Podcast: Teaching Acceptance of Responsibility

In this week's episode of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast, Steve is joined by teacher educator and a PLS Classes instructor, Judy Lalli to discuss creating a classroom environment that models, teaches and supports responsibility.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Announcer: 00:00 PLS Classes: Online and on-site graduate classes and professional development opportunities delivered by master facilitators from eight accredited college partners. Visit plsclasses.com for more.

Steve [Intro]: 00:13 Hello and welcome to the Steve Barkley ponders Out Loud podcast. For over three decades, I've had the

opportunity to learn with educators at all levels, both nationally and internationally. I invite you to listen as I explore my thoughts and learning on a variety of topics connected to teaching, learning and leading with some of the best and brightest educators from around the globe. Thanks for listening in.

Steve: 00:40 On today's podcast, I'm joined by Judy Lalli, a long-term colleague and friend. Judy has been a classroom teacher. She currently is a substitute teaching at all grade levels in all courses. And she's been a long time teacher educator. And Judy teaches a class titled "Successful Teaching for Acceptance of Responsibility." And in all the work that I've been doing in coaching and assisting teachers and developing a much broader spectrum of student outcomes beyond content, this idea of looking at student responsibility struck a chord with me. So Judy, thanks for joining us here.

Judy: 01:40 Oh, it's my pleasure.

Steve: 01:42 I'm wondering if you, if you'd start by kind of giving a definition to what we mean by student's acceptance of responsibility.

Judy: 01:54 There's a word, you know, self responsibility that is used often in this course and it's conveying to students from Pre-K to post-grad that they can take responsibility for their actions and consequences, which as I'm saying that seems like a very simple concept, but there's so much of the blame game. The dog ate my homework kind of thing. And in this course, through language, through the use of words, because words matter, we teach the students to take responsibility, understand the consequences and the difference between punishment and consequences. It's just if this, then that and that's being self responsible. Owning it, owning it.

Steve: 02:43 Am I hearing empowered in your description?

Judy: 02:49 It's very empowering. It's so empowering. Once you

make that mind shift, that paradigm shift that, wow, I have a choice. I can make that effect the results. It's very empowering.

Steve: 03:04 So can you give us an example of how a teacher approaches an issue with an individual student? What's the skill- set that the teacher needs to have in order to develop the student's self responsibility?

Judy: 03:28 In this course, we practice a lot with our own language and then we model that and teach the students how to do it as well. So there's actually little exercises where you do an example, you know, I'm at recess and you know, "he took my hat, he grabbed my hat off my head" and you go through different questions with the students. "Well, what happened before that? What could you have done? What did you choose to do? What happened when you made that choice when you ran after him? What happened? What, what other choice could you have made?" And you just practice these little dialogues with – you keep using the word choice. And when you were responsible for that, what happened? It's a lot about language.

Steve: 04:16 So Judy, if you went back to your classroom time when you were working with a group of students over a year, how would you be laying this approach out as you address students early in the year and then looked for the development of the classroom environment across the year?

Judy: 04:43 You start from day one modeling. When you're setting up your classroom rules and procedures, you're modeling that language all the time. A student goes to give you an excuse and you say, "oh, that was an interesting choice you made." And you know, you avoid why. You never ask a kid, "well, why did you do that?" Because guess what? They'll tell you. And it doesn't matter what was in their head, why they think they did it. "Oh, that's what you chose to do. Interesting. And then what happened? All right, so next time, what other choices could you make?" And it's just repetition,

repetition, repetition of using the language of self responsibility. Pick, choose, decide. What did you decide? How did you pick that answer? What did you decide to do? What was the result? Just a lot of modeling.

Steve: 05:29 I was going to say, I'm hearing the modeling and then I guess I'm hearing the coaching. The kind of ongoing coaching of students.

Judy: 05:38 Exactly.

Steve: 05:40 And so compare that now to that you're in a substitute situation where you're meeting students that don't necessarily know you and you don't know them. How do you see this skillset fitting in?

Judy: 05:57 There's an exercise in the course called cosmic time and it talks about when you're upset, the kid's upset, something upsetting is happening and you really just take a breath and you work with the student to realize that, you know, a week from now, a month from now, six months from now, you know, let's put this into perspective. In cosmic time how important is what's going on right now? Well, it's the same whenever I teach or take a course. I always do cosmic time. What am I going to remember from this course six months from now, a year from now, I may not remember the name of every little strategy. This course has many, many, many activities and strategies. There's lists and lists of named strategies. I may not remember the names of those strategies, but what am I going to get from this course? I'm going to get a sense of responsibility for students.

Judy: 06:45 So the first day I walked into a class to sub, I had never substitute taught in my life. I came up with something that wasn't directly from the course, but it was based on all I had learned in this course. And I gave the students a piece of paper and I said, you're going to have this piece of paper with you all day and throughout the day I

want you to jot down a minimum of three positive actions that you took today. And at the end of the day, I'm gonna collect these and leave them for your teacher to read. And when she returns, she's going to see what you chose to do today that was positive. And no teacher wants to come back after being away to a bunch of reports about what this kid did wrong and what that kid did wrong. Instead, they come back, they read all these positive behaviors that the students wrote themselves in a self responsible way and it just was a really a fabulous way to conduct myself when I was substitute teaching with kids I didn't know.

Steve: 07:45 I have to tell you, your example just reminds me of one that was shared with me a long time ago. But a normal substitute behavior was to come in and when a student did something wrong, the sub would put the student's name up on the board. And so, you know, this list was going to be left for the teacher of students who did stuff wrong. And after a couple students names got up there, they figured out that if they could get everybody's name up there, the teacher would pretty much blow it off. And so the sub got the idea to switch it, which is almost what I'm hearing you're saying – it's not until a student did something great that she put the first student's name up on the board for doing something great and you know, you had to earn your way onto a name on the board. So a negative responding student as the day went on, had to look for a chance to make a shift because they didn't want to be left off the list of people listed on the board. Just seemed to really fit with your example.

Judy: 08:56 Oh yeah.

Steve: 08:57 There's a lot of effort being put forth in professional development and in educational writing and research right now about social emotional development of students. And I'm wondering the connections between that focus and the content in the course that you're describing.

Judy: 09:23 I mean, if I'm responsible for my own actions and consequences, you know, I'm free to interact with others in a way that, you know, it's not the blame game. It's how do we get along and how do we work this out? There's actually sections in the course. It used to be called problem solving and I think then it was revised to solution seeking, which is a lot more positive. You know, you're here, I'm here, let's meet in the middle. How can we solve this? I listen, you listen, there's a lot of overlap with some of our other PLS courses that teach verbal skills, but it's a lot about listening, rephrasing, paraphrasing and negotiating and coming to solutions, whether it's teacher to student or student to student.

Steve: 10:07 So I'm wondering as a person taking the course, to what extent am I realizing there's things I'm doing as a classroom teacher that I need to stop doing because they get in the way of making the progress I want to make as well as learning new things to do.

Judy: 10:28 It's very hard for us to change. All of us. Teachers get set in their ways. This is how they learned it during student teaching. This is how they did it before and gosh darn it, I'm going to, you know, keep doing it. Even when it's not working. So by going through this course – and it's like a double barrel, it's the philosophy and it's also many, many, many strategies and I think hopefully by the end they realize that even if at first they weren't buying into the concept of self responsibility, just by seeing how the strategies work hand in hand, I think it does cause that paradigm shift I was talking about before. I mean just follow the – you don't even have to buy into it. Just follow these strategies and you will see success and then maybe you'll realize, wow, I can let go of a little bit of the control.

Judy: 11:17 I think that's what's hard. A lot of teachers are really afraid of giving up control. And if they allow students to be responsible students – the decisions, I mean, you know,

I have to have my rules, I have to have my ways that I do things. And once they see that the more power and power is a word used in the course too. The more power you give up, the more empowered the students become. You can relax the little bit because you're going to see that it's going to work because they're invested in what they use that power to do.

Steve: 11:51 So the teacher's job becomes easier as the students take more responsibility.

Judy: 11:58 You know, work smarter, not harder I think is one of the expressions. Not from this course, but you know it's true. I mean I often think of how, you know, things are going along, teacher's teaching and then suddenly there's a crisis, a fire drill. Somebody falls in the classroom and certain kids take over maybe the kid in the back of the room that you never would have expected and they just know what to do and they handle it and they grab this kid or do that or may run to the office and do what has to be done and it's like, wow. If those kind of moments could be incorporated into the classroom day where you're really reaching everybody's strengths and allowing them to make more choices and just be involved in investing in the classroom community, whether it's creating the roles, helping to monitor the rules, working with each other, it's so much easier for the teacher who can then get back to the business of teaching.

Steve: 12:53 I'm wondering, when the teacher creates this approach to dealing with issues in the classroom, I'm wondering of the impact back with with parents. Is there a piece here that teachers have to be explaining to parents? Maybe especially in the younger grades as to how the teacher is dealing with the with issues?

Judy: 13:15 I don't know that it's that dramatic. I think it's more subtle. I mean, obviously, if you have parents who do attend conferences and open house night and classroom visitations, they will get it. But even if they don't, I think

it’s okay. I mean, if the student says, you know, “please sign this paper. It’s important for me.” Whether they explained that, you know, it’s not that, oh, I’m going to be punished if you don’t sign it. It’s more about, oh, I want to be responsible to having it signed. Either way it’s up to the child to convey to the parent that, you know, this paper has to be signed.

Steve: 13:52 So the student takes – I’m hearing the student taking responsibility for the interaction with the parent as well.

Judy: 14:01 Yeah. I mean, again, it’s both the philosophy and the techniques. It’s just never accepting an answer from a student. Like, “well, my mom didn’t sign it or, you know, she, you know, I left it on the table, but she…” You know, it’s just, you just don’t get into that. It’s like, you have your paper. Okay, great. Put it in this bin. You don’t have the paper? Okay. Those, you know, without the paper, you know, what the consequences and you know – tomorrow will be fine but for today, this is what you chose and it’s just they get it after awhile that those kinds of excuses of blaming others just aren’t going to cut it.

Steve: 14:35 So you’ve described the content applying to educators at all grade levels. Is there a difference in what the upper secondary folks walk away from the training with as to how they look at implementing it with students compared to the teachers in the younger grades?

Judy: 14:57 Well, we used to always say, know yourself, know your client and know your situation. So you know, the day everybody leaves the course that I’m teaching, that course is going to change for that teacher because they’re going to adapt it to their personality. They’re going to adapt it to their age level of student and they’re going to adapt it to their own teaching situation. So I think this course is broad enough. The teacher talk, which is taught in the course,

here's actually a supplementary text called "Teacher Talk" written by the author of the course. You know, the way the phrasiology is in the book, not every teacher's going to use that phrasiology. They're going to adapt it to themselves. I was fortunate enough to train in the on-site version of this course with the author of the course Chick Moorman, and he had an expression – "bummer." And you know, that worked for him. It doesn't work for every teacher, but it's where you toss it back to the student that, "aw man, I don't have my homework." "Oh wow. Bummer." Or "gee, that's a shame." You know, "what are you going to do about it?" And it's just like bouncing it back to the students. But the phrasiology, you have to adapt yourself and you know, a teacher of seventh grade is gonna just phrase things very differently than I would with second graders.

Steve: 16:15 Mhm, but the focus I guess I'm hearing is really similar.

Judy: 16:20 Yes, definitely. You know, we're talking a lot about behavior management. I also was reflecting before this interview about ways I use the idea of self responsibility academically as well. And I had an example I wanted to share. I never liked spelling tests. I mean, I believe that some people are just lousy spellers and others are better spellers and it's not always related to intelligence. And I just had a problem with, especially in second grade, with spelling tests. So what I would do, I kept saying to myself, well what's the life skill here? Is it to be a perfect speller or is it to know when you're not a perfect speller, how to edit your own work, how to proofread. I think that's more the life skill. And so I would dictate the words and they would write them down where they're little sentences that went with them.

Judy: 17:09 And then I would let them open their book, look up the words and correct their words so and write them correctly so that they're, you know, eyes and brains would remember and their hand, as they wrote, would remember writing the word

correctly. And then I would grade it based on that and if they got them all right, terrific. What's the difference? A lot of them still didn't get it right because they didn't have that life skill of knowing, you know what was incorrect. Because I learned in another PLS course that spelling is more of a visual than an auditory skill anyway. So, good spellers tend to look at the word and say, well that doesn't look right. So I gave them that and I really credit the STAR course with changing the way I approached spelling tests because I was teaching them a very self-responsible behavior.

Steve: 17:57 I'm also making the connection to a phrase being used in a lot of schools today is "college ready and career ready." So this whole concept of a self-responsibleness would be pretty critical if you're exploring – that that's an outcome you're looking for of the educational plan that students have completed.

Judy: 18:23 I like to look at life skill. Again, cosmic time. I have them in second grade or fifth grade or sixth grade. But what's going to happen when they're in the world of work in the real world. What behaviors will be helpful? Getting 100% on a spelling test in second grade, one day more, you know, learning how to recognize that it's okay if I made a mistake, what was I going to do about fixing it?

Steve: 18:46 I'm wondering if there's a resistance that teachers share with you when you first present this thinking style and and skillset to them. Is there a concern that they have? And then how do you address that in your instruction?

Judy: 19:06 It's always beneficial to be teaching a course to teachers who have students at the time. Sometimes people take courses in the summer or when they're on sabbatical but in real time, if they can go back and use the activities with their students, I think that takes away a lot of the resistance because they see that they work.

Steve: 19:28 So there's that quick payoff result for making the change.

Judy: 19:32 And that's what our courses are so famous for. Is that you know, you learn at one day and you can use it the next day. A lot of practical, practical applications. This course is also about teacher self responsibility. I do want to emphasize that. It's a real bonus that teachers who leave this course leave with a different vocabulary that helps them in their own life. Just being able to phrase things in a way that is self responsible and not blaming others. I mean, I will never use the phrase "I ran out of time." I just couldn't use it after taking this course. It would be impossible for me to use that phrase. We all have 24 hours and sometimes it's almost awkward when you express it in a self responsible way, but you say, 'you know what? I did not manage my time well today. I chose to behave in ways that I'm late and I'm really sorry that I'm late." But it's never, "oh, the bus was late or…" Yeah, I just don't do that anymore. This course really changed the way I deal with peers. I just take responsibility in a different way. I'm a wordsmith and this course is very much about words and how you phrase and I think words do matter.

Steve: 20:49 Yeah. It sounds like people working as instructional coaches would find this training, giving them a set of language that they'd not only be suggesting teachers use with students, but that they'd find themselves as coaches using similar language with teachers.

Judy: 21:08 Absolutely. And I've been teaching some coaching modules and I really see so much overlap with teaching and coaching. And again, in terms of vocabulary and paraphrasing and listening and rephrasing and eliminating the use of but and however, and other conversation stoppers and more open ended questioning. And that all fits in with the STAR vocabulary.

Steve: 21:30 So Judy, I'm wondering if there's a story that you'd like to share from a participant, maybe in your training, making a big a-ha or discovery that they shared with you?

Judy: 21:47 I'll share another example from my classroom days.

Steve: 21:49 Yeah.

Judy: 21:50 And again, it's really hard to pinpoint. I trained in all the PLS courses and a day never went by in the classroom where I didn't say, "oh I learned that from the teacher course. I learned that from the star course. Oh I'm really glad that I had motivation cause I learned about the importance of effort payoff." So a lot of them – a lot of the successes I had in the classroom were based on many techniques I learned in many courses. But I ended the year doing a flea market and we just turned my classroom into a flea market and parents cleaned out their homes and sent in a bunch of stuff and it was one of the highlights of my teaching career. This flea market every year. The kids price the items, they displayed them throughout the class.

Judy: 22:34 We raised money for charity. All the other classes came in on a time schedule. We worked on the time schedule. My students were the cashiers, they use calculators, they added up the money, they totaled it, we saved the money. We picked a charity. It just had everything and it was an action. Like in questions for life, we talk about the last thing being action. This was really real life application. But where I'm relating it to the STAR course – I can just picture my kids coming up to me – "Ms. Lalli, Ms. Lalli, this little kindergartener, she picked out three items and it comes to a dollar 10 but she only has a dollar. Can I just give you over the three items for a dollar?" And you know, sure, but that came from a year of learning how to make decisions and being responsible and just, you know, it's not always black and white and I just thought that was such an example of the language of

responsibility and making those kinds of choices.

Steve: 23:27 Well I'll tell you, I mean, what I'm hearing is thinking. It sounds like a lot of this is getting a student to stop and think through what the options are and how they want to handle something rather than having a ready, fixed piece to implement or looking for the teacher to have the ready fixed piece.

Judy: 23:49 I think a teacher who takes STAR and models the model of STAR, goes to the classroom and conveys the message to his or her students. I believe in you. I believe that you can make good choices or choices that have consequences. They may not always be the best choices. You are going to take responsibility for those choices. Either way, I believe in you. And that is such a powerful message that a teacher conveys after taking this course. I think. I really – I don't want to be too dramatic or use too much hyperbole, but I think this really – teachers who take this course do have a paradigm shift about the confidence they place in their students and the decisions those students make.

Steve: 24:36 And that's gotta be motivational to the student. That recognition.

Judy: 24:42 If I'm a student and I know that this is a safe place to fail, this a place to practice, this is a place to make decisions that may work, may not work, then it's a safe place to try again. But either way, my teacher believes in me and gives me that confidence to make those decisions.

Steve: 25:01 Yeah, I was gonna reinforce that part that, my teacher believes in me, therefore I should take the risk. And if I'm not successful the first time I should try again, because my teacher believes in me.

Judy: 25:14 Teaching is, you know, learning is risk taking. That's what learning is. I mean, taking the safe way and getting a hundred on a test is one thing. But real learning

involves risk taking and stretching and growing and those are words that are used in this course too all the time. Take a risk, stretch, grow, do it, make a choice, make a different choice. And it all goes back to I think what we just were talking about, that my teacher believes in me enough that I have the freedom to make those choices and take those risks.

Steve: 25:47 Judy, thanks so much for taking the time to let us record this.

Judy: 25:53 Okay, thank you.

Steve: 25:54 All right, bye bye.

Judy: 25:56 Take care. Bye Bye.

Steve [Outro]: 25:58 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean and please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.