



Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

Chapter 1: Foundations and History of Special Education

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think access to education is considered a human right? How has access to education changed over time for students with disabilities?
2. The chapter states that students with disabilities were often excluded from education or provided with substandard instruction in the past. Why do you think this happened, and what lessons can educators learn from this history?
3. How did major laws such as Section 504 and IDEA change educational opportunities for students with disabilities and their families?
4. What are the most important differences between Section 504 and IDEA? Why is it important for educators to understand these differences?
5. IDEA requires that students both have a qualifying disability and demonstrate a need for specially designed instruction. Why do you think both parts of this requirement are important?
6. What are some possible benefits of disability labels in education? What are some potential drawbacks or concerns associated with labeling students?
7. The chapter discusses person-first language. Why might language choices matter when discussing students with disabilities?

8. The quote at the beginning of the chapter states, “We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.” In what ways does this idea connect to special education and inclusive classrooms?
9. The chapter notes that many strategies used in special education are also effective for students without identified disabilities. Why do you think this is true?
10. What responsibilities do general education teachers have in supporting students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms?
11. Why is parent and family involvement considered such an important part of special education planning and decision making?
12. The number and types of disability categories under IDEA have changed over time and may continue to change in the future. Why might disability categories evolve over time?
13. How might disability labels influence teacher expectations, either positively or negatively?
14. What does the term “least restrictive environment” (LRE) mean, and why is it an important principle in special education?
15. After reading this chapter, what do you think are the most important qualities or dispositions educators should have when working with students with disabilities?

About the Author

Dr. Kathleen VanTol has over 35 years of experience working in the field of education. She holds a doctorate in special education from Western Michigan University and is a professor of special education at Dordt University. She is also a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and a Board Certified Advocate in Special Education.

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