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On Accessibility in education

I want to start by asking you to think about something.

When you walk into a room, you don't think about listening.
It just happens.

For me, it doesn't just happen.

Every room is different.
Some rooms echo. Some swallow sound.
Some people speak clearly. Some don't.
Some turn away while they're talking.

And then there's the noise most people tune out.
Doors opening and closing. Windows open to traffic or playgrounds.
Side conversations. Chairs moving.
In meetings, microphones not muted, breathing, rustling, typing, all louder than the actual speaker.
What you experience as background noise, I experience as competition.

Listening isn't passive for me, it's active.
It's watching faces.
It's filtering noise.
It's filling in gaps.
It's asking for repetition or sometimes not asking, because I'm tired or I don't want to interrupt again.

Lipreading isn't reading every word.
It's making an educated guess from fragments.
And when the topic changes quickly, or new vocabulary appears, that guesswork gets harder.

By the end of a day, I'm not tired because I wasn't paying attention.
I'm tired because I never stopped paying attention.

So as we talk today about learning and inclusion,
just hold onto this:

If listening is automatic for you,
imagine what it feels like when it never is.