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Foreign. Hey everyone, this is Katie Novak, and you're listening to the Education Table, a micro podcast where we dive into inclusive education in 10 minutes or less. Today, we're talking about data. Not just the big, flashy standardized test scores and report cards, but the small, everyday data that helps teachers adjust instruction, connect with students, and see the immediate impact of their work. We're going to talk about how to gather this data and highlight some important pieces you may be missing. Because seriously, if you're not paying attention to the little data, you may be missing the best parts of teaching. After that, I'll share some action steps that you can use to leverage both big and small data in your learning environment to make a difference every single day. So let's dive in.

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As a consultant, I get feedback about my teaching almost every single day. Sometimes directly in conversations or feedback forms, sometimes indirectly through engagement levels. And occasionally I am called mom in the middle of a session that has actually happened more than once. And goodness gracious, it shows that I am getting older. But truly, it is the highest of compliments. I used to love when kids accidentally called me mom and it's happening all over again now. Taken together, all of this data helps me to figure out what's working so I can keep doing it. And it helps me to figure out what's not working so I can adjust. Sometimes I do that in the moment, and sometimes it takes weeks or months of trends for me to figure out that I need to do something differently.

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But all of this makes me think about how teachers work with data. So often when we have data meetings, we're thinking about the big data. The standardized test scores, universal screeners, monitoring progress, attendance, the results of surveys, things like that. And do not get me wrong, these things are wildly important, but they are not the only types of data, and they do not tell the whole story. What about the small, everyday data points that we can look at? Like the kid who raises their hand more today than yesterday? Or the moment a student stays behind to ask a question? Or that email from a parent saying, oh, my child loves math this year because of you. You need to print that out. But these small data points are so powerful because they remind us that change doesn't happen in these big leaps.

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A lot of the times it is intertwined with these really small moments. And if we don't take time to reflect on those things, we miss so many opportunities to adjust instruction to figure out what's working, but also like to just celebrate the beauty of this work. So this is my reminder that although data meetings where we're looking at larger standardized forms of data are really important, there is more complexity to the work we do. And we have this amazing opportunity to reflect more often, adjust and celebrate, even daily. And it turns out this is really important for educators. Research is clear that teachers who frequently use data to reflect on their practices and make decisions become more effective than their peers who do not. There was a study called Becoming Data Driven.

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The Influence of Teachers Sense of Efficacy on Concerns Related to the Data Driven Decision Making. That is a very long title. But researchers at the University of Arkansas and the Oregon Department of Education argue that too often data based decision making is stress inducing for teachers. And when something is stress inducing, you do not do it as often. And in my own experience, I have found that the reason that data meetings and looking at data is so stress inducing is because we're often looking at the data through a very deficit based lens. We're looking at what's not working without balancing it with what is actually going really well. So we're often looking for problems and if we're only focused on the negative, it starts to feel like, oh my gosh, I'm not capable of making a difference.

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And that's really demoralizing because goodness knows there is a lot that we can change in education, but we're also doing so many things really well. And as a mom of four and someone who spends a lot of time in classrooms working with teachers across the world, I can tell you there are brilliant moments in education. And that although we're looking at big data trends that show us that there is a need for change. And I don't to minimize that. It cannot take away from the fact that there's really good work happening in schools. And there are so many small moments where kids really are being served in ways that are going to help them find a path to be successful in this world. And we need to look at the big data for long term trends.

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Certainly we need more kids who are mastering and exceeding grade level standards. We need more kids to develop literacy skills and be able to solve problems in mathematics. But in order for us to feel a sense of purpose while we wait for that big data, we have to look at the small data to help us refine and connect and grow every single day. And it's often these moments that remind us why we love this work so much. So I want to share three tips that you can begin to think about integrating into your practice to honor both the big data and the small data. So Here are three ways that you can make data work for you in your classroom. Number one, Reflect daily on small data. At the end of every day, take two minutes and jot down a few quick reflections.

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Now, in addition to writing down the needs of your learners, also ask yourself the following questions. Did any students have a breakthrough moment? Was there anything you did that resulted in much higher engagement for from your learners? Even something as small as a student smiling for the first time in a couple of weeks or a group of students really showing persistence? That matters. Keep a journal or a digital note where you can track these small wins. And over time you may see some trends that don't show up as quickly in the big data. But these moments are where you're going to find the heart of the work that we do. Number two, remember that big data is important to inform, but it doesn't totally define.

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So the big data we use, like universal screeners, standardized test scores, SEL surveys absolutely help us to identify needs and trends and even gaps in how we're serving our kids. And certainly it will allow us to determine that there is a need for change. But we have to know that it's not about changing every single thing. It's about figuring out what is working already for whom and then what is not working yet for whom. And so we can make those changes. But the thing is we can't wait a year to see if the things that we are changing actually make a difference. And when we're talking about standardized data, sometimes we do have to wait that year.

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So we have to use the small data from formative assessments, from conversations with students, from emails from parents so that we can reflect what is working well, so we can keep doing it and is not working. So we can put our brilliant heads together and figure out how to do it differently. So for example, if your big data shows a class wide struggle with reading comprehension, that is so important to guide planning to think about explicit instruction and evidence based practices and how to nurture this love of literacy in your students. But we also have to lean into the small data, right? What our student conversations look like when they're discussing literature or maybe tracking students perceptions of confidence reading in exit tickets, like all of this allows us to adjust and fine tune in real time.

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Now the third strategy is to remember to measure what matters. Now. Not all progress can be measured by a grade

or a score or a survey. Relationships, for example, are really hard to quantify, but they have the potential to drive engagement and success. So pay attention to how often students seek you out, how many emails you get from families sharing really positive feedback, or even how many times you hear a student say, oh my gosh, I get this, or oh my goodness, class is over. I don't want to leave. It may be really good to create your own rubric for what success looks like in your classroom. That includes but goes beyond academic outcomes, whether that is building confidence in learning, fostering collaboration and relationships, or increasing student agency.

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Because sometimes you just need to know that you are making a difference, that you are creating a space where kids are supported and challenged and they feel good. And ultimately, we want all of this to lead to increased academic outcomes. And evidence suggests that it will. When we have excellent instruction, when we build relationships with kids and when we meet their needs, we would expect them to increase learning, but that takes time. And so it's important that we reflect with our students and we create our own rubrics for what a really successful day looks like when we're accessing grade level learning, when we're challenging ourselves, when we're working together and taking some time to even reflect as a community.

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That allows us to celebrate ourselves as we work towards our much bigger goals of increased student achievement, more responsible technology use, and overall success in the world. So to end and big data helps us see the forest, but small data helps us nurture the trees, which I know is so cheesy, but goodness gracious, someone needs to nurture the trees every day. Teachers have this potential to make a difference not just on standardized test reports, which of course they can, but they don't happen frequently enough for us to know if we're really nailing it. But ultimately, it's the countless small moments that shape a student's love of learning and sense of belonging. So take the time to reflect, adjust, and celebrate daily wins, because those are the moments that make this grind worth it. Thank you so much for tuning into the education table.

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Don't forget to check the show notes for some reflection tools and strategies to help you measure what matters. Until next time onward.