



Foundations of Special Education

By Dr. Kathleen VanTol

Chapter 9: Communication Disorders

Discussion Questions

1. Speech and language are often discussed together, but they are not the same thing. Explain the difference between speech and language and describe why it is important for teachers to understand this distinction.
2. Children develop communication skills at different rates. What are some typical speech and language milestones that teachers of young children should be aware of? Why is it important to recognize when development differs significantly from expected patterns?
3. Compare and contrast the major types of speech disorders discussed in this chapter (articulation, fluency, and voice disorders). How might each type of disorder affect a student's participation in the classroom?
4. Language consists of several different components, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Choose two of these components and explain how weaknesses in each might affect classroom learning.
5. Many students with communication disorders also have other disabilities or disorders. Why is it important for teachers to consider the whole child rather than focusing only on the child's disabilities?

6. Communication disorders can affect both academic learning and social relationships. Describe several ways communication challenges might influence a student's classroom participation, friendships, and self-confidence.
7. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is often misunderstood. Explain the difference between augmentative and alternative communication, give examples of aided and unaided AAC, and discuss why research supports introducing AAC as early as needed.
8. The chapter emphasizes the importance of presuming competence. What does it mean to presume competence when working with students who have communication disorders? How might this belief influence a teacher's expectations and instructional decisions?
9. Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are important members of the educational team. Describe the role of the SLP and explain how classroom teachers can collaborate effectively with SLPs to support student learning.
10. Many classroom accommodations for students with communication disorders are simple instructional practices. Identify several strategies teachers can use to make classroom communication more accessible. Which strategies do you think would benefit all learners, not just those with communication disorders?
11. Students with communication disorders may be at increased risk for bullying and social isolation. What can teachers do to create a classroom culture that promotes acceptance, meaningful participation, and positive peer relationships?

12. Imagine you have a student who stutters and is anxious about giving oral presentations. How would you support this student while maintaining high expectations for learning and participation?
13. A student who uses an AAC device joins your classroom. What steps would you take to ensure that the student is able to communicate effectively, participate in classroom activities, and develop relationships with classmates?
14. Reflect on the statement, "Communication is essential for learning, building relationships, and participating fully in school and community life." Why is communication so central to education, and how can teachers help remove barriers that prevent students from communicating successfully?
15. After reading this chapter, what is the single most important idea you want to remember about supporting students with speech and language impairments? Explain why this idea stood out to you and how it might influence your future teaching.

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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