



Kelly Preheim

Kelly Preheim: [00:00:00] We'll have a little break, five minutes in-between where everybody's tired of thinking. And then, I'll go, "Hey, let's look at these bird flash cards. Here are some of the birds that you might see in your yard." And so, we'll get them started that way.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:18] 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. 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: [00:00:54] This is Annalies Corbin with Learning Unboxed. And we're very excited, as always, to welcome a new guest to the program. And today is one of my all-time favorite teachers pretty much on the entire planet. Joining me today is Kelly Preheim. Kelly is a kindergarten teacher in Armour, South Dakota. And I am very, very excited, Kelly, to have you with us today.

Kelly Preheim: [00:01:24] Thank you, Annalies.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:27] So, I'm going to have to do just a touch of storytelling to sort of set the context. And we should all imagine Kelly turning bright red because I only have awesome things to say about her. But truly, truly, truly one of my all-time favorite

teachers. And the reason that Kelly and her kindergarten kiddos in Armour, South Dakota are my favorite is because the journey that they have been on.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:54] And so, just to sort of help our listeners understand, I met Kelly many years ago now when we were working on a project in the Dakotas with the Clinton Global Initiative and a number of other different partners around bringing STEM education to rural areas. And Armour is in rural South Dakota. Yes, Kelly?

Kelly Preheim: [00:02:17] It is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:17] And what's the total population of the town of Armour, so folks understand what we're talking about when we say rural?

Kelly Preheim: [00:02:24] It's about 800.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:25] 800. And how many kids in the school do you think roughly?

Kelly Preheim: [00:02:30] Around 150.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:33] Yeah. So, this is one of those little, small schools, small but mighty. The things that they're able to do in this town, in part because it's small, and rural, and very intimate, I think, are part of what make the school and Kelly's work so successful. But I met Kelly as we were coming into the state as part of a statewide initiative. And like I said, a number of different partners all around trying to bring STEM education, problem-based instruction into that part of the United States. And Kelly and her colleagues at Armour School District were one of the teams that joined the project. And lots of teachers, as we know, starting these new things are a bit reluctant, not because they don't want to, but because it's all the giant unknown. And I think—is that for you, Kelly? There was a lot of unknown, yes?

Kelly Preheim: [00:03:23] There was, there was. And I wanted to do it right. And I just didn't know exactly how to get going.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:29] And the thing that I loved so much is as we started the training, and, again, this is part of the story that I do tell about Kelly, is that as we we sort of rolled into the training around, how do you transition or flip classrooms from traditional instruction to more of a problem-based or an applied environment, recognizing you're not doing it all the time, but you're trying to do it as often as you can with your kiddos, what does that look like? And how do you think about it? And there's a thousand different ways that you could do that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:59] And one of the things that we always tell teachers is teach your passion. But sometimes, we're reluctant to share with others what our passion is. And I remember a particularly stressful session around problem-based instruction and the conversation with Kelly about, "We could do this, we could do this, we could do this,

we could do that, we could do this, we could do that." And finally, Kelly just says, "I just love birds."

Kelly Preheim: [00:04:25] And I remember that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:26] And I remember going, "Awesome. Let's do everything in kindergarten through the lens of birds." And thus, joined an awesome friendship, partnership, and learning experience for all of us. So, I want to thank you, Kelly, for years and years of great opportunity to share with others that you can, in fact, find your passion.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:45] So, let's start a little bit with you in that journey. So, in particular, so when you think about utilizing something like, "I can see how much I can teach in any given classroom through the lens of birds," for a lot of teachers, that, too, would be daunting, even if it your passion. So, share with us a little bit about as you started that process, some of the things that you were thinking about.

Kelly Preheim: [00:05:10] Well, before you came to Armour, I had become a birder, and I had gone to a birding festival. And really, it just blew me away, what was in my area that I didn't know about. And I started sharing it with the kids because, frankly, my husband was tired of hearing me talk about birds. So, I started telling kindergartners about it, and they got excited. And it was interesting how they reminded me of kids when they first learned how to—young kids when they first learned how to use an iPad or an iPhone and how they just love it so much. They just picked it up really quickly.

Kelly Preheim: [00:05:45] This is what was happening. They saw my excitement about birds. They were picking it up. And then, the next year, I thought, "Well, I'll probably—" I used to just do a bird unit in May. I decided to do a bird unit, I just start teaching it throughout the year. And that class in particular was really excited about birds. And so,

that's when I started doing that. Then, you guys came along, and had all these ideas, and they were all good, but it wasn't birds. But once you got going on that, then I got pretty excited about it.

Kelly Preheim: [00:06:19] Another thing I think kids just need to, they need to get away from the screens and get outdoors more. And I've noticed that some kids are even afraid to be outdoors. So, this was really a good thing in that way to get kids outside, get them to be explorers, get them interested in nature because we need to have the next generation to care about nature if we're going to protect it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:44] We do. And I think that you bring up a really interesting point. There's a lot of connectivity in our world today for lots of kiddos at home. We come into school. There's just real push that we're utilizing technology all the time and and in everything. And to your point, those things can be great, however, right, we do need to take kids, especially the young ones, those elementary kiddos need to be completely immersed because they're curious.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:13] And that's one of the things that I loved about watching over the years. Kelly has a wonderful Facebook page called Bird Teach, where she's often posting lots of things for folks to be able to see what's happening with her kids, and in her class, and a thing called the Chickadee Club, which are going to come and talk about again in a minute. And being able to watch the kids explore over time, I think, has been a very powerful thing. I mean, your kiddos, once you get them out there, they're not afraid and their curiosity is pretty boundless. So, could you talk a little bit about some of the particular projects over the years that you've done with the kids that revolve around birds because some of them have been pretty darn inventive?

Kelly Preheim: [00:07:57] Yeah, one of them that we did was we have a lake here in town, and so we thought we would—first of all, our overlying big question was, how do we get the people in our town to be—to learn more about birds and care about them? And one of the things that came up with this, let's build nest boxes or birdhouses for the birds. So, we got together with—well, of course, kindergartners can't build bird houses on their own, so we got together with the high school class. And with my help, my students and I—I created a short PowerPoint slide show, and my kindergartners were the speakers. And they said, "These are the kinds of birds we'd like to home to these bird houses," like an Eastern Bluebird, or a wood duck, tree swallows, housing them. And then, we asked them if they could help us build nest boxes for them.

Kelly Preheim: [00:08:50] So, then, now, the high school kids had to do some research and find some plans. And then, they came and talked to the kids and showed them what the plans looked like, which was over their head, but it's still really interesting for them to see the small parts that go into the large part. And so, then, when it was time to build, the kindergartners came over complete with aprons, and safety glasses, and bowls. And we we watched them and help with the measuring and the building. And it was a very exciting time. My students were out of this world excited.

Kelly Preheim: [00:09:26] And when it was done and completed, then my kids got to see the birdhouses. That was interesting. They cleaned the birdhouses. And then, we went out and watched the high school students place them at the lake, and they're still there, and they're getting used. And I clean them out every year. And there's still, every year, we have birds in those bird houses.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:47] And that's-

Kelly Preheim: [00:09:48] Then, another thing we do is we make a bird field guide to help our neighborhood or our community. And so, the kids each choose one or two birds. I have a list of birds that are common to our area. And the kids chose a bird, and then we researched birds, and I write out. They helped me. We decide what we're going to say about each one. And then, I type it up, so that they can copy it onto the page. And then, they also draw the picture of the bird. And that is one of my favorite projects. I love that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:22] Well, and both of those projects I've seen—just for our listeners, I've seen both of those projects. I was in town, actually, on one of the days that Kelly's kindergarten kids and the high school kids were working on the actual build of the birdhouses. And I will say the high school kids got as much out of that experience

as the kindergarten kids do. And we talk about this all the time at the PAST Innovation Lab and, certainly, on Learning Unboxed about the fact that the most authentic audience is never gonna be the teacher, right? That authentic audience is when you're interacting with the public, or another class, or in this case, a group of high school students. Those high school kids learned an awful lot from your kindergartners. And the building of the bird guide, the field guide every year, that has also been a really powerful tool. And I've got great photos of both of those things, and I will make sure that they get posted up, so that people who are listening can turn to see what Kelly was talking about. So, those are awesome, awesome projects.

Kelly Preheim: [00:11:23] So, here, we built the Bird Feeder Complex for the lake with some high school students. They did most of the work this time. So, that's out there. And the community seems to really have embraced that. They love to see the different birds that are in the area.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:39] One of the other things that I love that you've done very, very effectively over the years is help scaffold your kiddos not just to love and pick up on your passion for birds and everything that they can learn through your passion for birds, but also the way the kids engage with the public about birds. So, what I'm thinking about, in particular, are I've seen any number of occasions where you've had kids up talking to folks in the city council or talking with folks from birding clubs from around the state. I mean, you've had some pretty amazing opportunities for your kids to actually engage with folks who had no idea what they were about to encounter with these little kiddos.

Kelly Preheim: [00:12:21] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:21] Can we talk about that just a little bit? Because lots of folks, I think, are afraid of the little ones doing meaningful policy work. And at the end of the day, every time your kids are out there in public talking about why they should care about the birds and your community, it's impacting policy in your community. That's a tough thing. Lots of folks don't do that.

Kelly Preheim: [00:12:39] I know. And I think people don't expect much from little kids, but I'm telling you right now, they—you can expect more from them. I mean, they just really are amazing. And when we went to talk to the city council, that was interesting. Only one of the little boys showed up. He was asking me a lot of questions. He was listening to the high school and saying, "What does that mean? What does this mean?" So, he was really into it. And then, one time, we went to the birding festival, and they had the kids up on stage, the South Dakota Birding Festival, and the kids were up on stage. And I showed pictures of birds, and they were ID'ing them. And then, I was

playing the sounds of birds, and they ID'ing them. And I think the audience was pretty blown away to see how capable they were.

Kelly Preheim: [00:13:30] Another thing, the parents are so impressed with the rise in their child's self-esteem because, now, they're experts on something that most adults know little about. The kids really did a good job with their vocabulary source. And I learned from other birders and from the books I read. And then, I teach them. And they're going out and teaching parents and grandparents. And it's a pretty neat thing. And I get a lot of great compliments. Some people see me and talking about, "Hey, we were out on the deck, and there are these great birds, and we didn't know what they were. So, we called him, Brody." And they said, "Hey, what is that bird?" He said, "Dark-eyed Junco." And, then, went off his way.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:13] And that's perfect because that's a huge win. Absolutely. That's a huge win. And it's not just that their vocabulary increases. Again, another one of the things that I've been so impressed with by the way you've really been able to embrace this and utilize it in your classroom, your kiddos are not just mastering their kindergarten standards, but the reality is because they're so interested, and they're so passionate about what they're doing, you often see your kids picking up first and second, and even maybe beyond, depending on what we're talking about, standards. And they may not be mastering all of those advanced grade standards, but they're, at least, being exposed to them in tangible and meaningful ways.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:55] So, how do you think that that translates as it relates to what is happening within the elementary school itself? So, if at kindergarten, you got kids coming in, and you are able to get far more math standards or far more vocabulary standards in that kindergarten year than required by the state, how does that then translate to what happens with those kiddos as they move up in an elementary school? Because it's transformational for a whole school. And that's partially what, just from the outside looking in, I saw happening in Armour School. You were you were all growing collectively.

Kelly Preheim: [00:15:27] Yeah. I think I'm setting the foundation for learning the scientific method, looking at something, and wondering. We've got to remember, when they were—they're not that far from babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, but they're trying to figure out the world, and learn about themselves and other people, and how things work. And so, I feel like they just need to keep that going, keep them wondering and asking questions. And I try to get them to rather than tell them things, I ask them things and get them outside, so that they can see things firsthand.

Kelly Preheim: [00:16:02] For example, like when I want to teach about animals that are different, we have real binoculars that we use. So, we go outside, and we look at things like a Turkey Vulture soaring, and we'll look at them. And then, I'll point out the Chimney Swifts that are also flying over, and we'll look at them, and I'll talk to them like, "How are they the same?" "Well, they're both birds. They're flying." "How are they different? Well, what do you think they eat? Do you know anything about that?" And

then, after we look at them, and they're all excited about seeing these birds, then we can go in and talk about, "Well, how can we find out more? Well, we can ask someone. We can get books. We can go online and look." So, I think it's a great way to teach them how to wonder and kind of the process to go through.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:53] Yeah. And it's part of, back to your point, they're—these kids are still very, very curious. They're young. They're five or six years old. They're trying to figure out the world. Everybody remembers that little kid who asked why a thousand times. But that's what you want. And the reality is, for whatever reason, and I think that there is a long list to some extent, as kids get older, especially once they hit middle school and the high school, we've often times sort of forced the why question out of them, right? It's disruptive, or it's whatever.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:28] But the reality is the greatest learning is happening at the point where they're asking the question or when as they're doing work, they're doing projects with you, and something doesn't work, and you have to modify. Those are the two ends of that design cycle spectrum where kids are learning the most. And they're the two ends that, often, in schools, we let go of first. And it's really unfortunate because your kids ask great questions. Every time I went to your classroom, I was blown away by some of the questions they would ask. Or the things that they would tell me because they obviously thought I needed to know.

Kelly Preheim: [00:18:01] I noticed that when I have visitors, the visitors come in the room, and they're like, "Guess what? We know 150 birds." And they will tell their favorite ones, and why it's their favorite one. It's like—this person's like, "I just stopped in to get some marker."

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:18] But you know what? That's good. That's an awesome thing. So, talk to us a little bit about the Chickadee Club in the sense that I remember as, when you first started with the Chickadee Club as that mechanism for kids who were leaving your classroom but wanted to stay engaged with you. So, I know that teachers, oftentimes, struggle with figuring out, how do I keep up the momentum on something if I've got active and engaged learners who want to continue down that path? And I think your solution was a pretty creative one because it's not just a hangout club. You're doing stuff. So, talk to us a little bit about the Chickadee Club.

Kelly Preheim: [00:18:54] Well, one thing about me is I don't like wasting time. If I am going to do this, this is going to be valuable. And so, I did feel that way. And actually, it wasn't even my idea. A friend brought it up and said, "You should do something to keep this going." And I'm like, "Oh, yeah. I could do that."

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

Kelly Preheim: [00:19:11] So, at first, on Fridays, the teachers didn't have any breaks, no specials. So, we would swap. And I'd have on kids. I'd have the second graders

come in, and we do Chickadee Bird Club with just them and my kids. I just do like a 20-minute lesson. And then, she'd have mine at a part of the day, so I could have a break. And she loved basketball. So, she would take them in the gym and teach them some skills. And so, that was a Friday thing for a while. And then, later on, I decided I'd rather do it after school, so I could get anybody in K-12 that wanted to come in. And so, last year, I had 40 students signed up. They weren't all able to come all the time. And as soon as sports started, then I lost quite a few because they were busy with sports in the fifth grade. But we really like it. I try to do outings whenever we can, and I take them to the lake or around town.

Kelly Preheim: [00:20:04] And what's funny is along the way, it's not always about birds. There's a lot. Well, let's see if we can list that all. That's just the way kids think. So, if we've got that bug above their heads, "Hey, look, there's all these bugs in the crowd. Look at these worms." And why are there big cracks in the ground? So, there's all kinds of Science. It's not just about birds, but in the classroom, if it's a cold day, and we can't go out, or raining, then I usually have a lesson prepared, like maybe about the Sandhill Cranes that have been flying over by the thousands. So, I teach them about Sandhill Cranes. I teach them the sound. Tell them, "Watch for the white ones. That's the Whooping Cranes. They can be coming along, too, and they're endangered." So, there's just so many different lessons I can teach them. And they seem like they really enjoy it. And I have some kids who are just there because they sort of like birds, but there's some that are really, really into birds. And they can't wait. And it makes me so happy.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:06] Yeah. Well, yeah, as it should, as it should. And 40 kids, I mean, even if it's not consistent, that's huge. That's quite an accomplishment in a school that's 110 kids. That's—wow, Kelly! That's pretty impressive.

Kelly Preheim: [00:21:26] It is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:26] And and so some of the projects then, in addition to the exploration, this—because I know our listeners are thinking about, "Oh, wow! My favorite thing is fruit trees, or putting up preserves." So, I'm just just randomly thinking. The reality is what you've managed to do by tapping into your passion as a person and as a teacher, and pushing that into your student, you could be able to create some really imaginative projects, some real applied chance for your kids to actually practice whatever the content is that you're trying to teach them. So, what kind of projects are you doing with Chickadee Club that maybe you wouldn't necessarily do, or you're able to blow out a little bit differently than in your classroom? Because I assume the Chickadee Club then is because of the numbers and the community, those are kids in multiple grade levels.

Kelly Preheim: [00:22:19] They are.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:20] And so, are you doing some stuff with that group that you're not doing in your classroom, or that are extensions thereof because you have older students in the group, or is it more of the same, just more of it?

Kelly Preheim: [00:22:34] Well, we're not really doing projects, like community projects because it's hard to—I don't know. I might have to start doing that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:42] Sorry. I wasn't trying to give you ideas, Kelly.

Kelly Preheim: [00:22:45] Well, I don't really do community projects system, but if I could think of some, I would do them. So, [crosstalk] I can do more advanced things, and talk a lot about the geography, weather, and how it affects birds, how people affect birds, and how birds help people. And I can get a little—a lot deeper in those grades than I can with just my younger students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:14] Yeah. And so, I think that circling back around then—and, again, we will be posting some resources for our listeners, but I also think it's important to share that as part of the journey, you have done a very, very good job of being a teacher that's not only being creative in that space, but also sharing back out with the world. So, I mentioned earlier about the Bird Teach Facebook page, but, also, you've been writing. You've produced a few things where you're talking about your journey both in teaching and as a birder. So, share with us a couple of those pieces that you've done just in terms of, not necessarily what they are. We'll get from you the links and whatnot, and post the things that we're allowed to post. But what kind of things are you putting out there in the world or what kind of venues? Because other teachers who are awesome just like you wouldn't necessarily know, "Well, how would I go about doing that piece of it? Because it's an important piece of the work?" So, where, for example, have you posted or submitted things that have been published? Because it's—the things that you have done, they're actually an interesting variety, unlike what I see sometimes in other folks.

Kelly Preheim: [00:24:35] I see what's happening, I see how excited the kids are about birds and nature, and I just—I have families that are now taking their kids out birding. I have the duck hunting dad. He takes his son out to look for ducks, and the kids naming the ducks off left and right. And I mean, there's just so many neat things. Grandparents are really getting involved. And so, I just feel like I have to share on, and I have to get other people, well, to try to do something that's their kids, and take them out. And I remind them that they're not always going to stay on paths. They may pick up a stick, and have a sword fight, or throw rocks, or try to catch a frog, and that's okay, but just getting them out there, and pointing out the birds, and being supportive by buying them field guides, and bird toys, and bird feeders.

Kelly Preheim: [00:25:26] But one of the ways is the South Dakota Conservation Digest. They have kids edition. And I just wrote up something about spring birds on the way, and I just sent it to them, and I said, "I don't know if you'd be interested in this, but I think people might like to know when to expect certain birds," like the geese, and the

pelicans, and—because they all come at different times, the sparrows and the shorebirds. And so, I send it in. And once it got—it got published. And then, I authored another one for them called *When I Grow Up: Being a Birder*. And so, it was all about what it's like to be a birder. And that's one of my favorite articles that's also on the *Conservation Digest*.

Kelly Preheim: [00:26:12] I did—actually suffer from *Birds and Blooms Magazine* contacted me and asked me to write up something about birding on the job in the classroom. So, I wrote up what it's like to incorporate birds into my teaching, and how it makes such a difference. And I had another one called *How I Taught My Kindergarten Kids to Identify Hundreds of Birds*. And that was on the *We Are Teachers* website. They even paid me for that one.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:41] Yeah, I remember that. Yeah.

Kelly Preheim: [00:26:46] [Crosstalk].

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:46] But lots of places that teachers could think to put stuff, and I think that teachers don't necessarily or wouldn't necessarily have known, "Hey, I could be in the *Conservation Digest*," or "I could write." But the reality of it is, not only are you putting that out for other like-minded folks who would be reading *Conservation Digest*, but you're also leading the way for an entity like a *Conservation Digest*, or your local travel magazine, or your state publication to reach into what's happening in the classroom because that's not necessarily always their common resource for getting content and material to put in.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:24] Sometimes, they're doing a better job tapping into education, but the reality is, oftentimes, they're not out looking for that content specifically, and when teachers have the courage to write into them, right? And it takes—you have to be willing to put yourself out there, right, for them, say, "Oh, no, we're not interested," or "We really hate this." Not that that's ever necessarily going to happen, but I think oftentimes folks don't recognize the potential opportunity to put the work that you're doing in the classroom out into a sphere that's not just traditional education. I think maybe that's the message I'm trying to get folks to embrace with the work that you've done, that you have taken what you're doing in the classroom, and putting it out in front of folks in a broad array of fields of disciplines of things that they're reading or experiences. And that's meaningful because it is actively moving the teaching profession.

Kelly Preheim: [00:28:18] Yeah, I agree. I think that I did have to take a chance. Many times, I've had to step out of my comfort zone with this process. This being one of them.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:26] You're doing great.

Kelly Preheim: [00:28:28] Yeah. And I guess, I really needed to. I just had to tell people what's going on because I don't think they believe me. I mean, but it's believable. So,

the South Dakota Public Broadcasting came and filmed us they're doing a piece, a five-minute piece on birding in South Dakota, and they came to film the Chickadee Bird Club in the spring. So, that should be out on Facebook at any time.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:52] Yay!

Kelly Preheim: [00:28:52] And I think he would—well, I know. He was really surprised when he was-

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:55] Yeah, yeah.

Kelly Preheim: [00:28:55] Yeah, so.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:55] Well, I mean, like I said, there's a reason that I talk about this kindergarten classroom, and I've talked about it all over the world in my travels with PAST. And one of the reasons I do is because of the fact that every time I walked into that classroom, I was, in fact, blown away by how much your kids knew about birds, and the whole notion that a hundred plus bird identifications by sound, by looking, and they're coming out, a five-year-old, people just have a hard time believing that that is even possible. But not only is it possible, but it just—it was a very natural progression because the kids, I would argue, they fed off of the passion that they saw in you, back to your original statement. That's powerful. The learning is huge. And I think that it sends the message that if we tap into those passions, and we utilize our classroom as a mechanism for the purposes of engagement, not just the teaching and learning that meets the state standard, that we can get our kids so much farther that much faster.

Kelly Preheim: [00:30:08] I think so too. And you have to believe in your kids and give them some credit. And one thing I want to make clear is I don't teach birds all day.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:18] Right. Right.

Kelly Preheim: [00:30:19] A month or two, it's just—I mean, it is overwhelming in kindergarten. All kids don't recognize their names. Some kids, [crosstalk].

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:27] Yeah, right.

Kelly Preheim: [00:30:27] I mean, it's just a real—it's so, so different. And so, just trying to get situated. But right away at the beginning, they're asking me like questions like, "Why do you like bird songs? When are you going to teach us about birds? You haven't even taught us about birds." All these expectations. And so, that's kind of neat. But really, the kindergarten has changed so much. And now, it's like I teach first grade. And I have to teach them how to read by the end of the year and how to write two sentences. I mean, that's really—there's really a lot on my plate. And so, like the full morning is dedicated to readings. So, I spent almost the whole morning teaching

reading, but when I can incorporate birds, I do. And a lot of mornings, we do talk about birds because bird reports are coming in from all different grade levels.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:22] That's awesome.

Kelly Preheim: [00:31:24] They come in, "Oh, my gosh. I saw that Red-winged Blackbird." They go explain it, and the other kids are all listening like, "Oh, what's that?" So, our opening has to do about birds. I always have a bird of the day.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:37] That's awesome.

Kelly Preheim: [00:31:38] When I do letter, we have three ABC books of birds. And so, we look at the letter. And then, at story time, a lot of my stories, I'm not reading fiction, then I'll be nonfiction bird books. And so, I just fit it in whenever I can. And then, sometimes, we'll have a little break, five minutes in between, where everybody's tired of thinking. And then I'll go, "Hey, let's look at these bird flash cards. Here's some of the birds that you might see in your yard." And so, I'll get them started that way.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:08] You keep bringing them back to it though, and that keeps it front of mind for the kiddos, and that keeps it front of mind in your classroom in the work that you're doing. I think that is a fabulous, fabulous strategy. So, as we sort of get wrapped up here, I always like to end this program recognizing that there are teachers out there that are hearing this and going, "Oh, wow! What Kelly's doing is really awesome. I don't care about birds, but I really love ceramics," or "I really love lizards," or the list could be really long, right? "How could I think about incorporating more of that thing that I love into my own teaching and learning?" So, do you have some advice for teachers? Because they're always asking, "Well, what should I know? Is there like one big stumbling block that I should be prepared for? Or are there some easy wins?" So what would you like to leave these folks with, Kelly?

Kelly Preheim: [00:33:04] I think just working it in, and talking about it, and getting them excited about it at first because, actually, when I start talking about birds at the beginning of the year, there isn't a lot of excitement or enthusiasm for them. There really isn't. But I have a wall of windows in my room. And so, as we start seeing like the snow goose migration flying over our playground, then I'm like, "Oh, guys, let's go outside quick." And we'll go out, and we'll watch them, and it's loud and beautiful. And then, they start understanding. "Oh, my gosh, this is exciting." And I think you just start introducing it to them, and go ahead, and let them see you passionate about. I read a lot and lot of books about birds, and they do like that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:50] Well, I mean, I think that two ways that I sort of see from that is, one, embrace your passion. Live it, right? As I said, just acknowledge it. And then, you put it out there. But the other is to sort of gently step folks in. I think that's a great strategy for folks. You don't have to just leap in all at once full on but just start working the kids into it because if I had a teacher come in and say, "Hey, we are going to spend a lot of time thinking about knitting this year," which is awesome, but I don't

know anything about knitting. And I'm not sure that I care about knitting any more than I might not care about birds, but I could get there because my teacher is so passionate about it. And there's something to be said for the enthusiasm being brought to the table, right? I do think that's really-

Kelly Preheim: [00:34:36] I also have lots of—I come up with lots of different ways to incorporate birds, like I have to teach kids the first sounds in words. So, I'll say, "What's the first sound you hear in Chickadee?" things like that. When we have the last syllables, I use birds for syllables. I use birds for math, when we're doing story problems, when we were learning describing words, adjectives, and then I say, "Okay, what what do you see?" Oh, that's something I forgot to tell you is noticing the details. Kids notice details saw much more than they did before I taught birds. And I'll be reading a book I've read for 30 years, and they're finding out things. The illustrations I have never seen before. They are just so tuned in to look—for looking for difference, for looking, they can—I don't know. It's a really interesting how it's all worked out.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:32] It's fabulous. Thank you very much, Kelly, for giving us some time today, sharing your story, indulging me. I've been after Kelly for a bit of time to do an episode with me. So, thank you very much for stepping out of your comfort zone, for being such a beautiful leader both in your classroom, and in your community, and school, and for the rest of us. I am grateful every day for having met Kelly Preheim. So, thank you for joining us.

Kelly Preheim: [00:36:03] Oh, thank you, Annalies. And thank you for being such a great role model for me and encouraging me to step out of my comfort zone now and then.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:10] You are so welcome. And I am looking forward to the next iteration. We'll find a new project to do together. I promise you. I'm looking forward to it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:24] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guest 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. \