



Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

Chapter 11: Special Education Referral and Identification

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important for schools to implement classroom accommodations and evidence-based interventions before referring a student for a special education evaluation? Under what circumstances might an immediate referral be appropriate?
2. Classroom teachers are often the first professionals to recognize that a student may need additional support. What observations or patterns might lead a teacher to become concerned about a student's learning or behavior?
3. The Student Support Team focuses on solving problems within general education before considering a special education referral. How does this process benefit both students and teachers?
4. Parents are considered essential members of both the Student Support Team and the multidisciplinary evaluation team. Why is parent input important throughout the referral and evaluation process?
5. The evaluation process requires informed parent consent before assessments can begin. What does informed consent mean?

6. Special education evaluations must use multiple assessment methods rather than relying on a single test. Why is it important to gather information from a variety of sources before determining whether a student is eligible for special education?
7. The chapter emphasizes that evaluations should be culturally and linguistically responsive. What problems might arise if an evaluator does not consider a student's cultural background or language experiences during the assessment process?
8. Observation is one of the most common assessment methods used in special education. What information can observations provide that may not be captured through formal testing alone?
9. Interviews are described as "a conversation with a purpose." Why are interviews with parents, teachers, and students valuable components of a comprehensive evaluation?
10. Curriculum-based measures (CBMs) are frequently used to monitor student progress over time. How do CBMs differ from curriculum-based assessments (CBAs), and why are they useful for teachers?
11. Norm-referenced tests compare students to a representative sample, while criterion-referenced tests compare students to specific learning standards. In what situations might each type of assessment be most useful?
12. Many standardized tests report standard scores, scaled scores, percentile ranks, and age- or grade-equivalent scores. Why is it important for educators to understand what these scores do, and do not, tell us about a student's abilities?

13. Imagine a student scores well below average on one standardized test but performs much better on other assessments and classroom observations. How should the multidisciplinary team interpret these results? What next steps might the team take?
14. The chapter emphasizes collaboration among classroom teachers, special educators, school psychologists, related service providers, and families. What are some potential barriers to meaningful collaboration and how can teachers overcome them?
15. Imagine you are a classroom teacher who is concerned about a student who is struggling academically and behaviorally. Based on what you learned in this chapter, describe the steps you would expect to occur from your initial concerns through the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), if the student is found eligible for special education.

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.

Recommended citation

VanTol, K. (2026). *Foundations of special education* (3rd ed.). Dordt University.

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