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# The Autistic Classroom

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FOR TEACHERS OF ASD LEARNERS



**“ If a child can’t learn  
the way we teach,  
maybe we should teach  
the way they learn. ”**

**Ignacio Estrada**



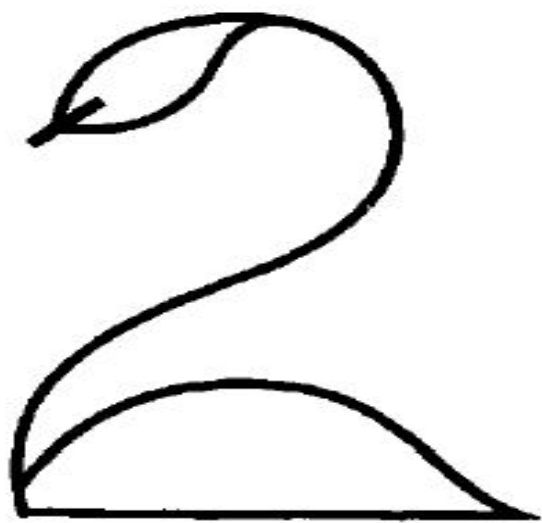
Our perspective needs to change

What do you see...

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Can you explain this ...

**1 + 1 = SWAN**



# Your experience

1. My experience of interacting with people with Autism is

- ▶ A. extensive
- ▶ B. Average
- ▶ C. minimal.

2. When I have to deal with people with Autism I feel

- ▶ A. confident
- ▶ B. not completely confident but okay
- ▶ C. unsure and a little anxious.

3. When I have learners with special educational needs in my class I feel

- ▶ A. confident
- ▶ B. interested but don't think I know enough
- ▶ C. unsure and a little anxious.

# We hear these expressions all the time...

- I can't teach **special needs children**
- because
- I don't have **special needs children**'
  
- I am not trained to teach
- **Special needs learners** so I can't do it'
  
- What will I do if I find teaching **special needs learners** difficult?'



# Imagine if we said this though

- I don't understand children because
- I don't have children'
  
- I am not trained to teach
- learner A,B or C so I can't do it'
  
- What will I do if I find teaching learner A,B or C difficult?'

# Autism: The official description...

**Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a group of complex neurodevelopment disorders characterized by repetitive and characteristic patterns of behavior and difficulties with social communication and interaction. The symptoms are present from early childhood and affect daily functioning.**

*National Institute of Neurological Disorders (UK)*

# Autism: a lack of training can lead to frustration...

**Bouncing off the walls syndrome, yeah that's it I think.**

*ESL Teacher, Bahrain*

**You have no idea which kid is going to turn up in class. I mean it's the same kid, but not.**

*ESL Teacher, Spain*

**It breaks my heart not to be able to help but I just don't know**

*ESL Teacher, Ireland*

**Things were not going well. I figured this kid had to have Autism or ADHD or OCD or something...**

*ESL teacher, Italy*

# Autism: A students perspective

**I am different, that's ok, but its not ok that me being different is treated as a problem to be fixed. I am Autistic, not a broken window.**

✦ *Learner Age 14 from Switzerland*

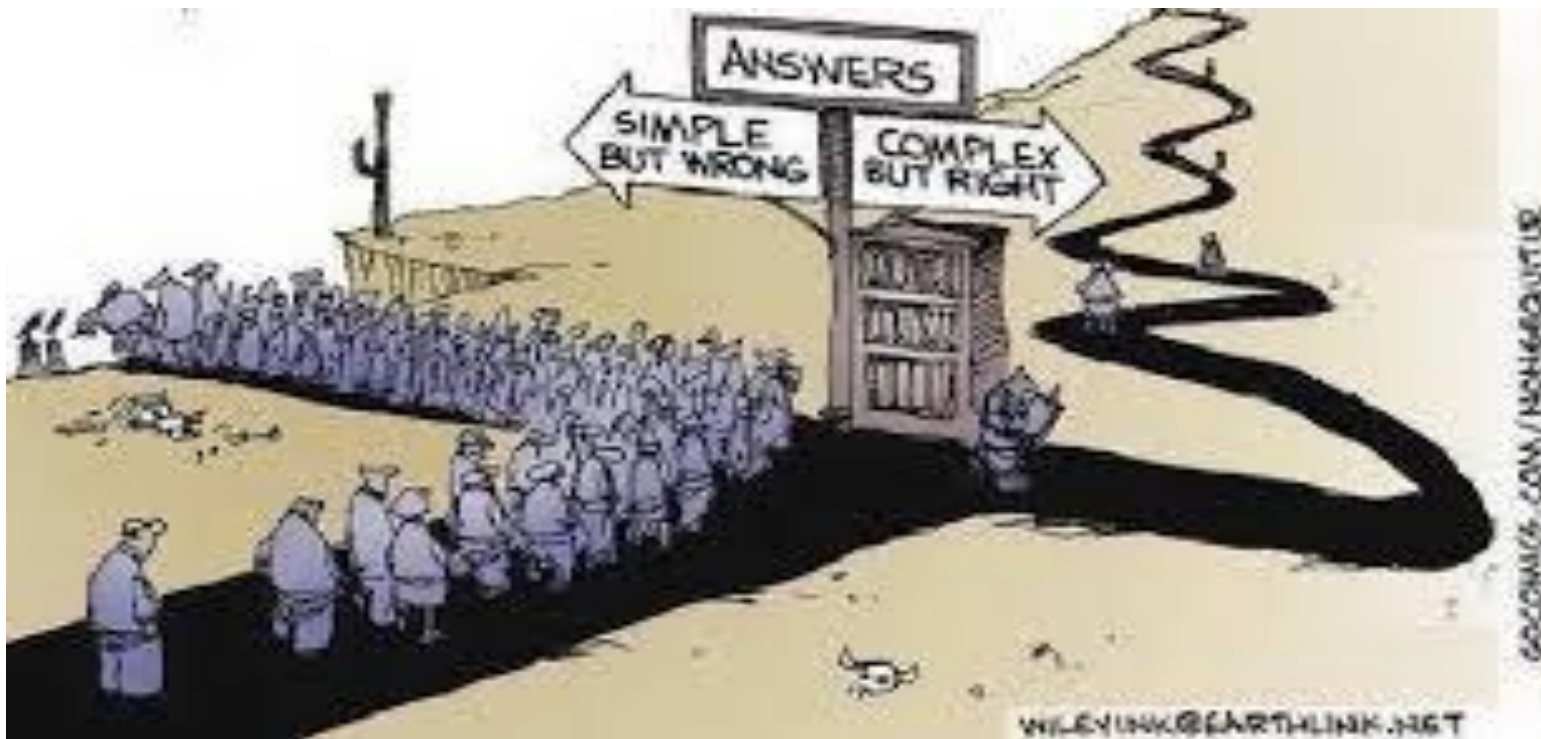
**You all want to be the same. I am the same...as me... ok?**

*Learner Age 9 from Austria*

**My brother said 'If my dad's head was a golf ball, my head would be a beach ball.' Nobody understood what he meant except him and me, and that's all that matters."**

*Learner (one of twins on the autistic spectrum) USA*

# The Autistic road



# Characteristics

- ▶ good and bad days
- ▶ difficulty processing sensory input (visual, auditory or physical)
- ▶ poor short term and/or working memory
- ▶ lack of time awareness and management
- ▶ hypersensitivity to environmental factors
- ▶ difficulties with sequencing
- ▶ difficulty in maintaining focus and especially in changing focus (from board to book, or TV to magazine)
- ▶ difficulty with regulating pitch/volume/pace when speaking
- ▶ lack of rhythm and /or balance
- ▶ difficulties with listening, especially in groups
- ▶ difficulties with turn-taking
- ▶ avoiding new or unpredictable situations
- ▶ difficulty with metaphoric language
- ▶ difficulty sleeping
- ▶ low self-esteem
- ▶ the ability to surprise (especially by making unexpected connections between ideas)



# Welcome to the box

**Students need to feel teacher's support  
encouragement and patience with their  
errors without being excessively critical**

(Horwitz, Young and Gardner, 1991)

# Who is in the box – the learner or the teacher?





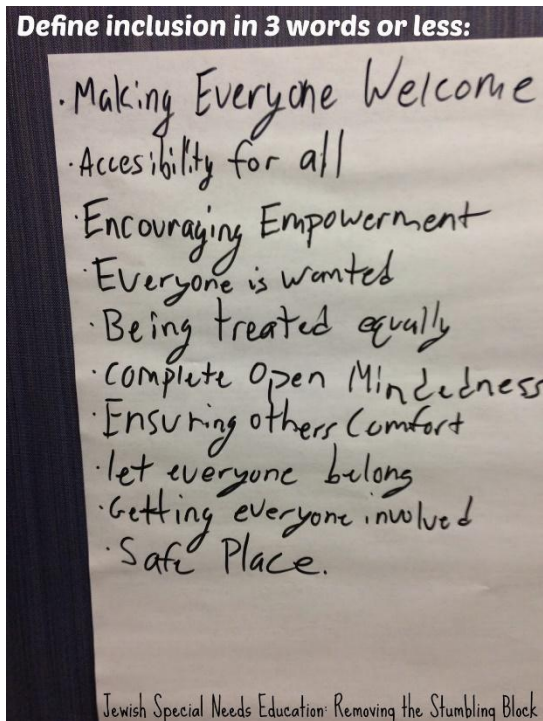
# Managing the Autistic Classroom

- ▶ Personalise their lessons
- ▶ Identify the individual needs and strengths of learners
- ▶ Teach in multi-sensory way
- ▶ Break down tasks into manageable chunks
- ▶ Incorporate different learning styles – see it, hear it, feel it
- ▶ Recycle and review in different ways
- ▶ Encourage learners to help each other
- ▶ Have clear rules, rewards and sanctions
- ▶ Have a seating plan, think about where learners should sit
- ▶ Give clear instructions, check and get examples
- ▶ Notice what is working and do more of it
- ▶ Encourage learners with positive marking and comments

# How should classes be presented

- ▶ be multi-sensory
- ▶ afford many opportunities for recapping and reviewing
- ▶ be presented in small manageable chunks, and
- ▶ include explicit instruction in grammar, study skills and phonological systems.

# Empowering learners



## Open and Inclusive?

# Our mission as inclusive educators...

- ▶ *promote mutual understanding and to learn respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective communication' (CEFR,2001: 3)*