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Hey, everyone, this is Katie Novak and you're listening to the education Table, a micro podcast where I answer your questions about inclusive education in ten minutes or less. In today's episode, we're exploring the difference between inclusion and inclusive practice. While these terms are often used interchangeably, they represent very different aspects of creating effective learning environments. I'll share some insights on what sets them apart, and then we'll discuss how educators can implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. Let's get started. I want to start with a story to illustrate the difference between inclusion and inclusive practice. Imagine a dinner party where everyone is invited to the table. Inclusion is ensuring that every person is present and has a seat. But what happens when the meal is served? If the menu is set without considering dietary preferences and needs, some guests may leave hungry or dissatisfied.

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This is where inclusive practice comes in. It's not just about having everyone at the table. It's about ensuring everyone can enjoy the meal in a way that meets their needs. Inclusion is a really critical first step of getting all students together, regardless of their variability. But inclusive practice goes beyond that. It's about giving every single student the opportunity to learn, to be supported and challenged. And this needs to be true regardless of any unique strengths or weaknesses. So why is this so important? Let's dive into the research. To effectively implement inclusive practice, we have to embrace the concept of variability. All students are different from each other, which we know to be true. They have their unique mix of strengths and weaknesses. However, they're also dynamic and they're always changing.

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So it's not enough to recognize that students have needs that are different from each other. We also have to realize that their needs are contextual. That being said, our teaching methods and materials and assessments and learning environments are often one size fits all, and they're made for this mythical average learner who doesn't have great needs for challenge or support and is always the same. So this simply doesn't allow all students to access information and resources, and it puts some students at an advantage and other students at a really significant disadvantage. So many people would say, for example, that I am a strong reader. If I was a part of an elementary school classroom and you did a universal screening on me, I would be reading at grade level.

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But that's really contextual because I am only reading at grade level when it is in English, when I'm wearing corrective lenses, when I have some sort of background knowledge on the topic, I might be able to decode a chemistry text. But without some really good instruction, I probably wouldn't comprehend it. And so my ability to read at high levels is really contextual, but I am not seen as being learning disabled. However, there's going to be some situations that are really going to create barriers and prevent me from being able to read. Now, according to research, students who are labeled as having learning challenges or who have learning disabilities are able to succeed at really high levels when we get the conditions right, when they're provided with personalized and flexible learning environments that meet their needs.

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So inclusive practice focuses on adapting our practices and systems, recognizing that it's the conditions that allow a student to be successful and not the labels that allow or prevent students from being successful. So inclusive practice is what are the conditions? What are the options and choices that need to be present so all students can get a seat in the classroom and are able to work towards grade level standards and make growth. So the question is, how do we do that? Let's dive into some concrete strategies to implement inclusive practices in your learning environment. Consider these four strategies. One, embrace variability. Recognize and value the ever changing strengths and needs of every student. You can use tools like learning profiles and interest surveys to begin to get to know students.

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However, you need to know that students and their strengths and their interests are not static. They're changing throughout the year. So it's really important that we offer lots of opportunities for students to make connections, to share their interests, and to try different strategies and figure out what works for them based on context. As an English teacher, for example, when we were closely reading poetry, we would have a shared reading of a target poem, but then I would allow students to work together to create a text set with their favorite artists and songwriters and poets so that we could compare and contrast poetic techniques. So some students were pulling up the lyrics, other students were looking for music videos, and in this we were co-designing a lesson that was built on their interests, but it was far less work for me.

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So sometimes we can help students make connections and include them. The second strategy is recognizing that what is necessary for some can be good for all. All of us know we have students who have IEPs and 504 plans, and we have accommodations and supports that we need to provide. But in UDL, we often say what is necessary for some can be a really great option for everyone. As I shared previously, I am in many situations a strong reader. However, if I forget my contact lenses or my glasses, I would not be able to see or decode a text. And so, even though I might not have the need for an audiobook all the time, having the option to say, you know what, today I don't have my lenses, I have a headache.

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I want to choose to listen to an audiobook today that allows me to be more reflective, it allows me to make a responsible decision, and it ensures that I know those scaffolds and supports are available. It really increases agency and reflection, but it also decreases the stigma of having to use a specific support. I know I had students who would not want to take the graphic organizer because they felt that everyone was going to know that they needed it. So when we give all students those options and choices to look at exemplars, to use graphic organizers to access text to speech, then we are allowing them to make decisions about their journey. And we're being not only inclusive, but we're building a lot of those metacognitive skills that are necessary for learner agency.

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Third is we want to, as much as possible, facilitate student choice. We need to encourage students to take ownership of their learning by giving them lots of opportunities to make choices about how they learn, what materials or scaffolds they use, the strategies that they're going to use to share what they know. Because when we provide this flexibility, it allows students to set personalized goals, it allows them to explore different pathways and to think about is this successful for me today, given this context? If so, I want to keep doing it. And if it's not serving me as a learner, it gives me an opportunity to choose something else. Now, do not feel like you need to overscaffold this. I often shared my firm goals with students.

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I would provide some success criteria and maybe one option, and then the other option would be for students to propose additional options, allowing them to say, wait, could we do it this way? Or is there any way we could find a scaffold like this? And not only did I allow them to make choices, but I really wanted to listen into their voices, which again, help them to feel more included. Lastly, the fourth strategy is to always be aware that you're fostering a really supportive classroom environment where students have a voice, where they can explore, where they feel like they can get what they need. And to do this, we have to create a classroom that values diversity, encourages collaboration, and really supports all learners. So there's lots of different things we can do.

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We can use collaborative learning strategies like socratic seminars or a jigsaw. We can facilitate peer reviews and cooperative learning, and we can use the continuum of restorative practices to build a really strong classroom community. The key is ensuring that we have lots of different examples of what each of these looks like when we are successful. Lots of opportunities for students to reflect. What does it mean to provide really good feedback to appear, allowing students to pause and think about do they need sentence stems? Do they need time to process? And when they get feedback from peers, was that helpful for their learning? We need to be far more reflective and far more responsive to asking students, do you have what you need to be successful? If so, let's keep doing it. And if not yet, let's change it up.

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How do we co create that? Because it's a huge part of inclusive practice. So to end this episode, inclusion is a really essential step in creating equitable environments. But inclusive practice takes it further. By ensuring that students have exactly what they need to succeed. By embracing this concept of variability, by ensuring that all students have the conditions they need to be successful, and then giving students choices and opportunities to reflect, we can create classrooms where all students have much better chances to engage and be successful as learners. So thank you so much for joining me at the education table. Be sure to check out the show notes for more resources on inclusion and inclusive practice, and click subscribe to hear more. Until next time. Onward.