

# The All Means ALL Podcast Season 2, Episode 40

## ATIA Day 2

### Audio Transcript

[opening]

Carolyn: Welcome to All Means ALL. I'm Carolyn O'Hearn.

Sara: And I'm Sara Pericolosi. We are two inclusive education enthusiasts striving to shift mindsets

C: Challenge the status quo

S: And open more doors for all students

C: In all settings

S: All of the time.

C: So we are joining you from day two of the Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference, which is A. T. I. A. Sara and I have been enjoying the weather down here in Orlando because it is way warmer than it is in Michigan right now. And we are, in addition to being inclusive education enthusiast, we are literacy enthusiasts. And our first two sessions this morning were largely literacy based, which was a lot of fun to go to. We went to the first session that was put on by the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Center for Literacy and Disability Studies and that team was talking about how they are creating resources for Educators in supporting our students who are bridging between being emergent learners and conventional learners. There is this really big gap in between both of those set of strategies and what you're expected to know and learn. In those, in those realms, in those buckets and so I'm really excited to see these free resources coming out. They said later this spring, so we're keeping our fingers crossed that it's early spring but later this year there will be a lot of really free resources for emergent and conventional learners based around, I think they said nine different books, which will be really exciting to see something that Karen Erickson said in this talk really resonated with both of us because we were both were about to tweet it at the same time, but thankfully we didn't. But it's that students with complex needs receive one fifth of the instruction as their peers, but it takes them five to ten times as long to learn, retain, and use new skills. So it's no wonder it takes our students three to four years to demonstrate sustainable progress. This really goes to the point that we need to increase our instructional time. I think based on some of the classrooms that I've supported as a speech language pathologist, some of the classrooms that I help supervise now, talking with other educators throughout my career, academics has been something that's been required, but not something that's been embraced and loved and the forefront. You know, we're working on communication, we're working on behaviors, we're working on independence and self help skills. And we have to teach academics because our students are largely in the K 12 range, but unfortunately, how much academics we're seeing it varies between classroom and classroom and teachers who love it and can

adapt it and have that mindset to others who are hoping to find that curriculum for all the students and that curriculum for every student just doesn't exist.

S: It doesn't. And part of the conversation that Karen had with us, too, is that oftentimes we try to adapt what is happening in a general education classroom. How do we teach literacy to students who are speaking and adapt that for students that are non speaking? And she cautioned everyone sitting in the room that oftentimes when we take what is happening and we generalize it and adapt it for our students, they really become passive learners because it wasn't designed with them in mind. And not only that, but many of the practices in the curriculum that exists right now for general education looks at a mastery approach. And for many of our students, they really struggle to generalize that information. And so she mentioned, which I thought was crazy that they have five decades of research that shows that students with complex needs really struggle when we teach from a mastery approach.

C: That's just, it's mind blowing that there's 50 years of research and yet it's still happening. We're still doing it, educators are still learning to teach this way in their, in their prep programs, teachers who have been around for a while are still teaching this way and so yeah, we really need to help educators and family members and communication partners and administrators and ancillary staff recognize that we need to really shift 180 away from the mastery mastery level. We, we aren't looking for mastery. We're not looking for compliance. We're looking for commitment. We're looking for actual learning and the application of that content.

S; And a lot of what Karen Erickson and David Koppenhaver and the University of North Carolina's literacy and disability studies. talks about challenging educators to embrace engagement to make learning fun. And that's something that came up in our session yesterday is that right now, the state of education doesn't always look where our students are engaged and where they understand why they're learning, what they're learning, why teachers can truly hit the point of this is why I'm teaching what I'm teaching. And that is a lot of what we on the side have conversations about. One of those things is when we're thinking of individuals who use AAC as their primary mode of communication, it is so critical that we are teaching literacy skills, that we are teaching them how to spell letter by letter, that we are giving them access to the full alphabet, and then that we are modeling it, that we are showing different ways of how we write, we're using alternate pencils, so that those students, if we don't provide the opportunity, They will never learn because we've never given them the opportunity to learn

C: This also piggybacks off of something. Sara and I were texting each other. We were in the same session, but not sitting by each other. Just going off of why education and especially special education courses are the way that they are? Why are our special educators expected to teach all of the subjects for their students who can vary between six years of a gap? So you might have a six year old and a twelve year old. You might have a twelve year old and an eighteen year old in the same classroom in some of our programs. And you're expected to teach them math and literacy and science and social studies and self help and behavior and communication and all of the things. And so I think that that's kind of where that pause goes from. Well, mastery is easier because it's checking a box and I know exactly what to do. And

something else that Karen Erickson said in that session was that imperfect teaching in all areas of comprehensive literacy is better than perfect teaching in one of the areas. So with this, it's jumping in. We're not looking for mastery. We're not looking for mastery for our teachers to say, oh yes, you can, we can check the box that you did this strategy perfectly before you move on to the next one, it's better to learn with the teachers, with your teaching staff, with the students on, Oh, we're going to do shared reading today. And then we're going to try predictable chart writing and see how that goes. We're going to try independent writing and learn from that as a system, as a group to see what can we do differently tomorrow. And it goes back to a lot of the things that we say all the time. This reflection piece is so critical in, in education, and we often are so overwhelmed as educators that the last thing we want to do is now sit back and say, okay, what did I do well today, but then how did I flop and what do I need to do better in tomorrow?

S: A lot of what I think brings you and I to Karen and Dave's work and to the work that we're engaged in right now is the idea of challenging the status quo. And a lot of what all of the sessions that we went to today are about, and this conference is about, is we need to challenge the status quo. We need to be dissatisfied with the system, and that's it. It's a system that is designed to get the outcomes that we are getting. And as long as we continue to move along with that system, We have such a huge number of students and adults whose needs are not going to be met. In Our session, Glenna Wright-Gallo mentioned that right now one out of four adults in the United States has a disability. That means that one out of four adults at one point We're learners in our educational system. And so we really need to do better and part of that is challenging the system that's around us is asking and thinking and reflecting, to your point, about why we're doing what we're doing.

C: I love that. Anything else you want to tell us about Glenna Wright-Gallo? .

S: Anything else? I'm really excited that AT Guidelines came out this week from OSEP, and if you haven't seen them or looked at them, we're going to link them in the show notes for you. I would really encourage you, there's a Dear Colleague letter that's a part of it, and in that it talks about how we are all a part of the shift. The shift in thinking, the shift in mindset, and more importantly, a shift in practice. And beyond that one of my favorite things that they have are the AT Myths, so common questions and facts. And I read through them earlier this week and I was like, yes, it's all the things that we hear when we hear, yeah, but, and they have that response. And what I love is we have such limited time. So to be able to go to one document and have so many of those frequently asked questions in one place with responses that come right from OSEP was really great. So Carolyn, I'm gonna circle us back to this literacy train. Yeah, because you went to a second session about literacy We kind of divided and conquered

C: Yeah, we like to do that when we're at conferences. It brings us more info brings you the listeners some more info, too and so I Went to a session with Ynez Peterson all about self selected reading which is one of the the strategies in the comprehensive literacy realm of strategies and We were really talking about how do we encourage our students and teach our students to be readers, independent readers. How do we find the topics that they like? How do

we make sure that they have access to the different books that they might want to read? And One of the quotes that Ynez opened in her presentation is more than any other time when I hold a beloved book in my hand, my limitations fall from me, my spirit is free. And Ynez talked about that quote for a little bit, talking about how, you know, we all get lost in these books and we kind of get transported to a new world and you are that character. And then she told us that that quote was by Helen Keller. Which is just profound in the fact that Helen Keller couldn't see and she couldn't hear yet she became a reader and a writer and so our students they might have these limitations right now maybe they can't read yet. Maybe they can't write yet, but They still need to have direct instruction on how to become readers and writers. We're not just going to expose them to, Oh, look, there are books in the classrooms. Go be a reader. We have to directly teach them. But in order to directly teach them, we need to connect with them and find a way to bring them into that. She used this really great analogy by saying, We can't drive the boat, but we can adjust the sails. And something that we've heard from Dave and Karen's work is that we can't make a student read. It's not our goal to make a student read, but our goal is to help them want to read. It's to, to get them to want to be a reader and a writer. So I just, I loved that little analogy of we can't drive the boat, but we can adjust the sails. And then she closed our session by saying the two most important factors for improving reading motivation and comprehension. It's one, personal choice of what to read. So again, how are we figuring out what they want to read? You know, I would like to read a book about cooking, whereas my son would probably like to read a book about Roblox and Minecraft and getting back into Harry Potter, which is great for me because I enjoy that as well. But you need to have that personal choice. You need to find what to read. And then the second one is access to many books. You can't just become a, a true reader and writer by having access to two books. And saying, well, I'm going to choose this one because this is all that's available to me. So it just got me thinking a little bit about how we can create the want, the desire of reading in addition to creating the access of the text materials for all of our students.

S; Carolyn it comes back to being motivated, right? We want to increase that motivation, increase the engagement, increase the fun and the learning and some of finding out what our students like to read, what they want to read is by communicating with their families. What are things that they enjoy doing at home? What does this look like at home? How do they as a family read at home? Do they have access to audiobooks? Is this a student that likes audiobooks? And in the session that I went to at the same time that you were in the literacy session, Gayl Bowser really did a great job of talking about the importance of partnering with families and how so often we end up in mediation because of a lack of communication on either one's part. And we make assumptions as educators that families understand our process, that they understand our timelines. We do a great job of handing out their procedural safeguards at IEP meetings, but do we ever take time to sit down and really dive in and talk about why their voice is important at the table? What we can benefit and learn when we work together. Are we having conversations with them around the assistive technology that their students are using in the schools, and how that might be beneficial at home. So it's a great reminder of the importance of communication. It's a great reminder too, that we as educators, that onus is on us. It is not on families, it is on us to make sure that we are doing the best that we can to make sure that we have very knowledgeable parents, that they are aware of their students rights, and

ultimately, Carolyn, it's our job to educate students, to educate them in how to self advocate for themselves, so that someday when their parents aren't standing right next to them, they have learned those skills of self advocacy.

C: I love that self advocacy is something that keeps It's, it, it's repeated several, it's been repeated a lot in, in today's sessions, especially because then this afternoon I went to a session with Kelly Key and Deidre Dobbels who talked about the Communication Bill of Rights, which I believe we've talked about here on our podcast. I will share it far and wide, constantly. So I shared it with a group of administrators and in my current place of employment, we shared it when we worked together at my former place of employment and they just really talked about how it's beyond the rights that are there. There are 15 rights that all individuals with complex communication needs have. It's about teaching these rights, making sure that these students know that they have these rights, but then also explaining what these rights could look like so having opportunities to talk about you know what if you are talked about in the third person in front of you. How do you stand up? How what do you say if someone wants to talk about you? You could say, you know, hey, talk to me, or hey, I'm right here or hey, that's rude, like, call, call it what you see it in addition to getting parents and other educators to recognize that they're talking in front of them. So I really loved the self advocacy piece of, of coming back to the students themselves so that they have the opportunity to, to remind others of those rights when inevitably those are overlooked and people fall back into the ease of the status quo.

S: Something that Karanveer Singh, a gentleman who was on our podcast episode 18, if you want to hear more, talked about was really similar to that. He said as a person, as a human being, it's really important that people with disabilities are in the same places and that they are treated equally. But more so than that, it's also crucial that we educate people without disabilities. So that they aren't afraid of interacting with us and for me that Communication Bill of Rights is one of those crucial documents that can help everyone better understand the rights of AAC users of non speaking individuals and ultimately it's the rights of all humanoids, right? It is the right of all people. And his session really was about finding your passion. And he is a very passionate speaker. He is very entertaining and has a great sense of humor. But he gave us three tips to find our passion. So if you're listening to this and you're like, man, what is my passion? He said, try some diverse activities and consider what brings you joy. His second tip was that we need to set goals for ourselves and goals that challenge ourselves. Pay attention to what's energizing us. What's giving us excitement? And then the third tip he had was to seek inspiration and to seek connection with other people that have different interests, different backgrounds, and ultimately to be patient and stay curious with yourself.

C: Oh, I love all of those things. I, I love that he, being an AAC user, is the one telling us to find our passion, and he's just reminding So many of us that we often overlook and we can miss the talent that's in our students that don't yet have voices. And so it's our job to help them find their passions and cultivate their passions and pursue those dreams. So Karanveer Singh, we were saying, like Sara said, he's back in episode 18, but he was the 27th Prentke AAC distinguished lecture this year and this lecture is delivered by a person who uses AAC to communicate. And

you can go find his recorded session on YouTube if you look up Pke, P-R-E-N-T-K-E-A-A-C distinguished lecture, you could go watch and hear Karanveer speak to you directly.

S: So, Carolyn, we're getting ready to wrap up day two at ATIA, and I'm going to pull back in something from the session that I went to with Glenna Wright- Gallo. And at the end, she challenged us, and I am going to pass that challenge on to our listeners. But really consider how you are taking what you're learning today, wherever you are. If you're at this conference, if you just went to a professional learning opportunity in your hometown, if you just went to a personal learning network.

C: If you're listening to this episode and learned something new.

S: Amen. How are you sharing that with others? We need to create a better educational system, and in order to do that, she used your favorite quote, we need to know better to do better. And so we challenge you to take something that you have learned today and go out and share that with others.

C: And tell us how you're sharing. Tweet us, find us on Instagram or Facebook. Let us know how you are sharing this with others because it can't just stay with us or it loses momentum. We need to do better.