



Featured Teacher: Alex Dishman

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Cast of Characters

Autism Spectrum Disorder elementary students
in Lakeworth, FL

Background and Setting

Dishman has been a teacher for nine years.

Memorable Learning

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Giving Every Voice a Platform

In classrooms where communication looks different for every student, the task is finding ways to help every student shine. For the past four years, Dishman has published a classbook as a way for her Autism Spectrum Disorder elementary students to share their thoughts and passions.

"It allowed my students, specifically those with limited communication skills, to express themselves," said Dishman. "It also allowed for my students to express their special interests in a written format."

Many of her students are nonverbal. Dishman makes the experience inclusive by incorporating augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools and visual supports.

From "Favorite Animals" to "When I Grow Up ..."

Classbooks become more meaningful when students connect to the content. That's why Dishman and her class pick engaging topics that spark imagination and confidence before they begin the writing process.

"We have written books on our favorite animal, the best parts of us, our favorite things, what we want

to be when we grow up and written short stories about any topic of our choice," said Dishman.

When Books Become Breakthroughs

"Publishing isn't just about writing— it's about academic and personal growth." Dishman shared how a topic can resonate with her class and encourage their best work.

"A few of my students struggle to come up with their own thoughts and ideas without prompting," she said. "By providing them with a topic about their future, it allowed them to think on their own."

Dishman also shared an experience with a student who developed both her reading and writing skills. "She wanted to be a teacher when she grows up, and used me as the reason," Dishman said. "Through this experience and process, she was able to put into words what she enjoys about school, her future plans, and by the end of the project, she was reading."

Publishing Parties & #ProudAuthors

When their published classbooks arrive, Dishman wants her students to walk away with a memory that will last a lifetime. Some of her celebrations



include “Book Cafés” in her classroom and “Red Carpet Celebrations” in the cafeteria, where she gives students the opportunity to read their book aloud and share their work with their peers.

She adapts her Publishing Parties to make accommodations for her class, ensuring that everyone is included. Dishman said, “Those [who] couldn’t communicate effectively had my voice telling the story pre-recorded on a button to press. They used the microphone and were treated like stars.”

Dishman also shared a celebration moment that sticks with her, “They wore shirts that said ‘published author’, and truly had a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

Advice to Teachers

To teachers considering creating a classbook with their students, Dishman says to go for it!

“Every year is a chance to improve. The experience is for the students, and it’s about making learning fun,” said Dishman. “I try to think of a way to make it more memorable, more meaningful and more accommodating. It’s a [class activity] that I think makes them feel proud and special.”



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