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Annalies Corbin: [00:00:16] 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: [00:00:26] 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 reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:50] So, welcome to Learning Unboxed. This is your host, Annalies Corbin. And I'm very excited about our guest. We're going to be talking about music and the role of arts, music, technology in education. And I'm very excited about my guests today. With us are Dwight Heckelman, who is director at Groove U. And we'll have him explain the awesomeness of, if nothing else, having the opportunity to work in a place called Groove U because that can only be cool, right. There's no way that's not cool.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:19] And joining Dwight and his 20 years of music industry experience is Nicholas Burgett. And I've known Nick for many years now in many different roles. And so, currently, Nick is an educational aide at Metro Early College High School, which for our listeners who have been paying attention to this series, we've had many episodes that have made reference to Metro Early College because it's our in-residence partner. So, we talk about them all the time. And Nick comes out of that. And through that experience, as a student, as an intern, working for IT and technology companies, but also spent some time in Groove U. So, welcome to both of you.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:02:00] Thank you. Thank you for having us.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:02:01] Pleasure to be here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:02] All right, excellent. So, Dwight, let's start with you. So,

Groove U.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:02:08] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:08] What on earth is that? Because it sounds so awesome, and we all kind of might want to go to such a place.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:02:13] Oh, yeah, go. I'm not that big but-

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:17] But you could be.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:02:17] Groove U is a post-secondary two-year music industry career program. So, our focus is on music industry entrepreneurship. And we have six areas of study: audio production, music business, live sound, video, interactive design. Basically, for lack of a better word, it's a trade school, but it's a post-secondary trade school.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:43] But it's also a place that has the opportunity to interact in the K12 space in some really intriguing and interesting ways, which is exactly how we kind of got involved with Groove U. So, Metro, as, again, we've talked about them a lot, and the learning centers, which is the early college experience that takes place there, and Groove U is one of the options, which is how we get involved with Groove U. Nick, yes?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:03:10] Yeah. So, back before I ever worked at Metro, I was a student there. I went there all four years for high school. And one of the teachers there approached me and was like, "Hey, we're trying to start this brand-new learning centers with this music college. Do you want to go? Because I know I can trust you to report back or tell us how it is like. Is it good? Is it no good? Tell us about it." And I was like,

"Yeah, sure," because before that, I was going to do something about agriculture, and that's just not super in my field, but I thought it would be somewhat interesting. So, when they said like "music and technology," I was like, "Yes, please. That sounds awesome."

Nicholas Burgett: [00:03:42] So, yeah. It was me and the first group of students from Metro to start the -- we call it Digital Learning Center at the time, with the partnership with Groove U. And so, we all did -- most of us had one year there. Then, some of us went back our senior year, as well did the junior year, to do it again our senior year. And so, over the course of two years overall completed the first-year review student course.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:05] Right. And so, Dwight, give us just a little bit of an overview then about how the program works as it relates in particular to the way you interact in that sort of K12 piece of it.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:04:16] Sure. So, in that piece of it, basically, the first year at Groove U for all our students is the same, regardless of their specialization. So, they're going to get foundational courses in all the areas of study - in audio production, music business, live sound, video, interactive design. They're going to get some career courses and some core business courses.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:04:35] And by Nick and his peers, they attend basically half time. So, they complete in two years if they want to. One year at Groove U, which is what he did. Groove U is very heavily lab-based. So, about a four to one lab-to-class ratio. So, it's a lot. It would be a lot for a high school student to bite off what is the equivalent of 22 credit hours that our full-time students take. So, Nick was basically a normal full-time college student, just not a normal full-time Groove U college student.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:04] Right. And so, Nick, if you had to sort of distill the experience down into one or two core things that you think were the most valuable, given you've been a bit -- and certainly in the time that I have known you, I would say a bit of a renaissance, right, in the sense that because you have always been a bit fearless as it relates to, "I'll try this. I'll try that," right? And so, I would imagine that

because that's part of your nature but, also, because of the way you've been able to sort of embody the experiences that you've had, you have some key takeaways, not being late being one of them.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:05:42] Yes, mostly that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:46] For our listeners, we had a delayed start.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:05:50] And a very wise man in this room once told me that early is on time, on time is late, and late is fired. So, as of today, I am not fired. So, yeah, big takeaways. Before I ever started at Groove U, I had an appreciation for music, I suppose, but I remember one thing that really stuck with me is people were talking about all the different things that they liked, and they like this, they like that, and I was like, "Yeah, I'm into all of that." And one student told me like, "I think, you don't know what you like yet because you haven't heard enough." I was like, "Okay, yeah, that's fair."

Nicholas Burgett: [00:06:23] And so, one thing, totally, like not even super connected to the education part was just like experimenting a bit more with like music as a whole. But then, gaining a much greater appreciation for it because I got to do every part of it. And so, in my mind, I never really even thought of music other than, "Hey, there's that thing on the radio that's currently playing that we've all heard a thousand times."

Nicholas Burgett: [00:06:46] But then, through experience at Groove U, getting to be like the stagehand to set up events, and working alongside artists, doing recordings in the studio, engineering sessions, shooting music videos, we had to write our own songs, which I'm no good at. So, just getting to see like every single part there was. And again, that was, like Dwight was saying, only in that first year. And so, it was after that where we could have picked a specific thing like, "All right, let's hone in a little bit."

Nicholas Burgett: [00:07:13] But over the course of two years, and what for a Groove U student would have been one year, I got to see like every part of the entire music industry. And, again, to me, it was just, "There's that song again that we've all heard by that popular band." And, now, it's like it's so much greater than that, and there's so much depth to it.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:07:29] And so, really just having like a greater appreciation for music, not just being like that thing that plays in the background, but like this is an entire community that's really awesome and really diverse. And there's these people that are totally different that were awesome friends because they had this bond that they shared. That was like totally different. And so, I, then, also got my own niche of music that I, now, like too. So, that was a plus. But, yeah, just getting to see the whole industry was really cool.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:56] And I think that's the beauty of that sort of applied teaching and learning environment. And, again, truly, truly the beauty of what we certainly advocate for at the PAST Foundation is you don't know what you don't know, right. And you have to be able to really not just have that sort of casual experience across a broad career set, but you really kind of need to dig in to know that, "I want to do this," or "I don't want to do this," until that program, Dwight, as you have set it up, was really intended to show folks the full array of the industry.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:08:28] Right. And I can't even necessarily take credit that I set it up because the way the program was developed was actually going to the industry first and saying, "Who do you hire and why?" And what we learned through that process was the diversity has to sort of cross, not just what you think you want to do, but the entire industry, as Nick sort of explained.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:08:48] So, a lot of our students, for example, will come in, and they'll be like, "I don't want to do audio production," because it makes sense to kind of get. I'll be sitting in front of a board, and I'll be listening, and I'll be turning switches. They see it on TV, and they-

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:00] "I think I know what this is."

Dwight Heckelman: [00:09:01] "I think I know what this is." And then, only about a third to a half of the students will actually go on to do audio production because they'll realize, they're like, "Oh, wow, I have this talent for video," or "Wow, the money is really maybe for me and/or the career path for me as in doing artist management or concert booking," or "Maybe what I thought was audio production studio really is doing live sound, and an install, or a live sound environment."

Dwight Heckelman: [00:09:27] So, yeah, that's kind of unique, I think. But I can't take credit for coming up with that. When we talked to employers, they're like, "Even if you know how to run the board, I want you to be able to read a contract. I want you to be able to -- you might have to do a side hustle. And if you want to work in the studio, you might have to work live sound on the weekends and/or you might have to shoot video." So, having that really holistic understanding of all the pieces is, I think, maybe a little unique and sets us apart.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:56] And I think that applies to the sort of thinking about training experience opportunity across any industry, right, that the way that you sort of process and set up the program is really to Groove U literally could be applied across a broad array of opportunities. So, if you're a small community out there in rural America, and you're like, "God, this Groove U thing sounds really, really awesome, but we don't have that," we could make that out of what we do have, which may be a completely different industry utilizing the same approaches.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:10:28] Right, yeah. And I think maybe Nick can speak to that a little bit from an IT perspective what is -- people think they know what IT is, but then you get into IT, and you're like, "Well, it's really this really broad field, and it doesn't involve me sitting at a computer coding all day."

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:41] But it does involve people complaining, right? And-

Nicholas Burgett: [00:10:44] And whether or not they've turned it off and turned it back on.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:49] That's a whole another conversation. That's another episode. But Nick, talk a little bit with us about the experience from the student's perspective because one of the things that I think that people forget when they set up these sort of innovative programs involve an element of career exploration and experiences, they forget about the autonomous nature of the student that's so critically important. And, certainly, your K12 experience, not necessarily traditional, and it gave you the freedom to be very independent in that space. Talk about that a little bit because that is not the norm. I mean, most folks have an expectation that you are not ready to do X, Y, or Z, but you are. And I would argue most students actually are.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:11:37] Yes. So, one point that Dwight made that was huge was thinking you know, and then getting there, and it being totally different because I remember I was sitting down with one of our advisors. I was like, "So, I want to do graphic design. That's what I'm going to do." She's like, "Well, we could look at other things." I was like, "No, pretty sure that's what I want." And I got to Groove U, and I was like, "Graphic design, that's probably going to be marketing," but being able to take all of the classes and realizing, "Whoa, video production is really cool," and that's still being a thing that I took with me.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:12:05] But in terms of like autonomy, it was the amount of responsibility given to us tied with the amount of privilege, it looks like. Uncalled for, honestly. We would start our day at Metro. And then, one of the teachers would check in and say, "All right, see you guys this afternoon."

And at that point, it was up to us to go get in the car, to get in a bus, to get ourselves over to Groove U.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:12:28] And there was no one checking us along the way at checkpoints like, "Hey, are you on your way?" It's just they're going to trust us to get to class on time. So, we did because that's what you do. And we wanted to be there, especially because with a lot of the other students there, the Groove U students, they're kind of used to this being school. But for us, like, I go in in the morning, and I sit in American History or Geometry. And I'm like, "Oh, now, I get to go to Groove U-"

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:53] Exactly.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:12:53] "... to play with all the technology." And so, we'll be sitting talking about some assignment and their students. Not that they're ungrateful. It's like, "Oh, we got to do this, and that's going to be hard." And we're like, "Are you guys kidding? This is so much fun." I mean it's great. And then, getting to do that alongside college students who aren't treating us any differently, just some high schoolers who are here ready to make a product happen.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:13:14] And then, again, at the end of the day, expectation being we get ourselves back to school because that's where we ought to be. And so, there's really no handholding. Dwight never sat us down and was like, "Okay, guys. Let me dumb this assignment down for you because I know you're not used to this and not ready yet." It was anything they were doing, we were doing. And it was almost to the point where you couldn't tell we were high school students other than the fact that they told them we were high school students. But just getting to do everything that they were doing, including like going out.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:13:44] And even like in terms of the Groove U structure them saying like, "Okay, guys. You need to shoot a music video. Go. Class is over in an hour and a half." And we could just get in a car, go downtown somewhere, find a cool mural on the side of a building, and just shoot, and just go. And then, they're expecting, when you come back at the end of the week, you've got a product ready.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:14:05] And it's not totally like you're on your own figure it out. Like any time we'd ask questions of it, they would have answers. The expectation is if you're not asking me a question, you're going out there, and are getting it done. So, we all did because that's what we were there to do, and we were all excited to do it. So, yeah, really, there was not a lot of time where there's someone like sitting over your shoulder like, "Hey, are you doing this right?" unless you're asking them to. You just kind of went and did.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:31] Well, and that's why it works.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:14:32] Yeah. And one of our alumni maybe encapsulated a little bit of this to your earlier point. He says that I tell my students, "Here's a candle. Go find a match," right. And so, here's the tool, you have to go own it, and find the inspiration, and work it, and deliver the output. So, I think that's a pretty good encapsulation maybe.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:14:52] Yeah. That's what I said [laughs]

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:55] But I also think that that sort of speaks to the notion of sort of where and how we set expectations, right. And so, certainly, on this program, we have a lot of conversation around why this system of education, whether you're talking K12, post-secondary, career trade, even workforce, right, why does not work. And in many ways, it does not work. And oftentimes, when you

really sort of pull the pieces apart, what you find is the things that aren't working are based on the fact that our expectations are way too low.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:15:28] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:28] Right? That we have an expectation that because you are a high school kid, you cannot or you won't. That's just not the case at all. And what you were saying, Nick, is something that I hear over and over again from our students who have the opportunity to be part of these amazing experiences is it's a privilege to be there, and it's just so incredibly awesome, right. And so, as we think about sort of where and how those boundaries, I was saying earlier, it works because nobody thought you couldn't. That's a pretty powerful thing.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:16:03] Right. And it's also has to do it just do it. It's about process, not product, right. You're a student. We don't expect you to get it right the first time or the second time, but you will get it right if you do the process. And I think that's maybe sorely lacking in a lot of the institutional education is, "This is the theory behind it, here's one small opportunity to demonstrate it," versus like, "I'm not really going to get into the theory. Just go do it. Then, we'll explain the theory. Then, go do it again, and I'll give you some more theory to help you figure that out." So, it kind of shifts that paradigm.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:37] Yeah. Again, that's that applied learning opportunity that makes all the difference in the world. Yeah, absolutely. So, Nick, as you sort of think about, then, what that experience means, how would you best translate that to somebody else? So, as more students come through and think about the opportunity, whether it'd be at Groove U or other places, why opt in?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:17:00] Yeah. So, I think a lot of people, and I heard this a lot from the people I was at Groove U with, they really want to pursue a career in music business or any sort of music industry determines, "School's not for me. I got to figure this out." And I think that's really a shame that there's a lot of industries like that when when you're thinking about you're like general college GEs, you're not going to see one there for plumbing and construction. You're going to see English and Algebra 1, which we need that, and that makes sense, but so many students then, they only see that. So, they say, "Well, if I want to do doesn't fit that mold, then that just means I can't do school or I don't want to do school."

Dwight Heckelman: [00:17:38] I don't have the patience to wait two years, two and a half years to get to what I want to do.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:17:42] Right. And that's like the really cool thing about Groove U is you'll also never hear a student like raise their hand and say, "When are we ever going to use this?" because you do. It's never like super intangible. It's like, "All right, here's how you plug this microphone in, and here's how you coil this cable. This knob does this. This button does that." And so, when you go actually do it, it's not like you sit there, and you do your homework, and then you go do the test, and try to figure out how it changes. It's just, "Oh, I have literally done this already." And the only difference is now, we're a "professional" and not school anymore. But it's the same thing.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:18:17] And so, you're not even really going to school at that point. You are just learning how to do the job in like a safe confined environment where

there's room for mistakes, but then when the students leave, it's like, "Oh, I've already been doing this for the last two years." It transfers over completely and extremely smoothly.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:18:34] And on a micro level, that's the outcome is we give our students two years work experience before they go to work. Not two years of education that's just kind of bare.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:45] So, you're kind of really sort of merging and blending that notion of work-based learning, which is all the rage right now, I might point out, right. Everybody is talking about, but the reality of it is your program, it's just an embedded part of the everyday.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:18:58] Yeah. We tell our students, your career doesn't start two years from now. It started the first day of class. So, I mean, we have a have a time clock up front. Our students clock in and clock out every day.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:10] Interesting.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:19:10] They come to our building, our new campus, in particular, and it doesn't look like school. It looks like you're going to work. There's a little lounge, a very small lounge. And thus, the building is set up for recording and work. So, that hope, the whole viewpoint of like they know they're coming to work, they know we notice when they're late. We look at our time cards every week. How many hours did you spend here this week? It's just getting that mindset early on and realize that by the time you leave here, you're just basically looking for your next job. You already have a job. You've been working for two years. And now, it's time to take -- Instead of like, "Oh, I guess, now, three months from graduation, I guess I should start thinking about work." You're thinking about that pretty much every day that you're at Groove U.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:55] Right, right.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:19:56] And while it is structured, it's not super bogged down to the point of, "Oh, I want to learn how to record a guitar." Well, we're not doing that in class right now, so I can't help you. It's like you will see students there for hours after classes ended because they know they can use the space, and there will be someone there, and it's like, "Oh, we haven't gone over this in class yet, but, yeah, if you'd want to know let me show you how to do that because we want you to be a professional who's capable of lots of things." Like you said, it's not just, "I know how to run a soundboard. I know how to read and write a contract, and I know how to like do management and different things."

Dwight Heckelman: [00:20:25] And so, it's not -- like there is a structure, but it's not like super, "We only do this right now. If you want to learn how to do this, stick around till next month." It's like there will always be someone somewhere to show you how do I do that next thing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:39] So, this is an industry partner truly being on a journey with you. It's the participant. And I think that that's one of the key differences. And as folks think about what could innovative learning, work-based programming look like, that's, I assume, a key component if that.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:20:58] Right. And I think just to sort of take that one step further, we don't view our campus as building. We view our campus as the City of Columbus. And every month that our students are in class, they are doing a project with a community partner, be it a business -- I mean, our students you know they have their own stage at Columbus Arts Festival where they run, manage, book their stage. We did Breakaway, the big EDM Festival. We've brought in Columbus Steel Drum Band to record.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:21:32] So, it's the idea of they're out every month interfacing with industry people. So, when they go to do their internships, which we have two pretty extensive ones as a part of a two-year program, they already have those relationships, they already have those connections,

they've already been able to demonstrate on some level they can do these things, and we get real time feedback from those employers about, "Well, you had your students do this, but maybe don't have them do that anymore." Like, "Oh, okay. We'll change that tomorrow." We'll train that piece of gear, we'll change that approach to how we're doing our education because those are the boots on the ground. We're not in some silo dictating, "Well, this is what we think you should know." We're really looking to our students to be active participants in their learning.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:15] And what does the next conversation look like? Because as more and more K12 folks start to wrestle with K12, what exactly is that thing? Can we get it to morph, to change, to go away, to re-evaluate itself? Take your pick depending on your lens and your point of view. Well, what does the conversation look like? I mean, how is what's happening at Groove U more mainstream in our public experience of finding our way toward talk?

Dwight Heckelman: [00:22:52] I think, at least, from our perspective, and I can't speak to how everyone is going to approach this, but from ours, of course it's very outcomes-based. But the outcome isn't even necessarily the credentialed education. The outcome is what are employers asking for. Every month my staff and I sit down with advisory panels, every month in these various specializations, and we ask them, "Who are you hiring and why, not now, but two years from now?" And they take those things, and they tell us, and we hear these things, and we then parlay those into course outcomes.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:23:31] And they can change pretty quickly. So, I like to use example of about four years ago, we were having our video one. We were sitting there, always the same question, "Who are you hiring and why? What skills do you need - hard skills, soft skills, whatever the case might be?" And they said, "Well, the question we ask is, how does your workflow changed from last time we met, from this year to last year?" And they go, "Drone pilots?"

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:51] It's awesome.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:23:53] And we go, "Oh." And so, something that was like 1% of the video class became 20% of the video class. And we literally bought a drone the next day. And our instructor was already certified, and they were out there learning drone pilots because by the time they graduate, I mean, they're going to need that, and we don't have to go through some massive Board of Regents, to accrediting body, to back up, to back down, to revise. Just change it. That's the industry we work in. It changes that fast.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:24:23] And so, do a lot of industries, but they lag because of all the non-streamlined approach to changing curriculum. And we heard it right from the people that we want to have our students work for. Like I don't know what other vetting I need. You want drone pilots? That's something we can help supply. Simple.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:43] And the good news is that's changing broadly, right? The more traditional education is recognizing that it is-- Wow. Yeah, there's so many words we could use. We'll go slow. In terms of its adaptability, system and structure-wise, to your point, it's just not set up to do that; and yet, those systems are recognizing and trying to figure out how to be faster on adapting side of that.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:25:09] And the system likes credentialing, which is -- and I'm not done on credentialing. I mean, I want my brain surgeon to say University of Harvard School of Neuroscience. And that looks really good for me. I want to see University of Bahamas correspondence course in the brain, right. But in some industries like ours, credentials, formalized credentials carrying nothing. They're not even a foot in the door. Nobody really cares. So, if we can shake off a lot of the

conventions that revolve around has to be this formal credential, things start to look really interesting if you're just delivering what the industries are asking for.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:48] And Nick, how do you bring that back? I mean, let's take this full circle. So, you are now back at Metro as part of the faculty and staff, and the experience at Groove U, and you were also a student at Columbus State, and, again, back to the sort of renaissance approach really had taken that opportunity both from a work and learning environment to try lots of things along the way. So, how does that translate back now? You're in that space where you're actually working directly with students trying to move through the same sorts of systems that you worked through. So, what does that look like for you now?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:26:28] Yeah. So, that is-

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:29] That's an intriguing circle, right?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:26:31] It is really funny.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:33] It's really an intriguing circle.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:26:34] It's funny because people that I used to call like Mr. This and Ms. That, they're now like, "Stop calling me that. Call me by my first name because, now, we work together." It's like, "Oh, yeah, right. That's super weird." But it's true. Like Dwight made a good point that the credentials, especially in this field, are not huge. Like I worked in the school at this point, but I also do freelance video on the side, and I do not have a degree in anything video related, but I know how to do the stuff because somebody taught me, and I know people that need it, and they say, "Oh, you can do it. Let's do it then."

Nicholas Burgett: [00:27:03] And so, I think so many students, like I have my students now where they're in middle school, they're sitting and thinking like, "I'm stressing out. I got to figure out all this stuff. I got to know exactly what I'm doing the next five years. And I'm going to have to be in school for the next 20 years to get this degree, and this thing." And like I have a student who really loves American History, but he's thinking, "Oh, I can't stay in school long enough to get a masters to teach this topic," or actually he didn't even get that far until I suggested it. In his mind, he's like, "Oh, well, I like this, but that doesn't fit anywhere other than learning. And so, I'll go work in my parents' tow yard because all I can do is learn this content." But then, trying to tell him like, "No, this is a job that you can have, and that looks like a lot of different things." And one thing I, then, suggested was like, "You could teach it," but even that is not the bottom line.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:27:56] You could work for a museum. You could be a researcher right. There's learning American History, and you could write books about American History. You could go on talk shows. You could be regarded as an expert in what you do, right?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:28:07] And so, I think so many students just have this assumption of what education is supposed to be. And it's that, "I go to school until I finish in high school. And at that point, I know a whole lot about math and science, and I can write a paper in MLA. And then, I go to college. And somehow, now, I have to figure out what I want to do with rest of my life." And so, we focus a lot at Metro on advancement and what's next. And so, we have middle school thinking about high school. We have high schoolers thinking about college before they ever get there. But now, I've got middle schoolers who are thinking, "I have no idea what I want to do for a living, and I have to figure that out right now." It's like, "No, not yet," but also it's just we kind of hang them out to dry, I feel like, once they get to the end of high school, and they're like, "Okay. Well, now, I have to pick something and I

don't know what it is. So, I guess I'll be a marine biologist." I've heard that so many times because of biology classes.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:28:57] I hope one thing that Nick got from being at Groove U that we try and impress is, especially in this field but it can imply, a lot of things can take this approach, that creativity isn't something you do. It is something you are. It doesn't refer to your output. It refers to your approach, right. So, people make something. They make music, or they they make something interesting, and people, mom and dad, grandma, they're, "Oh, you're so creative." We're talking about output. If you are a creative, then you're bringing that then to your business, and to your career, and to your artistry, into everything that you do. So, I hope that that's something that Nick took away as he looks into being an educator now is that, "Hey, creativity isn't about output. It's about approach."

Nicholas Burgett: [00:29:45] Right. And so, then, we have all these students with all of this currently going through their minds, and me trying to think, "What can I do to be helpful here?" So, with all of that, I, then, just kind of -- because they're thinking about all these different moving parts that I'm currently talking about, and it becomes a really complex dilemma in the mind, especially of a 14-year-old. So, I was kind of stopping and say, "Okay, what do you like to do?" And some of them don't know yet, and I say, "That's fine." But some of them think, "Oh, you're an educator. I have to say, "Well, I like the English class." I'm like, "No, it's not what I mean. What do you like to do?"

Nicholas Burgett: [00:30:18] And so, then, like going back to that example, that student who really likes American History, it's, like Dwight sounds, like there is a career we can make out of that. What you enjoy and what your passion is does not have to become your hobby because I think we get stuck in life core content classes, and that's what our jobs become, and that's all there is to it.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:30:37] But there's so much more than that. Like so many of these creatives are talking about, they could have become an accountant and playing music was their hobby. But trying to steer them in the direction of like, "That can happen," but then, where we get caught again is we need a place to foster that. Thankfully, for music, we have a spot like Groove U. But we need more of that.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:30:56] And we need to separate the hobbies from the pros, which something that Groove U takes pretty seriously, and that's the other side of it. It should be some people's hobby because, at least, being in music is a lifestyle choice

Dwight Heckelman: [00:30:56] For sure, yes.yes

Nicholas Burgett: [00:31:11] You're committing to a life -- I mean, you don't have to commit to a lifestyle to be a banker, right. Like that's just your job and it's not part of your life. But we're talking before we got here that musicians get started about 1:30 in the morning, and we run on five or six hours of sleep, or any of that pace through the industry as well. So, there is value in separating the professional from the hobbyist. And sometimes, college really needs to take that and K12 needs to take that seriously.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:38] I think, at the end of the day, I really want the T-shirt. And I want the one that says, "Stop asking kids what they want to be when you grow up."

right. And instead, back to your point, is we could get everybody to find their passion, to live that passion in their work, in their day-to-day life, at least, using that to help them make decisions. We would all end up getting to do that thing that we're so passionate about, but the reality of it is asking kids so early on, "What do you want to be when you grow up," puts them in a box right from the get go.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:32:14] Asking them to make decisions about it as high school juniors when they also have to ask permission to use the bathroom, right. Like, "I want you to make this biggest financial commitment of your life. It's \$250,000 or more. Also, raise your hand and ask to use the restroom." Like, what an incredible odd pressure to expect them to have it figured out. We got to give them more runway.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:40] Well, that just comes back to that artificial boundary, right. Again, it's those sets of expectations. They're just --everything is so out of whack. I think, at the end of the day, when I think about the work that I'm engaged in and the conversations that I'm having all over the planet, oftentimes, it comes back to repeatedly over and over again, really, why is that the expectation? High school graduation, we talk about that all the time. Great. It's an aspiration, but why is that the penultimate? That is bizarre to me. Yeah, let's do that. But why is that the thing we're measuring when there are so many other great opportunities out there? And yet, we're still stuck in that in the same way that we're stuck in a progression that we have to take Algebra, and then Geometry, and that we don't step back and say, "How about we learn all the things we need right now as we're actually doing something?"

Nicholas Burgett: [00:33:32] Or tell the student the high school senior that, "Well, go to college and figure it out." Like, "Wait. That's a really expensive experiment." If you give me \$100,000 and don't send me to college, I'll figure it out. Why do you have to spend all this money to figure it out? Just coming back, give the student more runway to find that passion, and that enthusiasm, and what they want to do instead of, I think we're way too delayed as a society. I think we're weird as westerner is to say like, "Just go to college, you'll figure it out." Like I remember sitting there being like, "That's really hard."

Dwight Heckelman: [00:34:08] And I love specific warning too, it's delayed because then, you're talking about how high school becomes the standard. It's like, "Okay, fine." But then, let's bring everything to that because when school branches out-

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:21] Exactly.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:34:21] ... and you can do all the different things is in college because in high school, you're still following all the state curriculum. Like my passion, I've discovered, is I really love shooting video, and I learned that while I'm in Groove U. And people are asking me what I want to do. It's like I never had the opportunity to figure out that I loved to do this. So, then why is high school the standard? I didn't know that yet.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:43] And I guess that's my point, right. As you step back and think about it, let's just rethink the whole thing. Let's just get some packets, get out of the box, get off the shelf. Let's toss it, right, and think about something else. So, as folks are sitting back wherever they are, contemplating what they've been listening today, what's the one thing that you think folks should know, Nick, as I'm in my community, I want to change the experience for my students? Well, what's your job to folks as they start down a new journey?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:35:16] Yeah, I would say don't be afraid to add new things and try new things because I think we often tell students, "Don't be afraid to try something new," but I don't think we then look at ourselves and say the same thing. So, like at Metro, for example, we have a class on coding, code.org. And I have students who are there that are kind of stuck in that box and go like, "Why are we doing this? I need to get to my next math class." It's like, well, someone here can become the next great coder who makes something awesome, and they would have never known they wanted to do that unless we brought it to them. So, I think wherever available, not being afraid to like, "Okay, we've got this box, which is a necessary box, that is our basis for education the way it is right now, but we

shouldn't be afraid to add to that." For that coding example, that's not something you'd expect to see in a middle school, but there could be a kid and that's where their passion lies. So, let's add that in there.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:36:13] And then, also, really making an effort as educators to try our best to really hear the students because, I think, especially in middle school, it's easier for me to say, "Well, you're 12. What do you know at this point?" A lot it turns out. So, being willing to hear them too because like at Groove U, they're going to sit there, and they're going to listen people, and say, "We need drones," and say, "Okay," but I should be willing to listen to my students also if they're like, "We think it would make sense for us to know how to balance a checkbook." I would say, "Okay." Now, I'm not in a position to do that myself but creating such a setup-

Dwight Heckelman: [00:36:47] You don't balance your checkbook?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:36:49] No. I mean, I balance my checkbook all the time. I'm saying I'm not in a position where I could add that for a student, but if we could make in such a way. And I don't have the brilliant one liner that everyone's going to go, "Yes, excellent. Let's change everything." And then, I'll get my plaque made. But not being afraid of change, which I think is so normal that we're all terrified of it, but looking at what we've got and thinking, "Okay, what can we add here for the sake of these people that need to figure out what they want to do with themselves?" if that makes sense and answers the question.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:28] Dwight, what's your job?

Dwight Heckelman: [00:37:29] I think my job is to have the conversation that education is not one size fits all from K through 12, right. That the way the system is constructed, well, from K through master's degree, if you really want to go that way.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:46] We say PK [subs T].

Dwight Heckelman: [00:37:46] There you go, right. So, the idea here is that everybody views their path through education is very linear. We're going to go meet these state expectations from K through 12. We're going to go to college. We're going to meet some type of expectation to achieve a degree. And then, maybe we need some other credential attached to that at some point. That's not how the world functions. It's a construct of our own design, right. I mean, I worked in the music industry for 20 years and nobody ever asked to see my diploma. Not once. Like I could've said I went anywhere. I could have said I followed this very route. Nobody cared. It was I was all about who I knew, and what I could do, and what type of person I was to work with. I mean all these things that are sort of ignored in lieu of follow the path, stay the course, this is our expectation of you is that you go K12, and then you go to college.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:38:46] And like, yeah, if we can start having that conversation and shifting that conversation like, "Well, wait a minute. Really? I mean, really? That really is how it's supposed to go?" then, I think we're making progress because more people will have this conversation about, "Well, we talk about it all the time. I went to college, and I never used my degree." Like, "Okay." So, you see the problem, right? You see that you paid a lot of money for things that aren't really panning out for you. What would you rather have done?

Nicholas Burgett: [00:39:14] Right. I think it's funny than you're saying no one asked to see where you went. But, now, if I tell them where I went, I won't matter because I say Groove U, and no one knows. Like that's not a thing. I'm like, "No, let me tell you that's really cool." And they're like, "Okay, where else?" And I say, "Columbus Stadium," and they're like, "For video?" and I say, "Yeah." So, at

the end of the day, it really didn't matter where I ended up because I learned a lot from both. And now, I could do the thing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:34] But Groove U is a cool thing.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:39:37] It's an awesome thing. **Annalies Corbin:** [00:39:39] Awesome.

Nicholas Burgett: [00:39:39] I'll just throw in my own personal blog that of all the years I've been in school, I've dreaded most of it, but my years at Groove U were the best that I've had, and what I barely can consider school just because it was awesome.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:50] Well, on that note then, gentlemen, thank you-

Nicholas Burgett: [00:39:53] Thank you.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:39:54] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:54] ... very, very much for all the time. And we truly appreciate it. So, keep doing what you're doing.

Dwight Heckelman: [00:39:59] Thank you. **Nicholas Burgett:** [00:39:59] Likewise.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:02] 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 re-imagine education.