



Dr. Maureen O'Shaughnessy: The Why of Ed Activism

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 0:01

Good morning. I'm Maureen O'Shaughnessy, and I am one of the co founders of the EdActive Collective and this summit, I'm so happy to be here with you for the next four days, we have lots to explore. Are you ready to change the school system for all children? We are. So welcome to our summit. This is such an important moment for our schools, we've been through so much. And we know that we can adjust with whatever the world hands us. So thank you for moving beyond our normal groups. And that's what our collective is all about: taking different populations and coming together to really stretch ourselves and see what we can do to be about this change. And we feel like the dam is broken, that school is not going to go back to the way it was. And we have a chance to take what's good and make it even better. And to leave behind the parts that aren't so good. We can have both continuity and transformation. Let's get started. We have a common commitment. All of us want this. Sometimes we get caught up in us-them thinking but we all want schools that work for all of our learners. And we want to keep what's working. We also want to build rapport, respect, and resourcefulness in our students, we want them to be able to connect with others, to be respectful, to value differences. We want them to be resourceful to understand what they're learning and how to apply it in the real world, how to apply the interpersonal skills in the job force. We all want our kids to be successful and thriving. So who am I? First and foremost, I am the mother of two wonderful daughters, Jadrian and Giana, and I have learned more through being a parent than probably anything else. I am also somebody that's fired up and constantly creating more options for our learners, and constantly learning myself so that I can do more. So in 2013, I founded a micro-school, LEADPrep, and we're in the Seattle area. And we are all about multi age kids getting to be seen, heard and valued as they are so that they can thrive. Relationships are foundational. And with this love and belonging, our kids are really getting to do a lot of student driven and project based learning. From there, I wrote a guidebook, I wanted others to be able to create a school within a school or micro school or something, a pocket of innovation, so that we hopefully end up having so many different ways that kids can go to school and learn that there's something that works for everybody. And then I started a podcast, education evolution, because I wanted to hear what else was going on out there who's doing great stuff and to be inspired. And what I've learned has definitely benefited me as a human and my micro-school. Then I started a mastermind for other micro-school leaders. And now I'm working with some of the others who have been on my podcast, and we are creating this collective and summit. And I'm really excited to be a co-leader of this wonderful week ahead of you. I am passionate about all learners, being future ready and thriving. And I think you are too.

So why are we becoming educational activists? I think we all know the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. And I think I'm guilty of it. Most of us are guilty of it on some level. But it's pretty scary to look at the mental health statistics of our teens. In Washington State alone pre pandemic on the state report where kids



do confidential reporting, one in 10 high school student had confessed to attempting suicide. I know our dropout rates are unacceptable and higher for students of color higher even for students with special needs and IEPs. So it's insane to keep doing what we're doing when we're getting these kinds of results. So I was talking with other people who have been guests on my podcast and we're kind of frustrated. The changes that we're making or seeing are really making a difference for some kids, but they're not sticking. They're not growing. And we know that project based learning is good, but it's really not enough. So we committed, we said, we need to play bigger. And this is us playing bigger and inviting all of you into the ongoing conversation with us. So we're working super hard. We want every kid to have equal access, relevant learner centered learning, and be future ready. And you're going to hear from amazing programs and ideas at this summit, that really make it clear, different ways that we can make these things happen. But it's going to take all of us, our youth, our educators, our parents, our business people, our politicians, we're going to have to pull together and that's what this collective is about, how do we get all the different conversations at the table and learn from each other, so we can keep the good, but make it even better. So I am an avid lifelong learner, and that makes it so that I can make all these connections in my brain and help others and, and I do a lot of consulting, and I love having tons of resources to share. And my learning has helped me in terms of how I can be an effective activist. And I have sometimes thought that schools are a problem to be fixed, but they're not. And I'm learning about polarities, they're not a problem that has a solution. They are complex and interdependent poles. And the one that we're talking about here is continuity. And transformation. It's not either or, just like breathing is an inhaling or exhaling. And I think when we get in that either or camp, we're fighting for something, and we're dug in. And so I'm really hoping during the summit that you'll stretch, and not get into that either or position, if both and can be your lens. Yeah, what we're doing has merit in these ways. And we could also benefit from this. So our goal is to maximize the upside of both poles, so that all kids are learned, we're not trying to throw the baby out with the bathwater, and say schools are bad schools do amazing things. And they can do more. And I'm totally guilty of this. My preference is schools that are transformational and doing things very non traditionally, and it always has been. So I look at the upside of that. And then I sometimes tend to put down the downside of traditional and schools that are kind of continually on that same pattern. And that's not working, we need the dynamic tension to move forward. So I'm gonna unpack that a little more. Because I'm really think mindset is important. And in the past, when I've done a create, I created a school within a school, when I left that large public high school to be an assistant principal, the rubber band effect took happened, and it was snapped back in. And it didn't last. And if I had created better bridges and understood polarities, hopefully I could have set it up for success because it was making an amazing difference for kids.

So we start with what our common values on our common goals are, and we all want schools that prepare and value our students. And then we look at the opposite end, What don't we want, because we also have fears of what the worst case scenario would be. And we don't want our kids disengaged, which the Gallup poll says a lot of them middle school to high school, they're



becoming more disengaged each year and not seeing the connections or the relevance. We don't want them depressed. And I see mental health numbers, soaring anxiety, depression, it's pretty much a pandemic, and I think we need to be aware of it. We don't want kids dropping out. And we don't want kids unprepared. Our businesses need people that can step in and work our colleges need college ready kids. So I really think we all have these common values, these goals and fears. So we can play from these commonalities, and listen to each other, and bridge and build. Listen to each polarity. Because we have some of both in each of us. I really think we can do something that can stick. So a couple of assumptions, we have to assume that there are upsides to both sides of this polarity to continuity and upsides to transformation. And sometimes black and white thinking has meant one is all good and one is all bad. But we know that's not the case. And we also have to assume that we want to avoid the downsides of both of these poles that we want the best to combine the best in whatever formula works for you. So we get the really best of both worlds for our learners. So we want to make sure, again, that we are really focused on what our goal is and avoiding what our fear is in too much of one area means we can like too much inhaling we'll pass out. So we don't want too much of either polarity, or it can result in the downside. But let's look at some more. Let's look at pulling out what a continuity map might look at. And my graphics are not fancy. There gorgeous maps and gorgeous resources online. And this is all based on Barry Johnson's life, of creating and practicing polarity. And he has wonderful books out and resources. And check out the polarity partnerships, they've done a lot. And I wish I use a magic wand in my podcast, if I had a magic wand, we would use this in our political realms, we would use this parents working with kids, we would use this everywhere because this is appreciative inquiry. This is all about valuing the good and striving to collaborate for even more good. So I put together my own little map. Our common goal is that schools prepare and value our students. Our common fear is students who are disengaged, depressed, dropping out, not prepared. And then I took the two poles, continuity and transformation. And I borrowed heavily from Robert Jacobs lenay, Brynner, hop, and Barry Johnsons, they have a guidebook on transformation. So I borrowed from them, the upside of continuity is we get to build on what we know and leverage past and present opportunities. And we have proven practices, we know what we're going to get predictable results. Awesome. And the upside of transformation is we can learn best practices from others. I'm

learning so much from my podcast guests, we can capitalize on new opportunities when things come up, we can dive in, and we can create new processes that yield better results. And it polarities, you look from one to the other. And it there's a beautiful flow to them. And you can see if you do too much of one, that, you know, if we're way into all these best practices, we might have the downside, we might lose sight of what made us successful in the first place. And we might leave potential gains and things that are working now we might throw them out. And we might dump it and jump into unproven processes and get results we don't expect. So we it's not all rosy if we transform you if we have students on internships everywhere, do we even know where they are and that they're safe. So it can be chaos. So we don't want to go too



extreme. And we know and I'm guilty of belaboring this sometimes when I'm talking to others, we know that our school model hasn't had very many significant updates in it's pretty much of the model that was around 100 years ago. And so a downside to continuity is doing what we've always done getting kind of in a status quo mindset, whether it's working or not. And we're so into this is what we're doing that we could miss out on opportunities, and new new take advantage of new opportunities. And we can get really bogged down in old inefficient processes. Is it really efficient to have every kid have six blocks of high school a day and every kid do the same assignment. Maybe it's efficient. But is it really getting us results? And if it's not getting us results, efficiency doesn't matter. So we're controlling kids right now. But are we really speeding up for some slowing down for others personalizing, that can be the downside of continuity, that we keep doing it even if kids are disengaged or dropping out. And so we want to look at how we can bridge the upsides and avoid the downsides. And too much of this leads to this. Too much of this upside leads to this downside. So knowing this, we can build something sustainable. And a lot of times, we said we have to fix something and we've come up with a solution as if it's a problem. And of course we can't fix it because it's a complex, interdependent, dynamic. So I really want us to think about things not as fixing but interacting, because I want us to evolve education and I want this transformation to stick and I want it to be with continuing the best of what we have So we're gonna have to bridge poles. And we have to create our own maps. This was just an example. And you can create a map for anything. Do I want to be more student driven in my micro-school? Or do I want to work more on community and how they interact and work on communication skills, all the soft 21st century skills and collaboration. So I could do with my team, we could be creating a polarity map for independent work and student driven and their personal interests, and community work. And look at the upsides. Look at the downsides. And we could use that to guide us and to build a bridge. It's not either or thinking it's both and. It applies everywhere. Except if there's if it's a problem, and there's a solution. I'm short, a math teacher, I hire a math teacher problem solution. But a lot of the time we're dealing with polarities. And when we think that there's a solution, we're digging a hole. We also then need to create action steps to move us toward the upsides. And for education, that means more equitable and empowering learning. So we have to have some action sign. There's also warnings, steps, if you look at the polarity thinking, there's some things that are like red flags, whoa, like inhaling out, exhaling, if I don't exhale, then I might pass out, you know, that's a warning sign, what do I need to do, so I don't get there. So there's warning signs if we're going too far, in any polarity. And if you know those, those are kind of like

the bumpers, when you're bowling, they can help you bounce the ball back in and keep heading to your target. So the summit is going to help all of us, it's definitely going to be a place where you can listen, we want you to participate in the roundtables. Tomorrow's imagination day is youth led, but it's intergenerational, and it's interactive the whole day. And they're going to be creating teams, based on affinity groups, please join in and invite youth, they can sign up for that day separately. But we know any real change needs to involve all stakeholders. And that includes our youth, of course, also, in the summit join in affinity group, stay involved, commit to



ongoing steps, our collective knows that when we go off to a great conference, it's kind of this one and done because we go back inspired, but we get sucked into the daily expectations and grind. So we're meeting quarterly because we know it takes regular meeting and taking steps in between, for us to leverage all of our resources and create the change we want. And we'd love to have you also join an affinity group and commit to ongoing

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steps.

Maureen O'Shaughnessy 17:50

So I want you to know that there are transformational models everywhere, get inspired by our summit speakers, and build more transformational elements into whatever model you're a part of our learners deserve the best, and we can keep growing. EdActive has a ton of resources, you'll see a lot on our website. If you're somebody that upgrades and buys the the recordings to listen to at a later date, you're going to also get all access, downloads and resources from each of our speakers. I know mine is the seven steps of creating a micro school or a school within a school. I'm giving my webinar to anybody that upgrades and the upgrades help us cover the back end costs because we're all donating our time. And then anything beyond that goes to the black youth project. So we want to be about contributing and making a positive difference. And if you upgrade that helps us get there. Also, you'll see on our websites, many of us consult or can come in and share our model with your parent group, your teacher, group, your district office, with leaders of youth with youth themselves. So please use us we're constantly growing our website and we want you to have resources. So when you get home and you're like now what you know that we're here for you, and you can reach out to us. Please contact me at my school. That's the email I check the most. I'd love to be somebody to brainstorm with you and I do 15 minute free calls just to help people unpack their ideas because I think transformations are super exciting. And congratulations at active summit participants. Your voices and efforts are so needed and we really appreciate you giving us this time to help us unpack and noodle on this challenge that we all have, how can we maximize learning for all of our learners and create equity so that every learner has a model that is working, so they're future ready and thriving. And please join forces with us and join an affinity group. We are really on fire to do what needs to be done for our precious rainbow of youth. And future ready students that we want to create and will create are seen, heard and valued in their schools, and they are thriving in life. Thank you for joining me

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