



## Dina Ghobashy: Creating Potential with Showcase Schools

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 00:02

Hi, Dina, it is so wonderful to have you on the summit today. Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here today. Dina, would you please introduce yourself, who you work for who your audience is?

**Dina Ghobashy** 00:18

Absolutely. So I'm Dina Ghobashy. I'm with the worldwide education team at Microsoft, I am responsible for the worldwide education leadership strategy. In my role, I work with education leaders worldwide to transform education, leveraging technology. And the ultimate goal is to really improve the student learning experience and prepare them for the future.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 00:41

I love that. And I really appreciate that you're helping EdActive, come together with all these different organizations. So we're not in isolation, trying to make this change. And I know I've appreciated attending your your global showcase, you have leaders all over the world pondering really important questions. What started you on this path of becoming a change activator?

**Dina Ghobashy** 01:08

Oh, my God, depends on how much time we have Maureen. I really started when I was in middle school. I just, I just did not understand the education system. And my dad kept pressuring me to be the first in my class. And I kept saying, I cannot spend all my life memorizing things, only to forget them the following day. I said the education system is completely flawed and if you know, my dad, he's a lawyer, he loves to debate, I couldn't win that argument. But I completely believed it to be true. I moved to the US, I actually grew up in Egypt, I moved to the US to pursue a master's degree and in one of the main masters classes, my professor asked this is my opinion, Can one of you debate it? And I sat there thinking this must be a trick question. I was taught all my life that the teacher knows better. Don't argue with the teacher, and you don't have an opinion. And it turns out, it wasn't a trick question. The professor



engaged in a fantastic conversation with one of the students. And my mind was blown. I was like, this is an education that I would enjoy. If I had this when I was younger, I would have definitely enjoyed every minute in my classroom, and why can't we do something similar with the younger kids? Why aren't we allowed to, to shine to have a voice to participate in to be active in our education? And why are we just listening the whole time? I just started thinking, oh my god, this is how we can develop leaders, not followers. This is how we can foster creativity. And I just kept imagining ways I could be involved in at the time, all I was able to do I was I was doing a master's in computer engineering, all I could do is just think about ways that I could help education on this side, as a, you know, contributing to nonprofit organizations, etc. And I joined Intel and I started working in technology. And that age to do something about education just came back when the world started talking about attack and the value of technology in education. And Intel had a group back then called World Ahead, and I jumped at the opportunity to be part of that group, and to start working with education leaders around the world to kind of think about how can technology help them reform education. So as kind of my story, in a nutshell.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 03:44

I love it, it's been a lifelong passion of yours and Intel, I remember when I was in high school assistant principal in the 90s, that they were in our school, volunteering and getting work time release to volunteer. So I really appreciate when businesses team. So a lot of this seems systemic, the passive, the teacher as the expert and you can't question things. If we can't adjust on these, this passive learning model, what do you think? Where are we heading as, as a culture as a world?

**Dina Ghobashy** 04:21

You know, I just keep asking all the time, what potential are we leaving unexplored? What would it be possible if every child had access to an education that really draws out and cultivates their talents? What would we cause? We would have a much much better society on every front.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 04:48

So absolutely, yeah. Yeah. Oh, and that's so possibility laden and it's not. I don't think education is a problem with a solution. I think it's this you dynamic with paradoxes. And one is, you know how stable and continuous can we be? And then also, how can we evolve? I don't think any of us want utter chaos and kids going in 1000 directions, but how can we take the best of what we have? And add in these opportunities for kids to explore their potential, to question teachers to



be in the conversation, to be active learners? I love that. What would you challenge our listeners to do to start? I mean, this whole summit and our whole collective is about becoming educational activators and activists. What are some suggestions that you would challenge our listeners to maybe try?

**Dina Ghobashy** 05:43

Um, um, let me see two things, actually, three. So if you're exploring any new education models, and you think technology could help, please reach out to me. We at Microsoft have been listening, and a lot of our products and features have been driven by the education community. That's one way that we would love to contribute to this whole transformation of education. Two, I think that, in order for change to happen, education is a very important critical component of society. And I believe part of the reason why education hasn't really changed so fast, is because there are lots of expectations and dependencies within the ecosystem, right? If we want to change it, now we need to change, you know, what we're doing in higher education, we need to change the parents' expectations, we need to look at the job market and remain aligned. So any new education model would have to be an alternative that kind of fits within all of that or work with all of these pieces, right. And for that alternative to exist, we also need the people, the teachers, the staff, the leaders that are capable of implementing and leaving that alternative, right. But we need to create an idea, a concept of what the alternative looks like, right? It's just bring it closer to people's mind. So if you are aware, or part of one of these, you know, great education models that are alternative to the current traditional education, please continue to share and amplify these ideas, these stories because others need to see that alternative, alive before they can even conceive how they can make it happen on their own. And then if you're a school or a district leader, I really advise you to just, you know, even if it's not even if you think it's not feasible to change today, but just start envisioning what if. If you had to blame us to recreate that whole system, what would you do? And then think what values, what culture would need to exist in order for that vision to be true. And then if you go out and hire, hire people who fit that vision and culture, not based on their previous accomplishments, but based on their values, and the culture that you're building, that vision that is just still in your head. These are the ones that are going to help you make that vision a reality. It may not be actions you're taking today. But you are going to be if you do this, you're going to be taking actions that would help you get to that place one day. And then Microsoft has a great program that I personally manage. And I'm absolutely passionate about the the showcase school program where you can meet and collaborate with other innovative leaders from around the world, and together collaborate on tackling some of these challenges.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 08:53



Those are so many wonderful ideas and summit participants, I'd love to have you type in the chat. What is a value you hold for our school system, or maybe a tweak that you wish, like we had internships, or kids could design their own courses, type some things in the chat, let's kind of get our wheel spinning before we go to the live session. I like how you really address the system, Dina, that it's about parents and teachers and higher ed, we're all going to have to work together. And I think and I think I've been guilty of this too. Sometimes we get into either or thinking either we're traditional or we're innovative. Either we do this or but I think there are baby steps. I've I've created a school within a school and the the majority of the school was traditional. Our kids had, you know, multiple blocks lumped together more relational, more hands on and then could go take some classes in the bigger high school. It wasn't either or it wasn't starting from scratch. So I think sometimes we go into this divisive thinking or into this problem solving, hey, do this and we fix it. And we're a system there isn't it's not a problem. It's a bunch of dynamics, like you said that are, they all need to be finessed and balanced. What we're going to have your information on our resource page. Actually, it's already there. So people can look it up. What would you suggest they do? Because I think part of the power of what you're doing with the showcase schools, is the collaboration, how might they be able to leverage that cool resource?

**Dina Ghobashy** 10:38

Yeah, this is really a great question. So whether you participate in a program and really got the core in the in the meat of all that we do, and be able to collaborate with all of these leaders, but also get the support, you know, from Microsoft and partners, along your transformation journey to help you meet your goals. You could also learn so much from showcase schools. One of the things that we started doing this year, and we are going to amplify and continue to do better next year is we're going to start teasing out some of these best practices and stories out of our showcase schools so that we're able to kind of disseminate them and share them with the rest of the world. So that's, that's another way you can really leverage those programs for your benefit. And to kind of to your point earlier about, it doesn't have to be either or, there's got to be a place that we can start today, I'd totally wholeheartedly believe in this. One of the things that I've noticed about education is that there's just a lot of inertia. There has been I remember, I moved from Intel to be the director of academic technology at a school. And we embarked on a project to get a new LMS. And we started exploring different products. And that used an agile approach that I learned at Intel. And it involved pretty much everybody: teachers and staff and by the end, we had a tool that we all loved and we were ready to deploy, we hit the budget, everything was ready. And guess? What the assistant had came to me and said, Dina, why don't we do it next year? I was almost in tears. Why? This is just ready, why wait? Why wait another year? And we had it we had a conversation and I was able to prove my point. And I presented to the Board and all of that in order to get it to happen. And we did move forward with it. But it just left me thinking this whole sense of, if it's not this year, there was always next year



and that rhythm that we have, we're not thinking about when we don't have that sense of urgency. And I urge everybody to have a sense of urgency, because every day every year that passes by, is an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life that would never be available again.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 13:03

Absolutely, that urgency needs to exist. They're with a such a short time and it's such a formative part of their life. We don't get a second chance that you know what we were pretty much into rote, let's let's go back and have you do middle school again and let you create and let you form your identity around how brilliant you are. No, there is that urgency. And people are like yeah, maybe later. Tell that to those of us that are parents, my kid doesn't get a maybe later. It's like now. Come on. Yeah. So it seems like Microsoft and your showcase schools, you've really been able to collaborate and support each other. And the time that I joined you, I heard people sharing ideas, and hey, we're we're trying this new thing. And hey, if you want to try it, email me, and I'd love to have you pilot it with me. There was just a sense of exploring together. It just sounds like the whole. I just wished for other collaborations, this whole sense of, hey, here's what I'm doing. What are you doing? How can we work together? Like kids, like in the sandbox? Hey, I'm building this you want to build with me? There's such a sense of exploration and working together in your showcases. Was that just the snapshot the day I was there? Is that kind of how it is?

**Dina Ghobashy** 14:19

No, it is absolutely just like that. So they have lots of opportunities to collaborate together. They're all in one team on on Microsoft Teams. So they're all able to easily ping each other, post their stories, you know, ask questions and form little groups. We did. A few of them formed a group to look at how can we assess 21st century competencies among students in kind of leverage each other's work and build on it. We've had two schools collaborating between India and Finland what actually is a student from India went to teach Minecraft the teachers in Finland. So tons of collaboration happening between the schools and a lot of learning and cross pollination is going on. That's why

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 15:07



That synergy sounds magical. Yeah. Speaking magic, if you had a magic wand and could really use what you've known and experienced to transform, you know, to take advantage, that opportunity, you talked about, what would you wish for our school system?

**Dina Ghobashy** 15:34

I wish that every child gets an education, that is it, that just happens with them, not to them, I wish that they get every child gets all the tools and the opportunities that they need in order to design their own future, to feel empowered. And that's, that's not easy to get to every child.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 16:02

You're so right. And even in personalized schools, people say, Oh, yeah, all of our kids know us. But if you were to go through the class roster, there are still some kids that are kind of invisible. So it's not easy, regardless the model and how beautiful for kids to be working with us. And not feel like stuff is being done to them. Yeah. Yeah. So summarizing, what's one action step our participants, regardless of whether they're a parent, or an educator, or a youth or business person, what's something that they could do today, to start helping us move the needle closer to schools that are done with kids?

**Dina Ghobashy** 16:50

Um, this is a great question. And, and I'm going to build on what I said earlier, is act for a sense, act with a sense of urgency and look for something that you could do right now. In one of the conversations I had with you Maureen, you told me what what says trash that you could do to help with this paradigm, I feel like I'm dealing so much in my role I, I sought out my role in order to be able to do what I'm doing today and help, you know, leaders all around the world rethink education. But when you asked me that question, I started scratching my head and I said okay, what is one thing I'm not doing today, but I could do in order to do something like that. And personally, I've found that part of the showcase school program is that we take new schools that are still ideas being designed. And we help them kind of think and design those schools with the latest in technology we know so that they don't they they're starting from scratch, they don't have to change things down the road. And I started thinking, what if I introduce them to new innovative education models at that point in time, where it's still blank slate, where they're still able to take on something like that, and include this in the conversations with them early on, to inspire them to think outside of the box and design outside of the box. So the advice here is to



just look for something within your pervue, that you're able to do that maybe just a little stretch, a little step, but it is gonna contribute to something bigger.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 18:29

I love that and and participants, take a second right now and type into the chat. What might that be? Because I think you're going to inspire each other. And Dina, you know, I've been asking myself the same question. If I'm a part of this EdActive Collective and summit, how am I going to become more of an activist. And something I realized is I surround myself by educational innovators, and it's like, that's fun. I love hearing what they're doing. And I still have their ideas and add them to my micro-school. But that's not getting me. I mean, we're all in the same corner already. It's almost like we're preaching to the choir to each other. So I've actually spoken with a couple of people in the State Board of Education, a state representative, I need to hear other voices. I've just started to collaborate more with our homeschool, our state homeschool organization. Because when I understand the upsides of each of these different options, and what we all want the same thing, we want our kids to thrive and learning to really make them future ready. So what are the cool things that they all know are happening? And how can we pull these together? So I have to be connecting with new voices and new perspectives. And I didn't realize how much I was in my comfort zone and on my podcast is celebrating changes, which is not a bad start. But now I need to have more complicated conversations on the podcast and in my own world. So you and I both are feeling that stretch, aren't we?

**Dina Ghobashy** 19:57

Yeah, yes. Yeah.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 20:01

So participants, we are going to shift gears now. At the bottom of the screen, you'll see the link, we're going to move over to Facebook. And Dina is going to be able to answer your questions real time. And we want everybody to jump over there with us. So we can continue this conversation because we're so excited that you're here and that you care about ed tech and collaboration and being an ed activist with us. So, Dina, thank you. Let's head over to the live chat.



**Dina Ghobashy** 20:30

Thank you so much, Maureen. for having me.

**Maureen O'Shaughnessy** 20:32

Yes.