyslexia he said no and that he had a choice of being placed where he wanted to be, which was in the general education or inclusive classroom.

Mark feels that he was placed in his LRE by being in the general education inclusive classroom because he was given a choice, and chose this because he did not want to feel different from his same-aged peers. Mark enjoyed the challenge these classes gave him, though he admitted to feeling like he did not fit in socially. This is further explained as Mark described not getting along well with everyone and struggling to start conversations and develop friendships. However, his peers did not know about Mark's dyslexia; only his parents and siblings knew. Mark does not feel that his learning disability affected his social skills directly. On the other hand, Mark felt stupid and judged when he found out that he had dyslexia, affecting his self-esteem in a negative way. This feeling changed with age and as the understanding of his learning disability grew, so did Mark's self-esteem.

Regarding the inclusive classroom, Mark said he did feel too challenged at times with the amount of work he was faced with in school, especially because he had to compensate for the time it took him to read and study for exams. Mark compared himself to his same-aged peers in

the inclusive classroom "all the time" and would rank his self-esteem in his K-12 education as a four out of ten. Mark saw himself as less than average but at times smarter than his peers; he felt smarter in math because his learning disability did not affect him in math like it did in other subjects.

Mark explains that he did lack motivation in school, but knew he had to do his work though he "never wanted to." Mark further discussed his mother, saying she played a big role in motivating him to get his school work and reading done through both positive and negative consequences. An example he used that motivated him was getting time to play outside when he finished his schoolwork. Mark shared that the only reason he never gave up before trying, or exhibited learned helplessness, was because of "incentives" like this. Mark never felt discouraged or encouraged by peers in his class but says they did affect his outlook on school because he "didn't want to be seen as a nerd."

If he was able to do it all over again and change being placed in an inclusive classroom for his K-12 education, he said he would not. However, he would want to have a "different mindset where [he] could see and understand that being different isn't a bad thing and that being isolated or taken away for individualized learning just seems like a bad thing. Of course this all comes with being comfortable with yourself at the age of eight," says Mark. In other words, Mark would not want to be educated in an individualized environment and is glad that he was placed in the inclusive classroom. Mark sees the inclusive classroom as the least restrictive environment for own his learning and is glad he had a choice in where he was placed.

Participant 2- John, diagnosed with gifted abilities

John is now a twenty three year old and was diagnosed with gifted abilities in the sixth grade. John grew up with two younger sisters and a younger brother and was raised by both of his parents. John says his family was "very supportive and encouraging" in his education. John attended public school for his K-12 education in Turlock of Stanislaus County, California. John considers his family white middle class in regards to race and socioeconomic status. John's interests and hobbies include anime, videogames, *Dungeons and Dragons*, as well as football and baseball. John graduated from CSU Stanislaus and now works as an Accounts Receivable Clerk for a corporate business.

John explains that he felt school was "boring" with some years being better than others and remembers that his main motivation for going to school was to hang out with his friends. John performed well academically, receiving "A's or B's, but mostly A's, and some C's when [he] didn't care;" he obtained a 3.7 GPA on a 4 point scale in high school. John says that he did not want to be in general education or inclusive classrooms because they were "too easy," but that he did not have a choice other than to take

AP classes in high school. John feels that the inclusive classroom was only sometimes the least restrictive environment for him in his education, but overall wishes he "could've gone to a school with an all-gifted class."

Socially, John feels he struggled with starting conversations and forming friendships, explaining that he "made friends through friends of friends." John's peers did know he was gifted but this was because they were gifted, too. However, having others know John was gifted did not affect how his peers felt around him because John feels his elementary school environment embraced the "gifted" label. John never felt rejected or isolated because he always had his few friends. John explains that he felt very comfortable around his peers, but would still grade his social skills at a two out of ten. When he found out that he had been diagnosed as gifted, John admits to feeling "sort of cocky or better than everybody else." However, this feeling has changed with age as John described his "peers caught up to [him] because [he] was lazy." John expresses that he never felt challenged enough in the inclusive classroom, feeling as though he was smarter than his average-achieving classmates. John says he was "very competitive" with his friends when it came to math grades, but did not care about the other subjects. When ranking his self-esteem, however, John gave himself a two or three out of 10.

John describes his motivation in his education as lacking "all the time" because it was "too easy" and he "didn't care." John even stated, "I spent more time figuring out how to not do work than actually doing it." In other words, John would calculate the least amount of work he could do to obtain the grade he wanted. John never felt as though he could not do the work, but would simply not feel like doing it. John's peers did not seem to affect his outlook on school and individual motivation or lack thereof. When asked if he could do it over again, John firmly stated that he would rather have been placed in a separate classroom for students with gifted abilities or in a class where his education could be more individualized.

Concluding thoughts

The social and emotional aspects of inclusion regarding social skills, self-esteem, and motivation seemed to be closely shared between the two participants, though each had their individual stories and reasoning behind how they perceived their experiences in the inclusive classroom. Mark and John both ranked their self-esteem and social skills at five or below on a scale from one to ten. John gave himself a two for social skills and a three for self-esteem, while Mark gave himself a five for social skills and a four for self-esteem. Both Mark and John also expressed a lack of motivation when it came to school and completing work. Mark lacked motivation in getting started on and finishing his schoolwork at home or in class, but was able to find

enough motivation extrinsically through incentives that were physical rewards, like that of playing outside. John, on the other hand, lacked motivation because the schoolwork was too easy or boring, as it was not modified to his needs as a student with gifted abilities. Each of these scenarios and feelings expressed by Mark and John align with one another and show that there is a case to be made that students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities share social and emotional experiences due to their placement in the inclusive classroom.

However, the inclusive classroom is not solely to blame for delays in social skills, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation among students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities in the inclusive classroom. Teachers and education professionals need to diversify their curriculum to suit the learners present in their classrooms. When students with gifted abilities and students with learning disabilities are in the same classroom as their average-achieving peers, they need curriculum modified according to their individual needs. In John's case, he needed more challenging assignments, especially in math. An accommodation could have been made for John in which the teacher assigned him an extension to math assignments. For example, John could have been asked to apply a mathematical concept he was learning to the real world and create a problem of his own for the teacher or his peers with gifted abilities solve. This would have kept him interested in school assignments and challenged him a bit more both academically and socially within the inclusive classroom. This would have simulated approaches common in classrooms for students with gifted abilities where project based learning and cooperative learning often lead to active and engaged learning. This may have changed John's view of the inclusive classroom, and thus his want to be placed elsewhere.

As present in both John's and Mark's responses, student choice seemed to be a big factor in whether or not the student felt the least restrictive environment was achieved with the inclusive classroom placement. In Mark's case, because he did have a choice in being placed in the inclusive classroom, he felt this choice was the right one and would choose it again if he could. However, John's case, where he did not have a choice, he felt it was not right for him and would have chosen to be educated in a gifted classroom or in a separate individualized class. Again, within proper accommodations and by diversifying the curriculum, both of these students could have seen the inclusive classroom as their least restrictive learning environment and somewhere they wanted to be placed regarding their learning.

Limitations

There are many aspects to consider when making generalizations from this research. The sample was taken

out of convenience and is very small, being that there were only two participants interviewed. Though the sample size was small and not randomly selected, the qualitative data collected from these two interviews is valuable as a starting point because they provide two firsthand experience accounts of and reflections on being educated in the inclusive classroom. The similarities in the responses of the two participants do indicate some kind of shared social and emotional experiences as taken from being educated within the inclusive classroom. However, further research would be needed to fully solidify this argument.

Significance

The scope of this research involves the broad issue in special and general education of the inclusive classroom setting and inclusion of students with special needs in the general education classroom. What began as questions specific to students with gifted abilities and learning disabilities, exploring their shared social and emotional experiences within the inclusive classroom, has now been expanded into a bigger issue. This issue is whether the inclusive classroom setting is the best solution for these students with special needs. The inclusive classroom, though the end and main goal of special education, may not be the best option for these students. Specifically, these students with special needs are placed in inclusive classrooms because it was determined as the least restrictive environment (LRE) where the student can both maximize and reach his or her potential. In the case of Mark, this was found to be true as he did feel it was the best place for him to learn and grow academically, emotionally, and socially. However, the LRE may not always be that of the inclusive classroom as it does not always ensure positive experiences and a supporting environment. This can be seen in the case of John, as he wished he had a choice as to where he was educated, stating he would have rather been given the opportunity to be educated in a class for students with gifted abilities.

Though the goal of special education is to determine what the LRE for each student with special needs is and to place the student in this environment, the best LRE for the student may not necessarily be the inclusive classroom and general education. It is important for the individualized education plan (IEP) team to correctly assess and determine this for each student. This IEP team must help the student reach the goals that are set by correctly determining and placing the student in the student's true LRE, rather than settling for the easiest, cheapest, or most convenient solution of inclusion and the general education classroom.

Understanding this correlation between students with learning disabilities and gifted abilities can help us to diminish the stigma created from these labels, as all students can be successful within the classroom and in regards to their future aspirations when accepted and

supported by their peers, teachers, parents, and community. Inclusion of students with learning disabilities and students with gifted abilities can be successful in terms of the academic, social, and emotional aspects of the students' lives as long as the general education classroom is truly where the students' LRE is determined and established.

Diversity in abilities within the inclusive classroom can foster a successful and accepting community in which all students feel challenged and hopeful of their future education, but may not be the answer for all students with special needs.

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Figure 1: Case Study Semi-structured Interview. This is a semi-structured interview, giving room for discussion and freedom for conversation that may stem from the specific questions listed in this interview, allowing for added information and comments.

Researcher: Aubrey Glidden

Institution: CSU Stanislaus

Date: _____

Participant Name:

- *What is your name?*

Age:

- *How old are you?*

Diagnosis:

- *What was your special needs diagnosis?*

Grade Level Identified:

- *In what grade were you diagnosed?*

Background Information:

Family:

- *Who did you live with when you were growing up?*
- *How many siblings do you have?*
- *How supportive was your family of your education and special needs?*
- *What race and socioeconomic status would you consider your family?*

Home:

- *Where did you grow up?*
- *Where were you educated?*

Interests:

- *What interests do you have?*
- *What kind of hobbies or pass times do you have?*

Current Occupation:

- *What do you currently do for a living?*

General Education Experience:

- *How would you describe your feelings toward school (K-12)?*
- *How did you perform academically (K-12)?*
- *What was your average GPA (K-12)?*
- *Did you have any favorite teachers or classes? Explain.*
- *Did you want to be in general education classes?*
- *Did you have a choice in where you were placed?*

Specific Aspects of Education:

Least Restrictive Environment, LRE:

Read definition of the term: (*Defined by IDEA, LRE means a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with nondisabled peers to the greatest extent*)

appropriate.) Explain if further clarification is needed by participant.

- *Do you feel the classes you were placed in were right for you?*
- *Would you say the least restrictive environment for you was where you were placed in an inclusive classroom?*

Social skill development:

- *How many friends would you say you had in school?*
- *Did you struggle with creating conversations or developing friendships?*
- *Did your peers know about your diagnosis?*
- *If so, did this affect how you felt around them?*
- *Did you ever feel rejected or isolated in school?*
- *How was the topic of diversity addressed by your teachers, if at all?*
- *On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable were you around your same aged peers?*
 - *Why? Can you explain?*
- *On a scale of 1-10, in grades K-12, what would you grade your social skills as?*
 - *Why? Can you explain?*

Self-esteem:

- *How did you feel about your diagnosis?*
- *Has this feeling changed with age?*
- *Did you ever feel too challenged in the inclusive classroom?*
- *Did you ever feel not challenged enough in the inclusive classroom?*
- *How would you compare yourself to your same-age peers academically?*
- *Did you compare yourself to your same-age peers?*
- *On a scale of 1-10, how would you rank your self-esteem or concept of self?*

Motivation:

- *Did you ever lack motivation in putting forth the effort into your learning?*
 - *Why? Explain.*
- *(Learned helplessness) Did you ever give up before trying academically?*
 - *Why? Explain.*
- *Did your peers ever encourage you in education?*
- *Did your peers ever discourage you in education?*
- *How did your peers affect your outlook on school and academics?*

Concluding Thoughts:

- *Do you have anything you would like to add regarding your educational experiences as a student with special needs in an inclusive classroom?*
- *If you were able to do it all over again, would you like to be in an inclusive classroom or in a separate classroom setting more specific to your individual learning goals?*