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Hello, everyone. This is Katie Novak, and you're listening to the education Table, a micro podcast where we answer your questions about inclusive education in ten minutes or less. In today's episode, we're exploring how to build a more student led classroom. I'll share a story about how shifting responsibility to my kids made mornings smoother and way more enjoyable. We'll also dive into strategies to help teachers find balance while students experience more responsibility, success, and enjoyment. Let's get started. Let me tell you a story about breakfast time at our house with four kids. Mornings used to be insanely chaotic. My husband, Lon, and I would always be rushing around trying to make a la carte breakfast for everyone. But no matter how hard we tried, the kids would often say things like, I'm not in the mood for that today. I don't like yogurt anymore.

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It was frustrating and exhausting. Then we decided to shift the responsibility to our kids. We taught them how to make their own breakfast. Suddenly they enjoyed breakfast so much more, and we got to sip our coffee while it was still hot. The simple change made a huge difference in our kids sense of independence and responsibility and ultimately made our mornings much easier. We can make the same shifts in our learning environments if we shift to student led the concept of student led classrooms aligns with so many educational best practices and research findings. According to a report from the National Education association, one of the nations largest teachers unions, student led learning fosters much greater engagement, motivation, and academic success. When students take ownership of their learning, theyre much more invested in the process and in the outcomes.

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In their study, student agency in Learning, published in the Journal of Educational Research, Lee and Hannafin found students who have more control over their learning activities develop much better problem solving skills and exhibit higher levels of creativity and critical thinking. Finally, a meta analysis conducted by the American Institute of Research showed student led instructional strategies can lead to significant improvements in academic performance, with effect sizes ranging from 0.5 to 0.7, which is more than one year of growth. So the research is clear, this is a really good direction to move in, but how can you begin to make those shifts? So, to build a more student led, universally designed classroom, consider starting with a few key strategies.

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First, share firm goals with your students with success criteria, and then ask them to come up with two or three ideas for how they would be able to learn or achieve those goals. This not only gives them a voice, but it encourages them to think critically about the learning process. So if your goal, for example, is to explain the understanding of a key concept maybe they decide to write their understanding or create a short video or make a multimedia presentation. They're all working towards the same goals, they're using the same rubric, but they're deciding how they want to share. If they all have to produce writing, maybe they can choose the prompt that they're going to address, or they can decide to use a graphic organizer or an outline.

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Or maybe they have the opportunity to access lots of different tech tools and decide which is going to work best for them. As educators, we're often doing the real heavy lift to come up with all of these options, but we don't have to do that anymore. So the first strategy again is share the goal, share the success criteria, and just say to students, what are some ways that we could do this? Next, you might want to try the jigsaw method, which is an oldie but goodie. In a jigsawed classroom, students become experts on a particular topic, and then they get into small groups and teach their peers. So imagine you're in a history class. You're focusing on four key battles.

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For example, in the Civil War, you could create groups of students who have to draft questions, create roles within their group, learn more about a specific battle, and then create an artifact that shares what they know. You can go around, you can check in with all the groups, make sure what they're doing is accurate, make sure that it's rigorous. And then next, you can regroup the students. So every single group has someone who is an expert in each of those battles, so they can teach each other while you as an educator can observe and provide formative feedback, and of course, provide targeted instruction when necessary. This method promotes collaboration, communication, and a much deeper understanding of the material. Another really effective strategy is to have students prepare their own study plans for upcoming assessments instead of teachers having to provide all the preparation materials.

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Make all the games, encourage students to create their own review guides, flashcards, practice tests, and this has never been easier. We have tools like chat, GPT, and Conmigo, which is Khan Academy's tutor app, and students can leverage these technologies to create their own review methods. Again, you're available to facilitate, to provide feedback, to redirect. This empowers them to take charge of their own learning. It will also be super applicable when they go to higher education, when they have to always figure out their own studying strategies, but also they can begin to trade their practice ideas and review activities with each other. And then you can pull small groups or individual students and do some side by side assessments and provide feedback and do some conferencing. The last thing is consider shifting communication responsibilities to kids.

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So one really cool strategy is to encourage students to update their parents about how they're doing. You can do this weekly or monthly using the kids and the parents preferred communication style. It might be a written report or a letter. It could be a series of texts, it could be a video message or a presentation. But ultimately it will help students to reflect, to develop their communication skills. There's also this sense of accountability. And, you know, I always find that parents really want to hear from their kids, especially when you're teaching middle school and high school, and kids don't give you very much about how their day went.

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But this reflection, if you're going to collect these and provide feedback, is also a great formative assessment because it can provide you with valuable insights into students learning process, the areas where they're really strong and areas where they really want to make improvement. And then just think. If you do this once a month, for example, you can carve out the time for students to craft their updates and connect with their grownups. And then you only need to send out a reminder to say, hey, everyone, heads up. Your child's going to be communicating with you. And feel free to check in if you have any questions.

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So to wrap things up, building a more student led classroom involves sharing the firm goals and success criteria, encouraging students to ideate and give input on how they're going to learn and share what they know, and then shifting a lot of the responsibilities that used to be teachers to students. And as we shared in the research section, these changes can lead to increased student engagement, responsibility, and academic success. So be sure to check out the show notes for more resources on creating student led classrooms, including the book shift to student led that I co wrote with Kat Tucker, one of my favorite people in the world. Thank you so much for joining me at the education table. Until next time. Onward.