

OPINION

Classroom



With
Larry
Ferlazzo

An award-winning English and Social Studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif., Larry Ferlazzo is the author of *Helping Students Motivate Themselves: Practical Answers To Classroom Challenges*, *The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide*, and *Building Parent Engagement In Schools*. He also maintains the popular [Websites of the Day](#) blog. In this EdWeek blog, an experiment in knowledge-gathering, he will address readers' questions on classroom management, ELL instruction, lesson planning, and other issues facing teachers. Send your questions to lferlazzo@epe.org. And offer your own thoughts and responses in the comments section.

Response: 'Making an Inclusive Classroom Work'

By **Larry Ferlazzo** on April 16, 2018 3:30 PM

The new "question-of-the-week" is:

What is the best advice you can offer to teachers who have students with special needs in their classes?

Today's commentator is Barbara Boroson, LMSW.

Response from Barbara Boroson

Barbara Boroson is a nationally-recognized keynote speaker and professional development provider with over 25 years of experience in autism spectrum education, the mother of a teenage son with ASD, and author of [Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Inclusive Classroom: How to Reach and Teach Students with ASD](#), published by Scholastic. Contact her at www.barbaraboroson.com:

*This is a big question for a small space. (It took me 234 pages to answer this very question in my book!) We all know that having students with significant challenges in your inclusive classroom is never easy. **Their challenges challenge you.** So, since I get to offer only one piece of advice here, I'd say this: Use that mutuality of challenges not only to help you teach, but also to help you grow.*

If you're really committed to making your inclusive classroom work, you will probably struggle to differentiate your curriculum to meet the varied learning needs of your diverse population. You will agonize over how to facilitate a peer community that is supportive and accepting. You will worry about pre-empting difficult behaviors and you will second-guess your responses to behavioral outbursts.

If you're really committed to making it work, you will take advantage of supports that are offered to you, such as interdisciplinary team meetings, RtI guidelines, special ed personnel, and professional development opportunities. Some you'll find helpful, some not so much.

You will do your very best to compensate for the special challenges you confront.

And, despite it all, you will get it wrong sometimes. Even with all of your effort and hard work, there will still be days when your best-laid plans go awry and your carefully calculated interventions backfire. Those days will be frustrating, demoralizing, even defeating. You may even want to give up.

But before you do, pause to consider how a day feels for your students with special needs. Just like you, they have been doing everything they can to get through the day, but without the benefits of experience, maturity, or education, and without the coping skills that you have.

Like you, they struggle. They struggle to process content in the face of auditory or cognitive processing challenges. They struggle to engage, focus, or sit still; to think abstractly or metacognitively; to compensate for specific academic dys-abilities (eg. dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyslexia); and to circumvent all of their other barriers to learning.

Like you, they agonize. They agonize over how to fit in, how to make friends, and how to stay under the bully-radar, even as they try in vain to decode the encrypted language of socialization.

Like you, they worry. They worry about falling apart, freaking out, and losing control when their sensory system is triggered and their regulatory system fails.

Like you, they will take advantage of supports that are offered to them, such as IEP-mandated modifications and accommodations, assistive technology, social skill groups, and push-in and pull-out therapeutic services. Some they'll find helpful, some not so much.

Like you, they will do their very best to compensate for the special challenges they confront.

And like you, they will get it wrong sometimes. Even with all of their effort and hard work, there will still be days when their best-laid plans go awry and their precariously calibrated equilibrium melts down. Those days will be frustrating, demoralizing, even defeating. They may even want to give up.

And so, my best advice is simply this: Acknowledge that you and your students are experiencing a mutual, even symbiotic process; each of you finding your way along a bumpy road. Celebrate your strengths and triumphs just as you celebrate those of your students. Address your own challenges with sensitivity, energy, and optimism, just as you address those of your students. Get the help you need, to give them the help they need. When you stumble, forgive and learn from your missteps, just as you forgive and learn from theirs, and keep moving forward, side by side, with courage, pride, patience, and humility. And when the going gets tough--which it will--give your struggling student a hug, and give your struggling self a break.

"When the going gets tough – which it will – give your struggling student a hug, and give your struggling self a break."

- Barbara Boroson in Education Week Teacher