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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 10 minutes or less. Today, we're diving into the world of playlists. Not the Spotify kind, but a blended learning model that empowers students to personalize their learning and control their pace. So let's dive in to the story, the stats, and the strategies. So I've always been a really big fan of to do lists. Every single morning, I write down what I want to accomplish. I start with my professional calendar, I write down all the things I need to do for work, and then I try to fill in what I want to accomplish personally, like if I want to go on a long run or if I need to refinish a door in my office.

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And I like to write these down and then check off items as I go. It turns out this is a pretty effective strategy for students too, because it helps them to feel accomplished and build agency. So let's dive into the research on that. Research shows that student agency, the ability to take ownership of learning, has a really significant impact on motivation, engagement, and long term academic success. And there has been numerous studies that find that, like personalized learning approaches like playlists do lead to higher achievement compared to traditional models. So by merging universal design for learning and blended learning, playlists can provide a framework where students can access the resources they need, engage with grade level content at their own pace, and get feedback from their teacher.

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And this aligns with the principles of udl, because if we design a playlist through that lens, we can offer multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression. It is a really great structure for both structure and for flexibility in the classroom. But the question is, how do you do it? Now, the first tip that you need to remember when creating a playlist is to blend the ingredients. The first thing to remember is that blended learning is like a recipe and requires three things. It requires online learning, the best of the digital world, offline learning, the best of actual hands on learning, student collaboration, and some sort of teacher feedback or explicit instruction. We want to blend all those things together.

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For example, if you're creating a playlist, the first thing on the playlist may be that students have to watch a video or a simulation. And if they're controlling the pace of that and they're answering questions and they're having to pause or put on captions, they're not all going to finish at the same time. But ultimately, we want students to go through and complete this video. And then maybe we require them to follow up with an offline task, like maybe writing a takeaway on a post it and putting it on a class wall to do kind of a graffiti walk where you can see what other people are thinking. And after posting that, maybe they have to come in and check in with you as a teacher and just tell them their greatest takeaway before they move on to the next thing.

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So essentially the beauty of this is that they're getting to work at their own pace. So the students who need a little bit more time, get a little more time, and then they're kind of trickling to you as a teacher for those check ins. So it is accessible to students, it's personalized. But you are a safety net of accountability. To make sure that students are working through the playlist. The second tip is to leverage the instructional materials you already have. So let your materials work for you by integrating them into a playlist. So imagine, for example, that you're teaching a science lesson and there's simulations and diagrams and a essential questions. Instead of having every student work through everything in lockstep, you could say that the simulation is an online resource that students have to access independently.

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And maybe you want the screens towards you to make sure that students stay a little more focused. And then when they're finished, you might say that they're going to interact with a diagram by annotating it in hard copy, for example. So maybe after they're looking at the digital simulation, they come and they create some sort of actual diagram, whether they're writing on a whiteboard or with pencils and crayons, or, you know, working alone or working together. But you can allow students to choose how they're going to make that diagram. And then when it comes to the essential question, maybe students check in with you to show the diagram before they have to go back and answer the essential question. But maybe they have a choice of how to answer it.

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So they could answer it in writing, they could answer it by making a short video, or they could answer it, for example, by creating like a multimedia tool, like a slide deck. So this approach gives students multiple ways to engage with and demonstrate their understanding. They're checking in with you, they're using the instructional materials, but it's allowing them a little bit more time to kind of personalize and work through it at a pace that works better for them. Now, the third tip is to build in scaffolds. One very common concern with playlists is that students are going to struggle to manage their time and they're going to struggle to stay on task. These are really important life skills to be able to do. And so we have to provide scaffolds and support so students can do that.

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So when introducing playlists, for example, ask students the first couple of times they do them to track how much time they're actually spending on each activity, because this helps them to reflect on their pacing and to make better decisions. The more that you do these playlists, you also can set checkpoints where students have to complete a task before moving on. So you might say that, you know, you have to come in and show me your work before you can go on to the next thing. And that allows you to kind of get a sense of, I haven't heard from those four kids over there. I'm going to go check in on them and make sure they're on task. You also can group tasks into must dos and then ultimately provide more choices so the most important content is done first.

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That can be really helpful. And it's also really important to provide examples or models for more complex tasks to make it more likely that students will be able to move forward with them. But again, try it a couple times. Ask students to reflect and it will get better every single time you do it. So you have learned that playlists are more than just a to do list. They're a really great way to empower students to take charge of their learning while balancing the best of the blend, the online, the offline, and the teacher led instruction or the teacher check in. So by blending these strategies, we can create classrooms where our students really do have the tools and the flexibility and the support they need to succeed.

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So try it out, see how it goes, reflect with students and keep moving forward because we'll get better at this the more we do it. Be sure to check out the show notes for resources and examples to get started. And keep an eye out for my upcoming book with the Amazing Katlyn Tucker, where we dive even deeper into UDL and blended learning through the lens of how the robots and AI can help us to do all of this better until next time onward.