



Angela Anderson: Finding Growth Mindset in Education - Incubate to Innovate

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 00:03

Hi, Angela.

Angela 00:04

Hello Maureen.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 00:06

This is so exciting. It is finally time to stop education and shift the paradigm. And I'm so thrilled that you and Incubate to Innovate are a part of the EdActive Collective and this summit.

Angela 00:22

Oh, thank you. We're so happy to be here. And we're so thankful to have gotten to know you over the past couple of months. We're just honored.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 00:30

It is definitely mutual. Could you please tell our summit attendees who you guys are, what you're doing, who your audience is? Yeah, absolutely.

Angela 00:42

Well, it's great to see you all. My name is Angela Anderson, and I am the co-owner of a company called Incubate to Innovate. My business partner, Amanda is going to also be with us here. And we are based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. And we have a business where we are passionate about really coming alongside teachers and school leaders to reimagine how they are doing education in the classroom. So we are really passionate about using our backgrounds in both education and design thinking to come alongside a school to help them to create more exploratory and experiential learning experiences for our students in the pre K through 12. sector. But we also have the privilege of working with higher ed, as well. So we work with public schools, charter schools, independent schools, really to help to create interesting cultures of innovation in our schools and to bring about lasting positive change.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 01:41

I love that. And we thought when we were thinking of guests for the summit, you and Amanda were just such an obvious choice. And it's a unique blend to understand systems thinking and what it's like in the trenches. Sometimes there are people that like, Oh, yeah, systems need to be this way. And then there's teachers down here trying to do the day to day to get that blend,



and you're so value driven. And then you've added the change makers for impact. So you have a learning community, you get the value of collaboration, you are a definite value add to the summit. So thank you. Oh, thank

Angela 02:17

you. That's very kind, are excited to be here. Yay.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 02:21

So where do you guys see the breakdown in our educational system? Because this summit is all about we've got to come together and be a fierce voice for change. What are you seeing as the breakdown?

Angela 02:35

Yeah. So you know, Amanda and I are both educators in between the two of us, we have over 30 years of experience in our current education system in a vast variety of different contexts. Between the two of us, we have been classroom teachers, administrators, I spent quite a few years as an innovation lab specialist. And so our experiences are vast and diverse. But when we met each other about 10 years ago, when we started teaching alongside each other, very early on in our friendship, and in our working relationship, we just were experiencing very similar frustrations. In the classroom where we felt like it was an outdated system where our students were not receiving both the educational and emotional needs that that their needs were not being met, that the current our current educational system is not preparing our students readily to navigate the complexities and the ambiguities of our world today, and it keeps us up at night. We want So Amanda and I looked at each other, you know, about four or five years ago, and we said we want to be a part of the solution. And so we started Incubate to Innovate as a way to be a part of the solution to come in and to help teachers to reframe teaching and learning to make it more exploratory and experiential, so that our students are graduating with the skill sets that they need to not only survive, but to thrive in today's world.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 04:02

So needed, let me ask a two prong follow up. So why do you think it persists that we have this outdated textbook driven model? And what's going to happen if we continue with this test driven model? That's not preparing kids? Mm hmm.

Angela 04:22

Yeah, I think, you know, it's it's so tricky because our students are being consumers of their education all day long. And we really want to move them to being creators. We know that most students do not learn best in the traditional school model or in the traditional school setting, and it's time for a change. Now it's time for a change. And it's a change that we get to choose because we want our students to be able to survive, to thrive in today's world and not just survive. And something that Amanda and I say often is that, you know, we don't want to prepare



our students to just do school while we want to prepare to to do life well. And so part of that is incorporating learning experiences that use design thinking that invite our students to learn to lead with empathy and to be a part of creating impactful solutions for others, because that's the power in it, right? We're all born with this innate feeling and desire to create. And so anytime that we can take students content knowledge and connected to something bigger than themselves, that's a win, because then our students are being equipped and empowered to then take their ideas, and we change makers in the world. For others.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 05:39

Absolutely. And what are the stakes if we don't go from having them be consumers to having them be creators?

Angela 05:47

Hmm. I mean, gosh, I just, I, we see what our students are needing right now. And they're not they're not getting it right. The anxiety is through the roof with their kids. They're feeling like they don't have the skill sets to navigate today's world. And so I just, it's not going to be a good situation, right? We want them to know how to do life well.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 06:10

Absolutely. And we hear business leaders saying, hey, you're not giving us prepared young adults, we can't just put into the workforce, we hear colleges saying they're not college ready. So everybody is seeing, and parents are saying my kids mental health is crazy. This is. So every seeing the problem. But we persist in using the old consumer driven model. So it to me it's a definition of insanity. Same thing over and over again. Everybody wants a different results. So it feels like post pandemic, this is like we're waking up. And this is the time to say this institution needs to change now.

Angela 06:50

It does. It does, Maureen. Now is the time and I do believe, you know, step number one really has to be making sure that we and this is the work that we do, that the teachers are being supported, and encouraged and equipped first, because if we're wanting change to happen, the movement has to start from the bottom to be successful versus something that's being mandated from the top down. And we see that over and over again, when we work with our schools. And with our clients, it can't just be something that a district leader or a school leader is putting in place. But we really have to start with these amazing educators that are on the frontlines doing the work with our kids each and every day. It has to start with them first.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 07:29

Absolutely can't just keep adding to the teachers' plates. And on top of this, make sure that you're ready for the test driven assessments that are going to determine funding for your school.



Angela 07:40

No, I know. So we have to make sure that these amazing professionals are being taken care of and supported. And so yeah, we don't want them leaving the profession. We need them to stick around and keep pouring into the next generation. Absolutely.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 07:55

Yes. So you and Amanda, creating your own business is huge. So what do you think was that tipping point where you're like, you know what, we're going to become activators, we're going to be about change.

Angela 08:11

You know, we were we were witnessing, as teachers ourselves that we both were sick and tired of having fixed mindsets. We wanted to be on a journey towards having growth mindsets and helping the people around us to have a growth mindset also, because it has to start with mindset first before we can expect any other kind of amazing learning to happen in the classroom. And so if we want our kids mindsets to change, our mindset says their teachers has to change first. And so, you know, we were looking at each other. And we felt like Amanda and I were doing exploratory and experiential learning in our classrooms, but we were like the only people right that were doing that. And we wanted to make it feel. We wanted it to make it feel like timely and that it was something that we wanted everyone to feel like that they could do. And so we wanted to start a company that where we're talking mindset first and then really coming in from the ground level and helping teachers to reframe teaching and learning to make it better for our kids.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 09:13

I agree. And I'd welcome having any of our attendees put in the chat. If you feel like this growth mindset piece is a pivotal place and an important place to start. Because what you say really resonates with me.

Angela 09:28

Yeah, and very early on, as Amanda and I were both falling in love with design thinking and wanting that to absolutely be a part of the vehicle that we use to transform teaching and learning. We realized that we had to develop a set of mindsets first, because that's truly the foundation and so I'm going to throw up a link to our change maker mindsets here in the chat and they are a free download on our website that is important to us and there are six of them. The first is lead with empathy. The second is embrace exploration. The third is Pivot with perseverance. And I know that we are all so sick of hearing the word pivot. But I will tell you that pivoting with perseverance is different than just pivoting. We can pivot all day long, but when we do it with perseverance, it's allowing our attitude and our heart to come along with it. And it's making a conscious choice to pivot well. Our fourth one is growth through failure. Our fifth is collaborate and connect, and the sixth is create a win-win solution. And when we're seeking to



do I know, more exploratory learning, a change in mindset really has to be the foundation. And so the mindsets alone have changed the cultures of the schools that we've worked with, honestly, it's been transformative.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 10:47

And they're so caring. And that's another piece that a lot of people in the workforce and in colleges are saying, students are so into their screens, and they're so disconnected. And it's like, when in schools are we giving them chances to connect and to work on those interpersonal skills, if it's all sit and get, we're not helping them flex those muscles and, and focus on ideas like creating win wins, that's priceless and needed.

Angela 11:15

It is Maureen, and for them to learn at a very early age that they are stronger together than they are individually. We want them to learn that there are so many silos that exist not only in education, but in a lot of different fields. But specifically in the world of education. There's so much duplicity of effort, there's so many siloed structures, and we don't want that. And we want our kids to grow up in a world where they are valuing authentic collaboration and connection, and they are coming together because we are stronger together than we are by ourselves.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 11:49

Absolutely. And that's one of the things I love about your design thinking model, that it starts with the little ones and with words that they understand. And as we're starting to use your design thinking model at my micro school, I love that progression. And that it's about the heart. It's not just about the wonderful creativity, but it's about the connections and with that empathy foundation, so you've nailed it.

Angela 12:15

It's so important. And I'm going to go ahead and put our Changemaker innovation process the link to that up into the chat for you all, because when we were writing our design thinking process, if you're familiar with design, thinking at all there, there's a lot of different processes that are out there now. But most processes stopped with create, where a student creates a prototype. And that's it. But Amanda and I are very passionate about stewardship. And we want our kids to be not just keeping their ideas for themselves, but stewarding them out for social change and widespread impact. That is what it's about for the good of their neighbor, for the good of the community for the good of the world. And we want to empower them in that and we want to have a movement around that. And so I'll go ahead and put our process up into the chat for you all. And there's a pre k k version as well, like marine was just mentioning, and there's an elementary version, and then kind of a traditional version that we use with high school students and higher ed.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 13:17



I love it. I just think that, yes, so much of work that students create is just for the teacher to grade and then throw away. And the design thinking might go a step further and have an audience so you present. But again, it's a dead end. But if it's like this is going to make an impact. And I have the power to make an impact on things that are important to me and to follow my passions. And I have purpose. We need that so much for young for all of us, but definitely are young.

Angela 13:47

And you know what I remember so many times in my innovation lab, we would have I would have discussions and at the time I was teaching third, fourth and fifth grade innovation lab and I absolutely loved it. I was in a school setting, you guys were we didn't we didn't even do grades. The kids came to me for an hour every week. And we explored and we problem solved and we journey together. And it was one of the highlights of my career. It was so much fun. But I remember sometimes when we would have discussions with the kids, and if you ask an eight 9, 10, 11 year old to identify or to name the problems and opportunities that they see in the world around them, they have no problems. They have no problems identifying the needs that are out there. We it's like somewhere along the way in their educational journey. I think in the traditional school model, too. I think sometimes kids are they stop exploring, they stop thinking that their ideas matter. They get a bit self conscious, but if we can be building that confidence in them, and they know that their ideas matter. There are no silly ideas, we want to to ideate, we want to dream big dreams, then they start to get that confidence to know that they can be difference makers that they You can go out and help to solve that problem that they are seeing. They don't need to just drive by it and pretend it doesn't exist. They can say, Hey, I can connect what I'm learning in math to that, or science to that. And I hear my friend down the way is wanting to do something similar, I'm going to collaborate in, and we're going to work together on it.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 15:16

And it's so good for mental health to feel like, I get to get out of my own zone and my own worries and self doubts, and contribute. And then pretty soon it's like, oh, hey, I'm capable. I'm all these things. I was doubting. I'm living the opposite of that. And I'm wondering, as you know, from my podcast, I love throwing in the magic wand. So if you had a magic wand to wave, what would the outcome be of teachers getting to work with you and create this exploratory environment? What would the magic one be? Meaning what? What results would you want to be able to make happen?

Angela 15:55

Yeah, you know, when Amanda and I come in and work with a school, typically, we're working with teachers and a four part four part fellowship that are an hour and a half long sessions. And each, we're exposing them to design thinking, we're teaching them how to use our innovation process we're doing design bursts with them, and then they bring units with them that are ripe and ready to make more exploratory, so they're dry, they're content heavy, they're maybe lecture



focused, the student is consuming their education, and we have them bring that unit with us. And through different tools and experiences, we help them to reframe it using the change maker innovation process. So the students, the students are going to go from research all the way through, to collaborate and connect to the seven modes of the process, and still arrive, meeting the same content standards. Still arrive, learning the information that they need to learn, but in a much more impactful way. That's the magic wand, right? Not that we just want to push more and more and more at our kids. But we want it to be so much deeper and more meaningful, we want deep learning for them. And you know, when we talk about this with with teachers, we tell them we want to take them on a journey, a journey towards more exploratory and experiential learning, because this is not something that can happen overnight. It's beautiful work. But it's messy work to want to be committed to doing this kind of work in the classroom. And so we talk about two zones, the zone of predictability, versus the zone of possibility. And I'm going to go ahead and share a link to this graphic for you all here in the chat. And you'll notice that yes, the zone of predictability, there will always be parts in education where we need parts of the zone of predictability we there's some validity to it. We're not saying to totally do away with it, but what might it look like to incrementally spend more time in the zone of possibility with your students, and in this zone, exploration is invited, questions are asked, a growth mindset is developed. There's freedom and safety that's experienced for our kids, collaboration is encouraged, creativity is fostered and ideation is, and then information is discovered, versus just received. And learning is readily embraced. And so we want to incrementally spend more time in this zone. And we again, it doesn't mean that we're ever going to do away with the zone of predictability, like data and things like that. Like there's good valid things that are in that zone. But what might it look like? If our students were spending more time in that zone? It's a commitment. It's a commitment to doing student learning in that way. But it's so so worth it. so worth it.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 18:42

Absolutely. We know learning sticks when it's experiential, and when we have some buy in. So this may end right now as we're heading into summer break, what a perfect time for for summit listeners to take your tools take a lesson that they feel like this is content heavy, what can I do? And to go through the cycle? Can Can you tell us about some other resources that you have about your learning community? Because we really want to inspire change that sticks and not just have a summit that's like, Listen, and then forget it all?

Angela 19:13

Yes, absolutely. And that was so that was a huge piece for Amanda and I, when we started incubate to innovate, we did not want to come in and do one and done PD, that never resonated with us when we were sitting in the she was receiving it. And we knew that we needed something different in education. And so very early on, we started an online collaborative learning community that's actually gone international now. And it's called changemakers for impact, and we would love to have you join us on the network. We're almost at 500 members,



and it's comprised of change maker leaders that are truly exploring innovative practices, and mindsets where we're coming together to cocreate to help each other create and sustain cultures of innovation to break down silos that I mentioned earlier, all while experiencing joy. That's really what we want. We want learning to be joyfilled. We want our process and the lifelong learning that we're all going through as educators and change agents, we want that to be joy filled as well. And so we would love to have you all join us. And I will go ahead and put a link to change maker for impact here in the chat for you all.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 20:25

Fantastic. And yeah, I think too, we're saying it's time to shift the paradigm growth mindset that, you know, if we are trying to as a summit inspire people, I think all of us participating and speaking at the summit, we have to keep stretching. And I'm wondering your one on one stretch, you're committing to moving forward. And I guess to start it off, just to kind of walk my talk, I've been committing to over the last couple of months starting to connect with politicians and business leaders. And that's not my comfort zone. But I need to listen to the other to the people that are saying, Yeah, we've got to have these state tests. And we've got to I need to understand where they're coming from, to get to what you said create that win win. So it's a real stretch for me to reach out to political leaders and to work through their aides and get time to speak with them and have zooms but I have to stretch and start these bridges and conversations if I want to be an activator. What's something that you're challenging yourself to?

Angela 21:27

That's a great question. I mean, I, you know, the complexity of complexities that COVID has brought, I know has been, has been so challenging over the last year. But one thing that has been good that's come out of COVID, for me is Amanda and I are both doing this, we are making a conscious choice to reach out to connections with people on LinkedIn, that are either in education or are people that are committed to education reform, because on our network, actually, it's about 70% educators, but then 30% people who are outside of education, but passionate and want to be a part of the bridge building. And that's a huge reason why we started our network is we wanted to start bridging built building bridges between education and other sectors. And so Amanda and I have taken it upon ourselves to be committed to doing a certain amount of like you said, exploratory times to get to know one another on zoom, whether they are in education or not, and it has been an amazing year of growth. We've both been doing it. We've been learning so much from different folks. And there is there is just a common, there really is a common theme. People are I think, I think it's been brought about because of COVID but people really want to co create, they do people really want to learn, they want to hear your story. And they want to be a part of the solution. I think people oftentimes, especially that aren't in education, but want to be a part of it or want to be a part of the reform. They want to be asked, but they want to be involved. But they don't always know how. And so when Amanda and I have made connections for our client schools, to people outside of education, they're sitting there kind of waiting for a school leader or a teacher to ask them to, like come in and help them



with a project or no, we're working with a school that was doing a tiny house exploratory unit. And they found we sit Is there anyone in your community that has a connection to Tiny Homes, and they kind of did their research and they realized that they had a parent who owns like a tiny home business, and he was so excited to bring his home in. And now these students are designing homes for people in their community that need them. And it's just, we think that it's all so out there that it's so hard. And yet there's so much to learn from people and the world is so much smaller, I think than we maybe thought than it used to be I think some of the pieces of COVID. It's it's just been so fun to get to know people via zoom from all across the country and to start to explore what it could look like to co create or to hear more about each other's stories because we've never arrived, we always have more to learn. They always growth. And you know what? our mindset grow through failure. When we first put it out there, we've got some kickback. People didn't want to hear it. They didn't want to talk about the fact that we make mistakes, and we fail, but we do and our students do and for them to know that that's okay. And for a safe environment for them to know that they're constantly growing. They've constantly have more things to learn. We all do. We're gonna make mistakes, but it's how we grow from them and how we are stronger on the other side. So

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 24:35

yeah, completely. I love that you guys are putting yourselves out there in the world of LinkedIn to me can be a little daunting. So for you to take on something that's not an education world and say, that's where we can be a bridge. You're walking your talk, and I'm curious if you had one ask for our listeners. We want to become activators all of us to really change this paradigm. What would be one thing listeners could be doing to stretch into that growth mindset a little further and, and to be an activator.

Angela 25:08

You know, I guess if I had to think of an ask and to be thinking, you know, when Amanda and I both took our own journeys from moving from having more fixed mindsets, to growth mindsets, I think it just starts with internal reflection first and just being, being open with yourself, even even if it's art, not our mindsets, but finding another set of mindsets that really resonate with you and being committed to your own growth. But I think a question that I would pose out is, are your students in graduating or even leaving, you know, your year with them? Are your students do they have the skills that they need to not only do school while but to do life? Well, because it's so bright, our life is so much more than just sitting in a desk chair and taking a test, right? We want the students to be equipped and empowered and have the skills and the mindsets that they need to do amazing work. And so, are they graduating with the skills that they need? I mean, that would be a question that I would ask you all and, you know, Amanda and I were chatting, because she has three kids in high school I have, I have kids that are still itty bitty. And she looked at her kids one day, and she shared this with me. And she said, I looked around at them. And I know they they have the skills to do school well. But I want them to have skills to do



life well. And so that's just something that I would pose out to you all and thinking about how we can be committed to making learning deeper for our kids.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 26:36

Absolutely. And taking time. Reflection. We don't, it's always whack a mole in education. And we're pulled so many directions. So taking time reflecting and asking this question. And then what can we commit to as fellow activators? Right, you know, Angela, you and Amanda are doing such important work. And I'm so grateful you're a part of the summit and that we as silos of educational innovation, that we're all committing to bridging with each other and to not continuing in isolation. I really feel like this synergy is just what we need for us to be able to change this paradigm and and make sure we're getting kids ready to be good at life. So thank you for joining us.

27:18

Absolutely. Thanks so much for having me. Maureen.