



Sheli Smith: [00:00:00] They actually understand now that this product is evidence of their learning. It's not just a product. It's this evidence that gets really big.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:14] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:24] We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we re-imagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:48] So, welcome to Learning Unboxed. Today, we have some awesome guests to talk to us about what happens when you take your kids out of the classroom, out of the building, and you go into the field. And so, we're really, really excited today to have with us Pam Hayes, who is the Early College Coordinator for Metro Early College High School in Columbus, Ohio; and Sheli Smith, Chief Academic Officer at the PAST Foundation and the PAST Innovation Lab.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:16] And these two ladies come to us for this conversation with a wealth of experience in what it means to really get kids engaged to think so far outside of the box. They often will wonder where they are some days, including some really awesome and amazing trips and experience they do. But this is not just a conversation about outdoor education. This is a conversation about how we can truly scaffold kids to have meaningful experiences in an early college setting that is really tied to helping these kids solve problems in the world.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:53] And so, the program that, over a number of years, these two ladies have done together is really one that stands out as not just a case study for great STEM education but a case study for how you can work very creatively within your community to take the opportunities and experiences that students can have, make them very, very tangible.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:13] And so, these ladies come to us, then, with a variety of backgrounds that I think lends themselves to, sort of, thinking this way. Shelli Smith, who I've known for 20 some odd years at this point, comes to us out of underwater archeology. So, the running joke that she and I have always had is that, "Show Sheli the ocean and off she goes. She may never actually come back to the office again," every time we send her to the field. And I think there might be some truth to that. So, I'm always cautious to wave at the airport because Sheli loves what she does, especially doing those things with student out in field settings. And so, the project they're going to talk to us about is an exciting one that taps into all of that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:59] And likewise, Pam comes to us with years of education experience in public school settings, heavily involved in design development of what became the Metro Early College. And we've talked about those in previous episodes, early college experiences, learning centers, and that interface between the real world and what you're going to be, what you're going to experience post-secondary business and industry in our community. So, welcome ladies.

Pam Hayes: [00:03:24] Thank you.

Sheli Smith: [00:03:24] Good morning.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:25] How are you guys doing?

Pam Hayes: [00:03:26] Great.

Sheli Smith: [00:03:28] Great. So am I.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:29] Good, good. So, let's just dive right in, pun fully intended, and let's start with actually, Pam, share with us a little bit about the overarching rationale for why to do this project. So, tell us the high level, what the project is, and why, as a school, from a school perspective, you guys wanted to do that.

Pam Hayes: [00:03:53] A lot of the things we do in the early college centers to try to prepare kids for global learning, I guess, you could say. So, taking them out into the fields kind of gives my concept of global learning, global minds that they, not only learn inside the classroom, but once you've taken them on a trip, we see just a total transition of the student. They just become another being. They seem to want to have more leadership skills. They're not being lectured to or taking notes in class. They're actually doing the things that they're going to be doing in life. And I think it helps them a lot to learn time management and learn a lot of different leadership skills that we're really trying to impress upon them as they become young adults.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:43] And we see that, I mean, every single day at the PAST Innovation Lab. The fact that the kids have so much autonomy no matter what it is that we have been doing, and the fact that they step in the door, and we believe that they can. Kids get that. They know that right away.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:57] So, Sheli, over the years, as we've structured a whole variety of programs at PAST and the PAST Innovation Lab, one of the things that you have always been an advocate for is the very deliberate scaffolding of experiences for students. So, walk us through this project because it has a number of key components that, quite frankly, over time, have been developed, but also we're out into a point in doing these types of programs that we know they're truly not successful without.

Sheli Smith: [00:05:29] Yeah, I think that in a classroom you, it's the known environment for learning. Everybody knows what a classroom looks like. It's got four walls or five walls, or it's round, or something, but it's a classroom, and it's got someplace to sit. And so, if we kind of rethink about learning environments, sometimes, kids, when they're really immersed in learning, they actually take the skills that they are not likely to use when they're sitting in the classroom, and they'll really begin to apply those skills.

Sheli Smith: [00:05:59] And so, I think, that immersive learning environment becomes an incredible way for kids who don't do well often in the classroom to actually shine. And we have seen this again and again over the 20 years that we've been running field

schools at PAST that we've had kids that we've promoted to leadership, where teachers at the school are saying, "Oh, that kid's not a good kid. That's not a good fit." And what we're seeing is that when we take them out of one learning environment and put them in another, they get really great.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:33] Well, the same place is not for all kids. And I guess they didn't [indiscernible]. So, before we we move in to some of the specific students' experiences, this program, this Global Sustainability program, and over the years it's changed a bit, right? So, just give us the gist of the program component, Sheli, from the purely programmatic post-secondary lens. Because you're sitting, in some sense, as a design partner from the PAST Innovation Lab in partnership with local school - in this case, the Metro schools - for this project and Pam, in particular, but also you're sitting in the seat representing the post-secondary partner.

Sheli Smith: [00:07:13] Right. So, we've always designed, at least, one program a year that has a post-secondary kids can get collegiate credit for. Our best partners have been at OSU. We've had many other colleges but OSU for this one. Global Sustainability comes out the Anthropology Department, and it's a holistic look at culture. So, we've chosen islands as the place where we're really going to go apply the knowledge.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:39] You just wanted to go the Caribbean. **Sheli Smith:** [00:07:41] Well, we went to Italy one year.

Pam Hayes: [00:07:43] It's a good place to start.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:44] You did, you did.

Sheli Smith: [00:07:45] Yeah, and China. **Annalies Corbin:** [00:07:45] Yeah.

Sheli Smith: [00:07:47] We went to China, yeah. We actually-

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:46] Have the actual travel?

Sheli Smith: [00:07:48] Yeah, yeah. So, yeah. So, I think you know, but islands are fabulous for Global Sustainability in the sense that you've got a cultural component. You have the physical component of the people who are there. You have the historic component of what came, or the antecedents, or the prehistoric people, the people of discovery or rediscovery, and then, what's there today. You have the environment and how you sustain a small environment. And so, kids can, in a very, very short time, grasp global sustainability when you get to an island.

Pam Hayes: [00:08:28] And you have a cross-cultural awareness too. There are a lot of students that have never been out of the United States or Ohio for that matter. And we get them on an island-

Sheli Smith: [00:08:36] Columbus, yeah.

Pam Hayes: [00:08:36] ... and it's completely new to them. And the environmental aspects that we're talking about for scientific research are there, but also, I think, the cultural component is probably what they remember the most.

Sheli Smith: [00:08:51] Yeah. I think from our perspective this is a for-field anthropology class. There aren't very many of them. So, when we write this up for the post-secondary class, we had to write that the kids were going to study Cultural Anthropology, they were going to study Physical Anthropology, they were going to study archeology, and they were going to study Linguistics.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:13] And so, to be clear for our listeners, so these kids enroll in this program, which is a summer program. It's not part of their regular academic year. They do however start it during the regular academic year - and we'll circle back around on that in a second - by taking this post-secondary course that's tied to it for credit. So, what Sheli's talking about, this course that is housed, in this case, in the Anthropology Department.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:36] But the reality is that wherever you are in the world through local partners, museums, afterschool programs, zoos, you name it, universities, colleges, you can create these types of experiences. But these are the key components that we have found over time work really well. And so, Pam, those kids to be enrolled in the collegiate piece of it, I mean, how do you pick the kids? How do you know they're ready? Because not all of these kids, just to be clear far listeners, come directly out of the Metro Early College.

Pam Hayes: [00:10:12] Correct. Many of the kids do come from Metro, and they already enrolled at Ohio State University. Once they're enrolled, we have a meeting, and we tell them -- Sheli and I decide on, I guess, on what our global prospect is for the year and what we want to study. And this year, we found a new place to go to in Tobago and Trinidad. And the students were interested. And we tell them what we're going to do, and what they're going to learn, and what their class will be, and we give them the parameters. We also tell them when the class is going to be and that it is a collegiate course. It's not just a "vacation" that we're going to go and study culture and go snorkeling, but they actually have projects to do.

Pam Hayes: [00:10:56] And once the kids decide, "Hey, yeah, that's for me. I can get college credit for this," we begin the prospect of, how do you want to raise money to go, and what are your interests? And so, a lot of the students, like the China trip, we had a totally different group than we have for some of the Caribbean trips. So, it's it's a different group every year, and it's kind of fun.

Sheli Smith: [00:11:21] And I think that it's important to note that not only do we have the post-secondary partner in the K12 or the secondary high school partners, but we also have to have another partner. We have now a partner in place where we're going, right?

Pam Hayes: [00:11:37] Correct.

Sheli Smith: [00:11:37] And this year, it's the Environmental Research Institute in-

Pam Hayes: [00:11:41] In Charlottesville.

Sheli Smith: [00:11:42] Yeah, in Charlottesville in Tobago. So, that gives us that three-legged stool.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:48] Which is critical because without the partnerships in place, these things can very easily be nothing more than a fun summer field trip, if you will, but not truly, truly meaningful deep applied learning. And that's the thing that we're talking about here today is this opportunity to take what could be great exploration for students, and exposure, and turning it into true deep learning. That's a very different thing.

Pam Hayes: [00:12:11] And some of the preschools we do in class are, for instance, we did traditions of Tobago. We did culture, we did history, we did flora, we did fauna, just to kind of give them a little pre-look at the island and what they're going to see. Tobago, on the other hand, the ERIC program gave us, "These are some of the programs we have. Which ones would you be interested in?" Well, we let the kids choose because it's actually their learning experience. We're there to guide them, but the ERIC professionals are the ones that live on the island.

Sheli Smith: [00:12:44] So, once the students saw some of the choices, we picked seven or eight. And then, they'll do projects when we're down there with their staff, which is tremendous because they actually get field experience. They learn a new way of teaching. They might teach the same way we do. They also learn, again, cross-cultural, how do you relate to somebody that might have a different dialect than you, and you're trying really, really hard to understand what they're saying, and you're trying to learn? You're out in the field, and they're telling you all of this really unique information about their island. And they're so excited and passionate. And how do you share that passion with them that they have for their own environment? Kind of thing

Sheli Smith: [00:13:26] Yeah. I think, too, that having that product is really important. We decided to do a Codex. So, that's a layering of lots and lots of information into a thing. And the people at ERIC really said, "Well, we don't even know what a codex is. Can you share that with us too?" So, now, the journey is a combined journey between the ERIC researchers and the Global Sustainability kids. At the end, they will make a presentation to the entire community at ERIC on what they've done.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:59] And just to be clear for our listeners, so Codex is essentially a multifaceted, multi-layered database that's searchable of information, opportunities, you name it, tied to a location. And Sheli has done many of these over the years on a variety of different both cultural and environmental sites in terms of producing things that, ultimately, a community can use for many, many years to come. And that circles back around to that value proposition for students themselves.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:30] So, again, the fact that they're actually engaged in real meaningful work that has tangible outcomes the local community changes the way, Pam, the students think about this opportunity and their responsibility back to the project. So, let's talk about that just a little bit. So, pushing the piece for the students to have not just the input but the responsibility on the back side. That's kind of a big deal.

Pam Hayes: [00:14:55] It is. It's really interesting that every group we've had kind of goes along, and this is really interesting, and it's unique, and it's fun. And then, all of a sudden, we get to the last three or four days, and we're like, "Okay. You guys have been working on this project. Now, what are you going to do for your presentation? We actually have an authentic audience for you. The people in this community are coming to watch you present information about their space, or their island, or their culture.

Pam Hayes: [00:15:21] And I think it hits them at that point that they're like, "Oh, this is real." Like we don't want to embarrass ourselves or anybody else. And it's amazing how quickly they work. And their presentations have been phenomenal in the last 10 years that we've done this, so. It's fun though because we're not really sure. This is our first time going to Tobago. So, we're not really sure what the opportunities are. In the past, we've done -- like in China, we did eastern and western medicine. When we went to Costa Rica, we did socialized medicine. One trip to Costa Rica was for medicinal plants, and how they can be used instead of prescription medicine.

Sheli Smith: [00:16:05] Yeah, we've done- **Pam Hayes:** [00:16:06] St. John was-

Sheli Smith: [00:16:06] In St. John, we did petroglyphs because they've never been completely done. And then, we layered that in with medicinal medicines and stuff. We've also worked with the Dive Charter Association in the Keys to create underwater placards for scuba divers and snorklers. We worked with the Bureau of -- Visitors Bureau in Michigan to map and create kind of a roadmap for a ghost town up there. We've done-

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:38] Ecotourism, yeah.

Sheli Smith: [00:16:39] Yeah, for tourism. So, ecotourism. So, we've done a lot. And so, that's why I said that third partner becomes incredibly important because we leave behind something.

Pam Hayes: [00:16:49] One of the most interesting ones, I think, besides the petroglyphs that we did was in St. John, as you know, there was a ship that, I guess, you had worked on. We didn't even know it was there. When we got down there, the people didn't know it was there. They were like, "What ship are you talking about?" And we gave them the history that Annalies had given us. And so, we sent the kids out. We put the boat in the middle of the water, and we said, "Okay. It's within this range. Whoever finds it gets a pizza." And the kids were like, "Really?" So, they were looking.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:19] Where were you? Pizza?

Pam Hayes: [00:17:20] They're looking everywhere for this shipwreck. And when we finally found. And our boat captain was like, "I didn't even know this was here." So, the kids developed a map of how people could come, visitors could come and find it, and did history on it. And we left that with him, and he uses it to this day, and he takes tourists out.

Sheli Smith: [00:17:39] Yeah. Even more important is after the hurricane came through St. John, the National Park Service used our work to figure out if the site had been disturbed by the hurricane.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:53] Yeah. And the great thing about that site -- and I think that speaks to, again, taking the kids out into the community, and letting them live and be an explorer, and understand is really key because over the years, certainly, both Sheli and I have seen this, institutional or local memory comes and goes, right. And so, it's very easy to lose your own history, your environmental history, your cultural history, your socioeconomic. All of the pieces that make up your story, your community, your human story are very fragile. And I think that, sometimes, we forget in our teaching and learning to make sure that as we send young people off into the world that they understand how fragile the world is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:33] So, these types of programs are really valuable in that sense. And back to Sheli's point, it was awesome to be able to tell your students about the shipwreck project in St. John. And my students, because that was on East Carolina University project many years prior. I want to say 19 -- let's see, 2002. 2001-2002, something like that, I took a team down, and we excavated on that site. And we weren't the first ones there either. And I think that's a key to a story of why it's valuable for your kiddos. We weren't the first ones either. And so, that long line data then becomes that thing that in a crisis, in an environmental crisis like a hurricane, you actually ha able to tell the story of damage, and sustainability, and all of those other components. And those lessons are really key.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:24] Sheli, I want to circle back around on the post-secondary piece again because this is one of those pieces that lots of folks struggle with how to do this and how to do it right. And I think, intuitively, schools know that we have to scaffold kids to be successful. But one are the reasons that the program and the course that you teach works is because you teach it right. It's scaffolded to have the students -- some who've had some early college experience who are participating in the program but not all the kids have, right. And so, talk to us a little bit about the structure of the scaffolding to ensure that those kids who've never had a college experience can be successful and move on to an independent college experience after?

Sheli Smith: [00:20:08] Right. I think it's really important that you don't -- oftentimes, people will say, "Well, I can't dumb this course down."

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:17] The collegiate.

Sheli Smith: [00:20:19] The collegiate.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:19] Let's be really clear, right?

Sheli Smith: [00:20:20] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:21] Because you and I have had so many of these conversations with post-secondary partners around the world when you say let's bring high school kids into this environment. And, sometimes, not always, out of fairness, but sometimes, it's a bit of a freak.

Sheli Smith: [00:20:34] Yeah. There's a lot of belief that, magically, something changes between Grade 12 and Grade 13.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:43] Magic is awesome.

Sheli Smith: [00:20:44] Magic is awesome, and it's alchemy too, and it's really cool. But in truth, it's still a Grade 13. And so, if you really look at what you need to have foundational understanding, this is a survey course. And we try to make sure that these are survey courses. That they are not diving into great depth in cultural anthropology nor in physical anthropology, but I'm giving them the basics of why this happens, just as I would in Physical Anthropology 101 or Cultural Anthropology 101. So, the classes are set up exactly like a regular survey class in college. Nothing's different. And-

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:24] So that they know and are comfortable with their instructor. That's a piece of it, right?

Sheli Smith: [00:21:29] Yeah. I think that's true. And I think it's also very applied learning. And I think that's incredibly important that the content that I'm moving and moving at the same time I'm trying to get these kids to really look at collaboration, communication, and all these implicit skills that I think that they can transfer, and they can attack any problem that ever comes ahead of them as long as they have these strong skills.

Sheli Smith: [00:21:55] And so, I find that even when I'm teaching all college students that these students, they may be finished with high school. We've seen that when we go into the field and teach exactly the same way, whether these kids are Master's students, early college students, it doesn't matter, as long as we take this really applied kind of learning, what we find is, all of a sudden, kids take all the content they've got, they've driven it to a deeper learning, they have it years later. You and I both know we have students that come to us now 20, 30 years later for me, and I've had them in a summer program, they've got college credit for it, and they go, "I can still remember what you taught me."

Pam Hayes: [00:22:40] It's interesting because we have one student, in particular, who, as Sheli knows, did not know how to swim, and we were taking her to St. John. And she was very hesitant about going. And Sheli said, "I can teach anybody to swim." So, we got her in the water, we-

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:58] Because Sheli's not afraid to drown. That's it. It's an awesome thing to behold.

Pam Hayes: [00:23:05] So, once we got her comfortable in the water, and then we got her down to St. John, and she saw the ocean for the first time, and saw what was under the water, we couldn't get her out.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:16] Yeah, yeah.

Pam Hayes: [00:23:17] Since then, she has traveled the world, said it was because of this class and this program that she has a new view on humanity and helping people. Global Health, that's what she wants to go into, and she became a certified diver, which we were just tickled because this was a young lady who couldn't swim, and just grabbed it by the horns, and just went, "I'm going to do this." And she said it changed her life, so.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:45] And those are the moments, right? We're on radio, so you can't see it, but this is all shuttered and sort of kind of goes through you when you hear those types of stories. And that's real because it's transformative.

Sheli Smith: [00:24:00] I think one time, very early on in my career, I got to experience this. And my professor said to me, "Don't make it complicated. Take the complex and make it understandable." It's not complicated, it's just complex. And once you kind of get around that, then you can take these really amazing ideas and concepts from anywhere in the world, and you can show kids that, and they get it and grasp it, and then they go wild with it.

Pam Hayes: [00:24:32] Well, as Sheli said, I think, a lot of times, this is -- I think, through all your education, through college, through graduate school, or whatever, a lot of kids will come back and say, "I think I remember this the most," because they actually had to learn to adapt to a different environment, and learn to work with peers they might not have known, come up with different ways of devising a plan for their projects.

Pam Hayes: [00:24:59] If you're in a classroom situation back at home where you're comfortable, you know exactly where to go to or what website you can find that information on. But down there, they kind of have to figure it out on their own. And we're there to guide them, but we pretty much let them do their own design challenge on that. So, it's kind of nice.

Sheli Smith: [00:25:16] Yeah. And I think the wonderful thing about going into the field is there's not a thing of pencils up at the front desk that you lost yours, you go up and get it. Six miles off the coast of any place, you're six miles off the coast. There's no Walmart out there or anything like that. So, I think learning that, to think better, to manage better, all of those are really big skills, and they can take them with them into their careers. And whether we taught Global Sustainability, or we taught Economic Literacy, or we taught any of our literacies, it wouldn't really -- we could put anything to it that we wanted to.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:56] And that's the beauty of the structure. of the way the programs work. And, certainly, that's what we advocate for over and over again at PAST Innovation Lab, and certainly what we're trying to accomplish with Learning Unboxed when we talk about these case studies. But that common thing that I see in all the conversations that we've brought to the program, I can say, without question, one of the pieces that you see is they are based on the notion of very strong partnerships, partners who come to the table to engage, to design, to construct, to play, to learn, to succeed and fail altogether. So, the partnership is the key. And then, the other piece is the scaffolded process for the students to be successful.

Pam Hayes: [00:26:47] And I think they learn a lot of independence this way too. They're away from home. They're quite far away from home. And some of them, the first couple of days, might get a little homesick, but you're like, "Walk up, here you are. This is the real world. You're going to be independent." We're sensitive to their needs, and I think the other kids are too. But pretty soon, they're like, "Oh yeah." I mean, we've had kids say, "Yeah, I am here. I did pay for this trip. I do want to get credit for it. You're right. I have to do this."

Pam Hayes: [00:27:17] And where are you going to get that if they're home, and they're in a classroom, and they can just go home? And here, they have to learn to adapt and change, which is the way of the world. I think a lot of employers look at that when they see a resume, and they say, "Oh, you went to China, or Tobago, or whatever. What did you do?" And then, they have something they can actually talk about and say, "Well, this is the project we worked on," and they have something that you know they can be proud of and remember for the rest of our lives.

Sheli Smith: [00:27:47] And I think, to circle back to your point is when you see other professors at the University say, "Well, what did your kids really do? You just took them to Tobago to swim, and you got a suntan." And then, you show them what these kids produce, and they go, "Oh, wait a minute. That's really impressive production." And I say, "Yeah, because they actually understand now that this product is evidence of their learning." It's not just a product. It's this evidence that gets really big.

Sheli Smith: [00:28:19] And I think we've had other professors laugh at us on different things, walk a mile in my shoes, put shoes up all over the campus, and people were like, "What are those shoes about?" And yet, what the kids learn was really amazing cross-cultural understanding. That was the gauge. And then, global sustainability, they learn that it takes everything to sustain a culture. It's not just one thing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:47] Right. And I think that we've bat this word "sustainability" around a lot right now, right. So, it's a it's a pretty hot, now, topic. It's been with us forever, but for whatever reason, we've put it in our marketing campaigns right now. So, it's sort of a buzz that everybody is talking about.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:06] And I think that the big takeaway that I personally and professionally really want folks understand, when they use the word "sustainability" as it relates to applied teaching and learning, in particular, is that it can be almost anything. And the thing that truly makes it impactful and sustainable, to come back all the way around to the root, is the fact that to your point, Pam, the kids don't forget. It stays with them and it actually has meaningful impact.

Pam Hayes: [00:29:36] So, you can craft a million different courses or experiences and tap into this local state, regional, national, global need, which is a really important need around sustainability but give it a local piece that is going to be meaningful to those kids.

Pam Hayes: [00:29:51] What is interesting is we were doing the history of whatever country were in this. This time, it happens to be Tobago. And the kids were like, "Oh, well, the Spanish were there. Oh, well, the Latvians were there. Oh, well, this culture was there." And then, we were talking about, how did that culture change agriculture? How did that culture change the fishing industry? Or how did that culture change whatever it was we were talking about? And they were like, "There were 12 different types of humans in this one island within the last 300-400 years." And they're like, "Wow, just think how."

Pam Hayes: [00:30:29] And then, we started talking about the Venezuelan people who were trying to come over, and how does that impact a society. It was just amazing that, all of a sudden, their little gears start working, and they're like, "Well, we never thought of that." I said, "Well, when we go there, you're probably going to want to just, in the back of your mind, think about that and think about some of the relationships between global sustainability on a small island versus a large continent." They're like, "Oh, okay."

Sheli Smith: [00:30:57] Yeah, because we have things going on right now that the borders are very restricted right now in Trinidad and Tobago base because of the mass exodus from Venezuela. And

so, how do you take that, understand that for two small islands, and bring that here into the United States, and understand it for our borders, and what we're discussing right now. And that's sparks all kinds of conversation. And once again, it takes a very complex issue, and you're able to look at it in a different light.

Pam Hayes: [00:31:29] A smaller light.

Sheli Smith: [00:31:31] Yeah. It's just a smaller country. So, I think those are those kinds of things now we can push all of those Kevlar threads together.

Pam Hayes: [00:31:42] And we're talking, too, about what viewpoints are the people from Trinidad and Tobago going to have about the exodus of people from Venezuela. So, you need to keep your ears open and listen to culturally and politically what they're saying in their community. You don't necessarily have to get into the topic, but just listen and see what they have to say. And then, you can form your own opinions, but it's really important for them, I think, as being young people, especially with our world being so diverse now, for them to actually listen to other cultures and see what they're doing. So, it's kind of fun to see their little minds work after. "Okay. So, we learned this today. What do you think?" And then, all of a sudden, it's like "Waaa."

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:25] The waa moment literally.

Pam Hayes: [00:32:29] Yeah.

Sheli Smith: [00:32:29] And I do think too that they're going to take this back into college or career, and they're going to not be afraid suddenly to attack a problem in their biology class, in their oceanography class, in any other class they get because, now, they suddenly went, "Wow, I didn't know any of that stuff; and yet, I still could come up and create a codex or, at least, the beginnings of a codex. And, now, I can go into this class over here and do the research that my professor wants me to do." So, I think in your comment about scaffolding, we're giving them those skill sets that they're going to need.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:07] And those skill sets are absolutely critical. And the reality of it is that even though for your Global Sustainability Program, which is absolutely awesome, and allows folks to get to go and do this great trip, the reality is if you are a teacher in a small community without the resources to travel outside the community, this entire program is based on things that you're doing just right here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:34] So, I want to touch on that just really quickly because the last thing I want to have happen is for folks, "Oh, well that's really awesome but we can't do that," because the answer is you actually can. It's just structured a little bit differently.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:46] So, Pam, really briefly, talk to us about the work that you're doing as you take the kids out is based on the work in the learning center that you've been heading up for a number of years now with your program, and the way that it's tied to embedded local industry partners and problems, back to Sheli's point about the kids going to go to Trinidad and Tobago, they're going to work on a codex that's a local problem. So, how does one, like, "I can't go to the Caribbean. How do I do this locally as the K12 teacher?" What does that look like for you?

Pam Hayes: [00:34:19] A K12 teacher could find almost like Stratford. I mean, you could go up to the Stratford Farm in Delaware and decide to do a project on growth food industry. You can go take the students anywhere out of a classroom. And I know they used to call them a field trip. So, a field trip was just going, and looking, and seeing what their job was, and coming home. I mean, to immerse

the students, you really need to have like a challenge for them, a design challenge, and say, "Hey, this is happening in our neighborhood," and bring it back locally. "Let's see who can help us with this project. Who has ideas?"

Pam Hayes: [00:34:59] And if they're younger students, I would get parents involved and say, "This is what we want to do. Do you have any suggestions?" And parents love to get involved. They can find industry partners, or they might have a neighbor who is invested in a specific topic and start there. Go to a lake, you go to a farm, go to -- there are all sorts of places. The zoo is another one. I mean, you could do so many smaller trips with the kids.

Pam Hayes: [00:35:28] And as they get older, and they've learned to accept the challenge, and design a solution for it, they start to think in a little broader aspect. And as they grow and get better, then you can start taking them to maybe Lake Erie, or Florida and the Keys, or someplace within the United States borders, which is pretty easy to find. And then, from there, you just have to start communicating with people outside. There are companies and organizations that do field trips. I don't know necessarily if they're as educational as the ones we do, but you could make it whatever you want to make it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:11] So, part of it is that sort of fearlessness around the design of the experience, right? So, Sheli, as the partner, right, as the community partner, so whether you're a museum or, to Pam's point, you're the local farm, you're a local nonprofit, you're the food pantry, so many different ways you could think about as external outside partner. And Sheli also came to PAST from the museum world, So, has lived in that space of that community partner from multiple different aspects of what that means.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:45] And so, how do you, as that kind of entity, sit and approach the planning and design side with the teacher? Because one of the things that, oftentimes, will happen in these cases is an outside entity, that museum, that zoo, even your metro parks or whatnot, has candid programming. And the easy lift for everybody involved in this conversation is to take that candid programming, which may be great programming, don't get me wrong, and say, "Here, let's just do this," right. And, oftentimes, teachers will be hesitant to push back and say, "But I really want it to be this?" or "Could we add?" How do you, being the folks sitting in the community, branch in that partnership?

Sheli Smith: [00:37:32] I think it's probably one of the more difficult lifts of education is that teachers have a perception of teaching, community partners have a perception of what they can do. Everybody's got their own perception. The community partner does not want to go in the classroom and teach. And the teacher doesn't know what else to ask for. So, what you often see as you've got these people that really, really want to work together. They don't really understand though what they can do for each other.

Sheli Smith: [00:38:05] And I think that if you get the partners all into the planning stage that then we start to see, like, in the middle school, if we can really focus on on exploration and role models, we can begin to expand the horizons of what kids can be. And then, if we can take that 9th-10th grade year and really get towards orientation of career, then we can take on, "Let's take on this project that we didn't have before. Let's take this on. What's a problem that we have in our community that we could solve? I mean, do you have a grocery store in your community? If you don't, let's see if we can solve that problem. And let's get those partners in where they can really help."

Sheli Smith: [00:38:46] And their help is really in the expertise for the teacher. And so, they can really give the teacher that kind of depth of knowledge or understanding that the teacher does not possess and make a confident teacher who can then do activities with their kids to actually get to a

solution. I think, then, you get to, as Pam said, you're at the end. Now, we have experience. Let's get this kid some experience. Let's get them out into a research, or a farm, or let's get them to a museum and an internship.

Sheli Smith: [00:39:17] And I think at this point in that experiential years of maybe like 11th-12th grade, getting internships is probably the most important part of all of this. So, to your point of scaffolding, I think we have to be really clear. When do we want to kind of like explore and get curiosity really built? And then, how do we orient to really problem solving? And then, how do we get the kids experience that really sets them up in a really nice vertical rise to be ready and confident to either go to college or go into a career?

Sheli Smith: [00:39:52] And a lot of times, I think, as a teacher, you need to think instead of what my students can't do, you have to think, "Oh, let's take this experience." For instance, the new dance they are doing, the kids were like really crazy and doing it all the time and-

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:09] Pam was dancing for it, by the way.

Pam Hayes: [00:40:10] It's on radio after all. So, there's dancing going on in here.

Sheli Smith: [00:40:13] I'm talking about the kindergartners and first grade in the neighborhood, they came, and they said, "Our teachers are really mad because they're doing this dance." And I went, "Why don't you go back to them and say, 'Hey, we're burning a lot of energy. Can we learn energy with this, and take a dance...'"

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:27] Exactly, exactly.

Sheli Smith: [00:40:28] "... and do an experiment with it, or read about it, or why did it start, or what's the culture of it, or why are people doing it, and who developed it, and kind of do a history?" And one of the little boys said, "Oh, I'm gonna go ask my teacher that." And then, not too long ago, he came back, and he went, "We did a whole science project on that dance just because you said that." I went, "Well, that's what we have to teach."

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:49] That's awesome.

Sheli Smith: [00:40:49] We have to teach teachers to think, not, "No, you're not going to be able to do that," or "No, you can't use your cell phone," or "No, you can't do that." And quit saying no and just say, "Okay, let's take this experience that you have now, and let's make something out of it. So, we have this problem with X. What do you want to do with it?" So-

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:11] Classic design thinking, right?

Sheli Smith: [00:41:14] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:14] I mean, that is all about, hey, we have a set of constraints. They're not bad. They're not good. They exist. We have to design with those in mind. And so, yeah.

Pam Hayes: [00:41:24] And if we're teaching kids to do that and take not a no, every time you say no to a student, it's like a challenge. If you say, "Okay, I really don't want you to do this, but if you have to do this particular set of things, what are you going to do with it? And what's the important purpose?"

Pam Hayes: [00:41:45] And I think that's what Sheli and I do with the kids. We're going down with a set of expectations that we have. We have no idea we have to change in a minute. We might get there. One of the things is turtle nesting. We're going out a couple of evenings to see if we can see the turtles hatch. What if they don't? So, what are we going to get from that experience? And what can the kids do that was different? Or what did they learn? Things change every minute. So, it's kind of fun to be able to change at that moment.

Sheli Smith: [00:42:18] Yeah.

Pam Hayes: [00:42:18] Well, it makes it real. It's not arbitrary. It's not-

Sheli Smith: [00:42:22] Or boxed.

Pam Hayes: [00:42:23] Yeah, yeah. It's not like here's a bunch of numbers, put them in an order, and you get a solution. This is, you've got variables all over the place. It might be weather, and we can't go. Maybe the fact that the turtles just aren't nesting at this moment. It might be any number of given things. Everyone gets seasick. And that's been our -- "Okay, we're not going to do that now." So-

Sheli Smith: [00:42:44] The social warfares.

Pam Hayes: [00:42:46] Yeah, the social warfares.

Sheli Smith: [00:42:47] Well, it's funny. The itinerary for this trip has changed six times, and we keep giving the students a different itinerary every time we meet, and they're like, "Why are we getting another one?" And I went, "Well, again, variables. We've got to figure out buses, and who your teacher is down there. And is that part of the park? Is the state park open at that time?" And they're like, "Oh." I said, "Just go with the flow. It'll change even when we get down there." And they're like, "Okay." So, we're teaching them adaptability. You've got to be able to change in a moment when you're in a job or in college, so.

Annalies Corbin: [00:43:19] I don't know, ladies. It sounds to me like you guys are advocating for Learning Unboxed, right. So, with that, last lob, I always like to end every one of the episodes with a piece of that sage advice from the experience that our guests have had. As folks sit back, and they listen and contemplate, "Hey, should I do this thing?", what's the thing that you want that teacher, that person in the community, that policy person who's contemplating, putting themselves on the line, and going out there, and doing something really, really innovative in the education space? Sheli, what's your piece, your last lob to those folks?

Sheli Smith: [00:44:02] I think I would love to see that we drop the difference between informal learning and formal learning. I'd like us to see this drop. We have data that shows that alternative learning and informal learning have amazing impacts on kids; and yet, we then run back to formal learning? So, why do we have this difference? I mean, if that's working, they're amazing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:25] Why aren't we doing it every day?

Sheli Smith: [00:44:28] Yeah, why aren't we doing it every day? Why is it alternative when it should be mainstream? So, somebody out there, take that on, darn it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:34] Absolutely. Pam, what about you? What's your last lob for someone thinking about this?

Pam Hayes: [00:44:41] I think my biggest pet peeve with education is committees, that you have to take everything to a committee, and then people have to vote on it. And by the time you vote on it, the moment is over. So, teach in the moment, and let teachers have a little bit more free reign of innovative ideas for their students, and let the kids design and be productive.

Pam Hayes: [00:45:02] I mean, we're thinking -- you've got to think 20 years down the road. You can't think 20 years behind this, which a lot of education is right now. So, we need to move forward, and give some teachers -- give them credit. I mean, they have their degree, they know what they're doing, let them be spontaneous.

Annalies Corbin: [00:45:19] Yeah, an amazing group of dedicated folks who are making every effort on behalf of our kiddos. Absolutely. So, thank you, ladies, very much for taking time out of your day and sharing your journey with us. And have a really awesome, and safe, exciting, fun trip. You guys head out.

Pam Hayes: [00:45:40] Did you take any of those words back? Like fun?

Annalies Corbin: [00:45:45] No. It's exciting. It should always be fun. It should always be exciting. I did promise you an adventure.

Sheli Smith: [00:45:51] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:45:52] 20 some odd years of adventure have been had. And with that, thank you so much.

Sheli Smith: [00:45:57] Thank you.

Pam Hayes: [00:45:58] Thanks.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:01] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media, @annaliescorbin. And join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.