The All Means ALL Podcast Season 2, Episode 29

CtG - Day 1

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: We are here in Minneapolis. together in person, which we are very excited about because usually when we record this podcast, we are zooming from opposite, opposite sides of the state, but we are at closing the gap and today was day one. So we are going to recap day one for you like we've done for some of our other conferences. It's so great to be back in person. I feel like we say this for every conference we go to. There's just a different energy. There's a different buzz, different enthusiasm about the work that we are so passionate about. We're bringing everyone together. It's just, it's nice to be with people who get it or those who are learning and want to get it. I think that's the other piece too is you have some of the, the big names here, like Kelly Foner and Linda Burkhart and Caroline Musselwhite. And. We also have a lot of people who are brand new to this field. So just to get all of us in the same space, it's just, it's a good, it's a good place to be. It's getting us energized and excited to go back and do this work when we return home. So, one of the, the very first session that we went to today was from Amanda Soper, and it was titled, We Can Read and Write. And of course, with Sara and I being literacy enthusiasts, we really wanted to see what she had to say and how she was helping some of her school teams really do some great explicit instruction around literacy as well as embed it throughout their day and A big takeaway that we had from that was building on the students prior knowledge What do they know and how can we build upon that rather than doing a story like the tortoise and the hare? And just assuming they know what a finish line is. Assuming they know the different changing of pronouns when it goes from he took a nap and he ran by slow and steady. We can start to make those assumptions and figure out who those pronouns are adapted to. But we really need to be talking and teaching this direct instruction to the students and not just assuming that they know it. Especially if we want to build on that language comprehension piece. And a big piece of it too was making it fun and engaging. She had some really amazing ideas for teaching these strategies, things that were interactive. One of them was to get up to the board and have gosh, what was the Tuskegee Airmen and how they, the red tail plane shot down eight jets or whatever. And so then you were able to see by touching the airplane on the screen how it took out, quote unquote, and so that meant it ran into the plane

and the plane exploded. And so you got to see that eight different times to make that concrete notion. more meaningful to those students, rather than just assuming they knew that it took out. What did that actually mean?

S: And Carolyn, I think one of the things that she repeatedly said is modeling communication is so important, but that it took her time to recognize that's one component. We need to very intentionally and explicitly teach vocabulary and teach that content knowledge. And especially for some of our students who may never go and climb Mount Olympus, we need to start thinking about when we're picking and selecting the books for them for independent reading, how do we expand and explicitly teach some of those things that they may not encounter in their lives?

C: Yeah, it goes back to the example I gave with the tortoise and the hare, how she brought in Pete the cat, because that's a familiar character. So they were able to read one of the Pete the cat stories that very closely resembled and mirrored the tortoise and the hare. So that was just really interesting and a really great way to talk about similarities and, and differences and also get that understanding of these fables that we have to read in school, but making them meaningful and exciting for those students.

S: And along with that, she really challenged us to rethink the morning meeting.

C: Oh my gosh, amen.

S: think we all know exactly what morning meeting we're talking about. You know, today is, it's this month, here's the days of the week, let's count up how many days we have, the weather is. And to really start thinking more intentionally about why are we doing what we're doing? Why are we taking that coveted time that we have with our students and repeating the same thing? We know repetition is important, but so is variety. And the other piece that really kept bringing true to her entire session was understanding why we're doing what we're doing, that cognitive clarity piece. And she gave some really great examples of how you can use that morning meeting. to intentionally teach vocabulary, to start thinking about teaching letter of the day. And challenging us, as the educator sitting in the room, and in turn we are challenging you, the listener, to really think about how are all of our students interacting and engaging in those activities. I think we can all raise our hands when we say, I have created an activity board. Or, I have created a choice board, but moving away from that and thinking more intentionally about how can the students use the AAC system, hopefully it's robust, and if it's not, we're hoping you're moving there quicker, but how can we use those tools that are readily available versus creating something different. The other piece that she really talked about is this idea of literacy instruction. We talk all the time about how for our AAC users. The path to autonomous communication is through literacy, and learning to read and write letter by letter.

C: So if you want to know more about what Amanda Soper does, or to hear, or to see some of the materials that she's created, she is over on Instagram, as AACreATively.

Oh, that was a mouthful. But we'll make sure we also link that in our show notes as well so you can, can see it. And speaking of communication, and of course we want to make language and communication a priority, Sara and I presented for two and a half hours today, this is the longest all about building blocks to autonomous communication, which is a systematic approach to building the skills of communication partners who are supporting AAC users. And it was just really great to to have this conversation with the people who, who committed to the two and a half hours. We had a great group. They asked some really amazing questions. We're having conversations with each other. At one point during one of our activities, we had to like get back on the microphone and have them to stop talking, which is something we always love to see when we're at or providing sessions and. And facilitating some of those conversations, but it was just really nice to hear their different backgrounds and how their schools are set up and, where, where they're coming from as far as the barriers that they're seeing. And so it's just, it was really cool to see, just, just to have that conversation of the people who want to do better for their students, but maybe see what, what the hang up is, is why it's not working beyond their little bubble, if you will.

S: Yeah, and Carolyn, when we think about the barriers, that's the activity that you were mentioning. We'd ask people to reflect silently on what makes implementing AAC so challenging. And that could be in a classroom, it could be in a district, it could be across an ISD, or a group of small schools, or big schools at that matter. We gave them time to reflect, and then get up and go find other people, and share and start talking, and then we had them walk around the room and look at all the other barriers that people created. And I think one of the takeaways is, one, I'm not alone, right? This is challenging. Other people are experiencing the same challenges. I am not crazy.

C: Well, maybe a little.

S: Just a bit. And so a lot of those barriers were around buy in. It was around this idea that there are prerequisites that students need to demonstrate that they can use PECS before we would give them more robust communication. We talked a lot about how sometimes we're afraid of the unknown. And that is so true around AT, including AAC. So how do we overcome that? And that AAC can be intimidating. And that also, by, out of, I think it's really, it's, our intent is positive. But we tend to set up these communication opportunities that become more compliant. And we talked a lot about how communication is not compliant. And, but that is a barrier for so many people. And then of course, the time, right? So time it takes to train our staff, time it takes to give our staff time to practice, and really get comfortable. And then how do we as educational teams support those educators as they begin to practice? So we gave them some ideas. We gave them some tools. We talked a lot about, before we know where we're going, we have to know where we're at. Right? And so how do we identify that current reality? What does that look like? And you and I really designed Building Blocks to Autonomous Communication to be responsive to where teens are at today. And how do we design that training to meet the needs of the people sitting in front of us, of the educators? Right. That's what we ask our teachers to do. And so we want to do the same thing when we provide that training to them.

C: So one of the biggest pieces that also came out in addition to thinking about those barriers and time gosh Sara time I think was on three or four of the five groups. We had them write down as, as groups their different barriers and yeah, it showed up. It was, you know, time to implement, time to train staff, time to practice, time to provide these opportunities. The biggest piece I think that came out of it is our time is limited, but our bandwidth is also very limited and we needed to come up with different ways and have this really great conversation about how to have AAC implementation be embedded and support the work that we're doing with these students rather than it be one more thing. Teachers and paraprofessionals, the classroom staff really can't take on one more thing. So it also begs the question of, well, what are we doing that maybe we could drop, like, morning meeting in some regards? But also, how do we capitalize on those opportunities that we have with these students? Because, you know, we can always bring back tools and try something different. But if we're not even giving them the opportunity to communicate or have these conversations within the day, then we're losing a lot of precious time and why else would they be coming to school? They could just be sitting at home. And so we really want to make sure that we're bringing them an academic day as in academic instruction, but also having opportunities to socialize and to figure out who they are and express themselves. So we just want to have, we had some really amazing conversation today and I think that was that. that bandwidth piece. I think everyone recognizes, you know, yeah, this sounds great. We want to take this training and this implementation work back to our district, but we need to go back to that current reality piece of what other initiatives do we already have going on and and how do we build this in rather than make it seem like we're adding something more.

S: And Carolyn, I think what kept coming back is the students, right? That we want to know better and do better for our students. And we ended the day at the AAC town hall. And it's really a unique opportunity for AAC users to come. And they had some pre selected questions that they all responded to. And during that time, we all as the audience members had to just sit back and take it all in. And man, was it a lot to take in. There were some great stories and laughter and, and fun. happening between the AAC users and, and the audience as well. Once they wrapped up the town hall, they opened it up to questions from the gallery. And it's so important when you and I have talked, we've talked about it's different to hear from us versus an AAC user or a parent or a community member, a teacher. And I always will take the opportunity to sit back and learn. And so as we wrap up day one, We're going to leave you with some quotables from this AAC town hall. We are really excited to be here in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is your first time in Minnesota ever. We are really excited to learn and so if you're here and you're at Closing the Gap, come find us. We'd love to talk and if not, and you're listening from your home, stay tuned because I cannot wait for the learning we have. Right.

C: So the, the prompt, the question for the AAC users was what is something you wish that others understood about you? We had one person who responded, it hurts when people make fun of me. Another person responded, I wish people understood that I can be all of me.

S: Another response was, I want people to talk to me normal, and I like to connect with people. Another response, I wish people understood I can't always communicate even with AAC. AAC is so critical, but I can't always word what I need to with my system.

C: Another person responded, I wish people knew about how smart I am because people just assume that people who can't talk aren't smart. I'm sick of always having to prove that I know things.

S: And the last nugget we are going to leave you with today is, I wish people understood that I need more time to respond using my AAC. Oftentimes, people assume that I have nothing to say because I do not respond immediately.