



# Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

## Chapter 13: Instructional Strategies

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is effective instruction considered the heart of special education? How does high-quality instruction differ from simply providing accommodations or modifications?
2. What is the difference between best practices, research-based practices, and evidence-based practices? Why is it important for teachers to understand these distinctions?
3. Why is professional judgment still necessary when using evidence-based practices? Can research alone determine the best instructional strategy for every student? Explain your reasoning.
4. How do classroom rules, routines, procedures, and the physical arrangement of the classroom work together to create a positive learning environment? Which do you think has the greatest impact on student success? Why?
5. High-leverage practices are intended for all students with disabilities rather than for a specific disability category. Why is this an important characteristic?
6. When planning instruction, teachers must prioritize learning goals. What factors should teachers consider when deciding which skills or concepts deserve the greatest instructional emphasis?

7. What is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and how does it relate to scaffolded instruction? Describe a time when you experienced effective scaffolding as a learner.
8. Why is it important to gradually fade scaffolded supports? What might happen if supports are removed too quickly or never removed at all?
9. Explicit instruction is sometimes criticized as being "teacher-directed." Based on this chapter, how is explicit instruction much more than simply lecturing students?
10. Frequent opportunities for student responding are a hallmark of effective instruction. Which response strategies described in the chapter do you think would be most effective in an elementary classroom? Which might work best in a secondary classroom? Explain your reasoning.
11. The chapter recommends using flexible grouping rather than permanent ability groups. What are the advantages and potential challenges of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping?
12. Why is guided practice such an important bridge between teacher modeling and independent practice? What role does feedback play during this stage of instruction?
13. The chapter emphasizes that homework should reinforce learning rather than introduce new learning. Do you agree with this recommendation? Why or why not?
14. Review, maintenance, and generalization are all essential parts of instruction. Why isn't it enough for students to demonstrate a skill correctly one time?

15. The chapter concludes by stating that "effective teaching is both a science and an art."

What does this statement mean to you? How can teachers balance research-based practices with professional judgment to meet the needs of individual learners?

## 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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