



Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

Chapter 10: Low Incidence Disorders

Discussion Questions

1. Low-incidence disabilities account for a relatively small percentage of students receiving special education services. Why is it still important for every classroom teacher to understand these disabilities and the supports students may need?
2. Developmental delay is different from the other IDEA disability categories. Why do you think IDEA limits the use of this category to young children through age 9? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?
3. Many students with orthopedic impairments have typical intellectual ability. How might assumptions about a student's physical disability affect teacher expectations? What can teachers do to ensure that expectations remain appropriately high?
4. Students with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, and muscular dystrophy may all require physical accommodations, yet their educational needs can differ greatly. How can other members of the education team help you to individualize these supports rather than assume that all students with physical disabilities need the same accommodations?
5. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) often results in changes to memory, attention, behavior, or emotional regulation. Why might these "invisible" effects be more difficult for teachers and peers to understand than physical disabilities?

6. A student returns to school after a traumatic brain injury but appears physically recovered. What signs might indicate that the student still needs educational supports?
7. Why is early identification of hearing loss or vision loss so important? How can early intervention influence a child's language development, learning, and long-term educational outcomes?
8. Choose one classroom strategy described in this chapter for supporting students who are deaf or hard of hearing or students with visual impairments. Explain why you think this strategy is effective and how it removes barriers to learning.
9. This chapter emphasizes the importance of helping students be as independent as possible. Choose one type of support discussed in the chapter and explain how it can increase independence and participation in school.
10. Students with low-incidence disabilities are educated in a variety of settings. What factors should an IEP team consider when deciding the least restrictive environment (LRE) for a particular student?
11. Students with deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities often have complex educational, communication, medical, and therapy needs. Why is it important for all members of the educational team to work toward common goals? What challenges might arise if team members do not communicate effectively?
12. Choose one specialist discussed in this chapter (e.g., physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, audiologist, teacher of students with visual impairments, or orientation and mobility specialist). How can that specialist help a classroom teacher better support a student's learning and participation?

13. Many students with low-incidence disabilities benefit from accommodations that improve access rather than change learning expectations. What is the difference between removing barriers to learning and lowering academic expectations? Why is this distinction important?
14. Imagine you are preparing your classroom for a student with a low-incidence disability whom you have never taught before. What information would you want to learn before the student arrives, and how would you prepare your classroom to support that student?
15. One of the major themes of this chapter is that every student is unique. After reading this chapter, what do you think are the three most important attitudes or practices that effective teachers should demonstrate when working with students who have low-incidence 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.

Recommended citation

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

<https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/foundations-special-education>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

