



Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

Chapter 3: Families, Inclusion, and Participation

Discussion Questions

1. Why is inclusion about more than simply placing a student with a disability in a general education classroom? What does meaningful participation look like?
2. The chapter describes several types of barriers to participation, including physical, communication, policy, program, social, and transportation barriers. Which of these do you think schools are most successful at addressing? Which remain the most challenging? Why?
3. Why might social barriers be among the most difficult barriers to overcome? What can educators do to promote acceptance, belonging, and positive relationships?
4. How can barriers affect not only students with disabilities but also their parents, siblings, and other family members?
5. The chapter notes that disability affects the entire family system. What are some ways that having a child with a disability may influence family relationships, routines, finances, and daily life?
6. Families often experience a range of emotions when learning that their child has a disability. Why is it important for educators to understand and be sensitive to these experiences?
7. The stories shared by families from Nicaragua demonstrate that many parents experience similar emotions and challenges regardless of culture or location. What common themes did you notice across the families' experiences?

8. Why is it important for teachers to view parents as partners rather than simply recipients of information or services?
9. What can educators do to build trust and positive relationships with families, particularly when discussing concerns about a child's learning or development?
10. Parents are often expected to participate actively in the IEP process. What barriers might prevent families from participating fully, and how can schools help address these barriers?
11. The chapter describes Parent Training and Information Centers as valuable resources for families. Why is access to information and support important for parents of children with disabilities?
12. Many advocacy organizations were founded by parents of children with disabilities. Why do you think parents have played such an important role in advancing disability rights and educational opportunities?
13. How can schools ensure that family members with disabilities are able to participate fully in school activities, events, and decision-making processes?
14. What responsibilities do educators have in creating welcoming school communities where students and families feel respected, valued, and included?
15. After reading this chapter, what do you think are the most important qualities educators should demonstrate when working with families of children 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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