



Girls Who Lead Summit Part 2

Daria Shirazi & Maggie Wesoff

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:00] There were so many tears and so many hugs today. I feel like an Oprah Winfrey Show. I mean, it was like I can't tell you the number of participants, whether they were speakers or their kids or their parents who came up and gave me giant hugs and just said, "This was amazing. I loved it. Do it again."

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:17] 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 irrelAvant. 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: [00:00:52] So, my next guests for Learning Unboxed at the Girls Who Lead Summit are Daria Shirazi—did I get that right, Daria?

Daria Shirazi: [00:01:00] Yeah, you did.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:01] Perfect. And Maggie Wesoff. And the two of them are from Grandview Heights Middle School. And they have joined us today at the Girls Who Lead Summit to see what it's all about. So, I want to start really quickly with you, Maggie. How would you describe yourself in a tweet?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:01:22] Well, I'm really active both in sports and like in the community. We have middle school sports. So, I did volleyball this fall, but I've done soccer, not for the school, but in past years. I plan to do softball in the spring. Over the winter period, I'm not going to play sport, but there are ski club and Science Olympiad, so I plan on doing both of those as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:49] So, your tweet might be something like seriously busy and engaged young woman.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:01:54] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:55] Yeah. That's pretty amazing that you're able to get all of those things in. Yeah. And you love them?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:02:00] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:02] That's awesome. And so, Daria, tell me a little bit about the thing you love most about school.

Daria Shirazi: [00:02:10] I think the thing I love most about school is just everything that goes on and there's always new stuff happening, even though just everything's always changing and you kind of don't know what to expect.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:24] And so, as the both of you are in middle school, so eighth grade, seventh grade?

Daria Shirazi: [00:02:29] Seventh.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:02:29] Seventh.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:30] Seventh grade. So, you're right in the middle of middle school, right?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:02:33] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:34] But that's a really awesome time, actually, I'll be honest with you, because middle school is that space where you learn so much about yourself, right? And lots of times, the things we learn about ourselves, we're really proud of, but sometimes, we internalize them. We spend a lot of time thinking about how the rest of the world-

Maggie Wesoff: [00:02:53] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:53] ... thinks about us. And that's not necessarily a great thing. So, Maggie, one of the things that I love about just that list that you boldly put out there, of all the different things that you're doing, that screams to me, this is a young woman who is curious. And so, what are you most curious to learn, Maggie?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:03:10] I'm really interested in physics and just like how things work. It's weird that things work the way they do. So, physics and chemistry are two things I'm really interested in. But also, in math, just like how the patterns and numbers present themselves, it's really an odd thing that it's interesting.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:36] I don't think it's odd at all. I think that's absolutely awesome. We need so many strong women out there in the STEM field. And so, to be curious and interested in that in seventh grade, that's absolutely awesome. Don't let go of that. That's spectacular. Daria, when you think about the things that you are hopeful in school, right? So, what is it that you see that schools should be providing for you?

Daria Shirazi: [00:04:07] I think it should just be like the academic part of school should be a way to get away from kind of everything that's happening as great as that is. Like all of the social drama as exciting as it may be, like I think when you learn things, it's just kind of a break from that because it's like this is the stuff that actually matters and like this is what's going to find my future.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:40] So, schools should be a drama-free zone. Is that what you're saying?

Daria Shirazi: [00:04:43] I mean, I think there's no way to fully prevent that. It's just I think when there are classes and like when you are learning something, I think it's just like it should be a way to dive in and just not think about anything else and just think about learning and moving forward.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:05] So, Maggie, do you think that you're able to do that in school right now? I mean, do you think that the structure of school as it exists right now in your school and recognizing that everybody around the world, we have listeners from all over the place, that school is different for everybody. So, it's really important for folks to understand what school is like for you. So, to Daria's point, are you able to just really dig down or there are some things that you're just like, "I'm not so interested in this, but there are some things that I'm able to sort of put my head down and sort of love"?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:05:41] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:41] Do you need to find more ways to love what you're learning in school?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:05:45] Well, in school, there's always the subconscious that's like, "Oh, well, what do they think of my outfit today", or whatever it might be. But also, when you're in an environment that's a learning environment, you're kind of just like, "Well, who cares what my outfit looks like. I want to learn about whatever you're learning about." And so, it's kind of a break from all of that, like stressing, social, just being around people. It can be hard sometimes. And so, school, it's funny because that's probably where the most of the drama happens. But also, it's where you kind of get a break from it as well. So, it's kind of everything rolled into one.

Daria Shirazi: [00:06:29] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:31] That's a really interesting perspective. And I really, really appreciate hearing you say that. Because I don't necessarily think that a lot of folks that are on the outside looking in understand that perspective. So, thank you for sharing that. I want to talk a little bit about, so you're here today at the PAST Innovation Lab for Girls Who Lead Summit. So, we're really digging down in talking about leadership and all the different ways that you can learn skills around leadership or what leadership is or who or how folks' journeys got them into leadership roles. So, I want to ask each of you a little bit about what do you think about your future as it relates to leadership? And are you gaining leaderships skills in school or are you gaining leadership schools out and about in the world, the things that you're engaged in or some combination thereof. And either one of you wants to can go first.

Daria Shirazi: [00:07:26] I mean, I really think it's a combination of both. Because in school, like the leadership that you're gaining isn't academics and like learning, it's more just like standard social situations which you encounter later on. And you're like obviously figuring out how to gauge what you're supposed to say and like what's really going on. But then, outside of school, if you're involved in like, I don't know, extracurriculars or stuff like that, basically, I think that's where you learn leadership, how to get things done, how to think about things in a different way, how to know what people are thinking and like their ideas.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:13] Well, thank you, Daria. I think that was very helpful. What do you think, Maggie?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:08:18] I think that at school, we're learning a lot of academic things, but some of that we're going to need. But also, a lot in real life that there are people in real life that you need to deal with. So, it's almost like we need a class that's just how to deal with social situations, where you feel uncomfortable or you're nervous or you don't know what to say and things like that. It's really stressful because you're not taught this in school.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:08:47] So, when you go into the real world, you're just like, "Well, what do I do? We never learned this. We didn't have a test over this." And that's kind of where a lot of being nervous comes from, what's just like, "I don't know what to do in this situation." So, a lot of the academic stuff is helpful, but I think

we do need a class that's just, like maybe instead of having to read aloud to something, we just like talk about what's going on and how to react to some of the social situations that we're seeing in everyday life.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:18] So, sort of a current affairs from the social side of your world, right? So, you know, maybe a class around culture today or something.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:09:28] Yeah.

Daria Shirazi: [00:09:28] Yeah, that would be great, instead of history, to have like what's happening in the world.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:32] Okay. Now, time out. You know, history is very, very important, right?

Daria Shirazi: [00:09:36] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:36] Right. It helps us understand where we are in this moment. I love that, though. And, you know, I do think that we are starting to see a global push around sort of that social and emotional sort of learning that does in fact need to take place. But I think it's really, really important for folks making those decisions around the programming sort of stuff that's happening in your school that they hear directly from you that that's something that you want and feel like that you need.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:01] I also want to ask you a little bit about your futures. And one of the things that we don't do very deliberately is we never ask folks, "Hey, what do you want to be when you grow up?" And the reason I don't like to ask that question is because I feel like it puts you in a box. So, instead, what I want to know to you—and Maggie, I'm going to toss this one at you first, because I think I have a little hint at it from some of the things that you've already told us, so what is it that you love? What are you passionate about? What do you love to learn?

Maggie Wesoff: [00:10:31] Science. Science and math. My mind works in strange ways. So, patterns and things like that, where it's memory but also, kind of just like the curiosity of like why it is that way, like why it is the way that it is. So, math and science is really important, but like a career I could see myself going into is just space. So, Elon Musk, I'm a big fan of his, because-

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:03] We will let Elon know.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:11:03] Yes. SpaceX Tesla. He's just like such a great person. And it's a lot of that kind of stuff and like my friend's babysitters, like boyfriend or something, was an astrophysicist at SpaceX or something, and I was like, "Oh, look, I've made a connection. I know someone who works at SpaceX now." And it's just kind of those things that's like, "Oh, look, that's interesting."

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:32] Yeah.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:11:33] And I'm really interested in things like why does it work that way and figuring out how we can use that to benefit society.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:41] Well, that's pretty awesome. We actually have a number of kiddos who are here, who go to school here that you can actually come here and attend class. And her name is Elizabeth. She's actually out here today. We'll find somebody to introduce you to her, Maggie, because she is all about space and she's done some pretty amazing things. We also happen to know a couple of astronauts here, so maybe

we can try and make a connection for you, because part of what Girls Who Lead is all about is helping young women find network connections a lot earlier so that we can tap into those passions and help you grow them. So, it's not just something you dreamed about but something you actually can get there. So, Daria, what about you? What are you passionate about?

Daria Shirazi: [00:12:31] Oh, so I really enjoy everything musical. I like listening to music. I like writing music. I love music theory. And I find it really interesting. I like things like that where there's a structure that you can follow and it makes sense. There's nothing stopping you from going out of it. If regular, you know, just chord progressions and stuff, what sounds right, whatever, like you could have one weird one in there and like most people would like, since they don't have that knowledge, like they won't even notice. And like the thing I like about art and stuff is that it can be interpreted in any way. And like no one says people can create it to make it one way, create it to make it—hold on. Okay. People can create it to represent something, but other people will see that as representing something else. And like there's no wrong answer. And that's what I really like about it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:32] That's pretty awesome. Do you like math?

Daria Shirazi: [00:13:35] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:36] So, you know that music and math are one and the same, right?

Daria Shirazi: [00:13:39] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:40] So, it's pretty unusual to find folks that you're going to love one more than the other, right? Obviously. But because you do, you clearly love music. So, there are some amazing opportunities in this community and ways for you to plug in with that as a passion. We have this incredible arts culture in Columbus, but we also have a thing called Groove You. Have you ever heard of Groove You? All right. So, again, one of the things that I love about the Girls Who Lead program is the ability for us to help you make connections and Groove You is a music and sound production program. They run a summer program, but you can also early college and post-secondary with them. And they are incredible. It's right here in town.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:27] So, we need to make sure that you know about Groove You. Yeah, absolutely. So, as we sort of wrap up our time here together a little bit, I do want to sort of put you guys on the spot and say hey, if your community is in the process of completely redesigning school, what are the like two or three things that you would want that school to have? So, Maggie, I'm going to start with you. So, Maggie, I mean, wild pie in the sky, nothing's off limits, the building is not built, the piece of ground hasn't been picked up, we have no idea of what should that place look like for it to be awesome for you, Maggie.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:15:13] Yeah. Well, conveniently enough, our community, is we do, you know, middle school, so it's sort of that way, but I think it would have been nice if we had like a get-together and determine like what is crucial, what must we have in the school. And I'm also kind of an outdoorsy person. I would really appreciate it if on the roof of our school, maybe we had a few classrooms out there, so we could have a green roof and we could be learning. We have fences around it, so it would be safe and everything. But like just to be outside while you're learning. Some people find it distracting, the noise of the birds, the cities, and everything, but I think it's quite peaceful and calming. And it kind of just humbles you to be like, "Oh, look, it's not about me, like there's a whole world out here, I'm one of millions." Like-

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:05] That's awesome. That's awesome, Maggie. Yeah.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:16:07] But definitely having an outdoor space and also having kind of like a team collab where you can just not really mess around, but be creative with what we're learning, like use what we're learning to do something productive.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:21] Right. That would be awesome. What about you, Daria? What would your dream school have?

Daria Shirazi: [00:16:26] I think if there is a period every day where it was kind of just unstructured, calming, like think time. So, like even just writing stuff down, what's going on in your head, stuff you even think about or stuff that needs to be solved or even just like interesting things to ponder about world, we can use those ideas that people have like came up with to build off on something that we'll learn about basically. Something, if it's a common enough interest among people, then like I think what we're learning should be determined by what people want to know.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:10] Absolutely. And what they need to grow, right?

Daria Shirazi: [00:17:13] Mm-hmm.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:13] Yeah. What they need to grow. Thank you, ladies, very, very much.

Daria Shirazi: [00:17:17] Thank you.

Maggie Wesoff: [00:17:18] Thank you.

Ava Watts

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:19] So, my next guest at our special, Girls Who Lead Summit, edition of Learning Unboxed is a young woman from Cleveland. So, welcome. Tell us who you are.

Ava Watts: [00:17:31] My name is Ava Watts.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:33] And where do you go to school?

Ava Watts: [00:17:35] I go to school in Lakewood, at Harding Middle School.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:37] Harding Middle School. And Lakewood is up in the Cleveland region, yeah?

Ava Watts: [00:17:43] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:44] Okay. Just because we have listeners who come and listen from all over the world, so to help them out a little bit. So, Ava, tell us about middle school. You know, middle school is a funny time, right?

Ava Watts: [00:17:59] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:59] You're learning an awful lot.

Ava Watts: [00:18:01] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:01] It's very transitional. So, tell us a little bit about Ava's experience in middle school? What do you love? Let's start with what you love about middle school.

Ava Watts: [00:18:11] Well, I love meeting new people because there are so many people, like you don't know everyone. So, you don't really know everyone and sometimes, you'll be in a class with someone new and you'll sit next to them and then, you'll get to know them and you'll really like them and you become friends and you make new friends. That's-

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:29] Because in middle school, I assume that you've got kids that you never knew before because they're coming from multiple elementary schools, right?

Ava Watts: [00:18:35] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:36] Yeah, that's a pretty typical experience. It can be scary for some people, but it's awesome that you're embracing that. So, what is it that you like the least about middle school? And I hate getting into likes and dislikes, but I think it's important to sort of set the stage for why we're doing the Girls Who Lead Summit. So, what is it that you dislike about middle school?

Ava Watts: [00:18:56] So, there are some classes that I don't like very much. And I think it's just because I have harder times learning in those classes. But then, there are other classes that you really like. And that's what I like about middle school, you get to switch off classes, so you're not in one class all day.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:17] Right. Right.

Ava Watts: [00:19:18] It's usually not the teacher. I like all my teachers, but there are some subjects that I just don't like very much.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:24] You don't care for. What would those be, I'm curious?

Ava Watts: [00:19:27] Well, in sixth grade, it was math. But this year, I like math, I'm learning better. But I don't like science very much. I'm not really a scientific person. I like my teacher. Mr. AJ, he's a very good teacher. But just science itself, I don't like very much.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:50] You haven't gotten sparked by it yet?

Ava Watts: [00:19:51] No.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:53] Yeah. So, I want to ask you a little bit about why you didn't like math so much in the sixth grade, but you do in the seventh. I'm really curious about why that that is, because I think that's really important. Math is in everything we do. So, in the arts and sciences, it's everywhere. Our world is just one giant mathematical equation. So, why the difference do you think, Ava?

Ava Watts: [00:20:17] I think it's probably because I was maybe more distracted last year by other subjects, because I mean, it was my first year of middle school. And it was new. Everything was new. And I was having a really hard time adjusting to it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:33] Okay.

Ava Watts: [00:20:34] So-

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:35] Yeah. And that's pretty typical. Do you think a lot of your friends have a hard time, you think?

Ava Watts: [00:20:38] Yeah. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:39] So, now, you're kind of the pro because you did it one year and you're sort of in that happy middle spot.

Ava Watts: [00:20:45] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:45] It's more comfortable?

Ava Watts: [00:20:46] Mm-hmm.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:46] Yeah.

Ava Watts: [00:20:45] Because I can manage my subjects better and learn better without stressing out over, "Oh my gosh. It's just all new."

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:53] Yeah.

Ava Watts: [00:20:55] "I have language arts next, what am I going to do there?" So, I'm learning a lot better this year, I think.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:00] Yeah, that's good. And I think that's pretty typical, too. So, Maggie, what is it that you love? What are you passionate about? Not so much hey, what do you want to be, but what is it that you love, Ava?

Ava Watts: [00:21:15] I love athletics and sports, especially soccer. I also love animals. And it took me a really long time and my parents a really long time, but I eventually convinced them to get a dog. So, now, we have a dog.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:30] Congratulations. What kind of dog do you have?

Ava Watts: [00:21:32] I have a golden doodle. Her name is Gretta.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:35] How awesome is that. Yeah. So, Ava, are you finding right now in school that you get to explore those things that you're so passionate about?

Ava Watts: [00:21:45] Yes. When we do research projects, we're doing one in language arts right now. I'm studying emotional support dogs. And there's an emotional support dog at my school, so I'm going to interview his owner and then, get to work with him a little bit and I'm training my neighbor's puppy to be an emotional support dog.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:10] You are?

Ava Watts: [00:22:11] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:12] That's awesome. As part of a school project or just because you think that's an awesome thing to do and you're so excited about it?

Ava Watts: [00:22:17] It's a school project, but I'm also really excited to do it. I mean, he won't be able to come into my school because he's not going to have enough proper training just from me, but I still think that it's really cool and I can train him to kind of be there.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:33] That's amazing. So, how is it that you learned the skills that you need to be able to train a puppy to be a support? Where did you learn the skill to train?

Ava Watts: [00:22:45] Well, for training, I know because I had to train my dog. I think she's pretty well-trained. She doesn't come when called, which is kind of a problem, but other than that-

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:59] I would get that's a problem. Yeah.

Ava Watts: [00:22:59] ... she's pretty good. She doesn't eat things that we leave on the floor.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:04] That's good.

Ava Watts: [00:23:04] That's true. She's mad at us.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:05] Yeah. Yeah.

Ava Watts: [00:23:07] And then, for training to be an emotional support dog, I had to do some research. And I have some books that I'm reading, 101 Tricks. I don't think he's gonna learn all of those. But to be an emotional support dog, he has to be calm. But he's still a puppy, so we're working on that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:26] Right.

Ava Watts: [00:23:26] And he has to be able to carry, sometimes, the weight of a human, literally. And he has to be able to calm down a human while being calm himself. So, it's a lot of training. It's going to take a while, but I think we'll get there.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:41] And you're excited about it?

Ava Watts: [00:23:43] I am.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:43] Yeah, I can tell that you're excited about it. So, that's pretty awesome that you've been able to tap into something that you're really passionate about. That's amazing. So, when you think about the opportunities that you have as it relates to school and recognizing fully that you've got a lot of journey left in front of you, but if you were able to sit down with the leaders in your school district and really sort of talk with them about what you think you would love to see or have in a school environment, what would some of those things be? What do you not have that you would like to add?

Ava Watts: [00:24:21] I think that recess could be outdoors more. I mean, sometimes, we have to go in the gym and sit and do nothing, because some people are running around and not behaving at all. And I also think recess, in general, could be longer. We have 20 minutes of recess and 20 minutes of lunch. And kids just have a lot of energy and I think that we could get out more of the energy if we have longer recess.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:52] But what if you did more of your learning and more outdoor active spaces, would that sort of help compensate?

Ava Watts: [00:24:59] Learning outside?

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:03] Mm-hmm.

Ava Watts: [00:25:04] I think that would help. I mean, if we did more interactiveness outside, because I think we have to do though some of the learning inside because of whiteboards and you can't really take your whiteboard outside. But if we did interactives with classes outside, I think that would help.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:24] That would help. Yeah.

Ava Watts: [00:25:26] Like maybe writing outside, when we're writing essays in language arts or social studies, I think if we went outside that maybe we'd be in a more calm and open environment.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:38] Yeah, I think it's an intriguing thing, right? So, part of it is sort of striking a balance between all the stuff that we have to teach you and all the things that we recognize that you would benefit from learning, right? Because we're not teaching you how to train emotional support animals in school, but you often sort of have to wonder, "Well, then why not?" Look at all of the amazing things that you are doing as you are engaged in that training, all the things that you're learning, you are growing to be an amazing young woman and a leader because of that. So, when you are here at a summit about leadership, what are some of the questions that you have for these women who are here to mentor? What kind of thing do you want to know from them?

Ava Watts: [00:26:33] Well, I kind of want to know how they became leaders and the people that they are now. And I want to learn what inspired them to become these great women.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:48] Yeah. Inspiring stories help you internalize that?

Ava Watts: [00:26:51] Yes. I sat at one table where a girl, she's 17 now, but when she was 12, she had a problem with gift cards. And like she would lose them or not want them, so she invented an app that you can store your gift cards and trade them in if you don't want them for different gift cards. I think that's really inspiring how, at such a young age, she was able to get this idea in her head and actually pursue and make it into something that helps her now.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:30] That's amazing. And she made the app available for others?

Ava Watts: [00:27:33] Yes, it is on the iPhone.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:35] On all the different app stores?

Ava Watts: [00:27:37] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:38] That is truly inspiring. Can you imagine yourself doing similar things?

Ava Watts: [00:27:42] Yes. I mean, I haven't really been thinking about problems that I have now, but just from hearing her story, I'm thinking about problems that I may have with my dog or anything else in just daily life, like getting to school or whatever.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:58] Yeah, absolutely. So, very inspiring to hear other people's stories or their journey. Yeah. So, Ava, thank you very much for joining me today.

Ava Watts: [00:28:06] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:07] I appreciate it. So, enjoy the rest of the summit.

Ava Watts: [00:28:10] Thank you.

Abby May

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:12] So, next up, we have Abby May, who is a student at Grove City High School here in Ohio, who has come to the Girls Who Lead Summit. And so, I'm very excited to have you join me, Abby. Thank you.

Abby May: [00:28:26] Hi.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:26] Are you nervous?

Abby May: [00:28:28] No, not really.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:29] Good. That's awesome. So, Abby, tell us why you came to the Girls Who Lead Summit?

Abby May: [00:28:35] I'm a senior in high school and I'm trying to figure out what I want to do in my career. And there's not really a lot of like hands-on experience, stuff that you can do. So, like I'm in an engineering design class. And so, my teacher told me about it. And I was like, "Oh, that's really cool. That's a cool opportunity."

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:51] Yeah.

Abby May: [00:28:51] So, I took the opportunity and I've met some cool people.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:56] And so, you said in the notes that you sent over to us that you love learning and you love computers.

Abby May: [00:29:04] Yeah. So, my mom gets on me because I have a hard time doing my homework because coming home, because I'm learning Hebrew right now, like I like learning languages. I like learning this stuff about computers. Anything that has to do with learning and stuff, like my mom is like, "Do your homework." And I'm like, "But I don't want to do my homework."

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:26] And so, that's a really good piece of conversation. So, I want to dig in a little bit with you, Abby, because lots of kids don't want to do their homework. And I think that we often have a

misunderstanding about why that is. So, Abby, why don't you like doing your homework? What is it about that that doesn't appeal to you? And it's not just, "I don't want to", right?

Abby May: [00:29:48] Yeah. I think it's a waste of time because you learn—I don't know, like regular classes are like 30, 45, 50 minutes, you know that aspect. So, you have 50 minutes of class time and then, like for example, my teacher this weekend gave us a whole packet of word problems. And I'm like, "You've already taught us this and you're making us complete this whole packet of word problems on the weekend of Homecoming."

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

Abby May: [00:30:18] You know, like it's just crazy. And I think it's a waste of time and I don't really do it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:24] And I hear that a lot. And I'll be perfectly honest. So, we, here at PAST and at the Innovation Lab, we struggle with this a lot. And I will say, unofficially, we don't advocate for homework.

Abby May: [00:30:39] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:39] In fact, we suggest, highly, that if you're going to have kids do stuff at home, that it should really be sort of the introduction to a topic. So-

Abby May: [00:30:47] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:47] ... you know, watching videos, listen to podcasts at least and then, actually do the actual practice and instruction, the hands-on part of it in the classroom so that maybe you're sitting a kid home to listen to something, but not necessarily this owner is sort of saying in terms of the way they think about it. So-

Abby May: [00:31:05] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:06] So, Abby, you know, as a senior and trying to sort of figure out, you know, what you're passionate about, what's the thing that you dig, right? So, in terms of as you think about your future, what does Abby need to make the decisions about what her next steps are going to be?

Abby May: [00:31:26] I think one of the problems is there's so many fields that I could go into. And I'm trying, like this is a good opportunity, like the Learning Unboxed. You know, I've listened to some of the podcasts.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:41] Oh, that's awesome. Good.

Abby May: [00:31:43] But I think it's a good opportunity to get hands-on experience and to have like girls come together. Because even though girls are beginning to lead in different aspects of engineering and science and math and technology, it still kind of look that men are smarter when there are studies that show like women were more creative. So, we're better for the fields that men have taken over. And I was just talking to someone, you know, like, "Oh, like women are starting to take over." And I kind of like that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:23] Yeah.

Abby May: [00:32:23] So-

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:24] So, outside of the general sort of cultural components, let's talk a little bit about that whole idea, because it is true that we see a lot of fields now and we're working really, really hard collectively. And I'm using the royal we here, right? Globally, it has nothing to do with us particularly. But generally, there's this push to change that dynamic, right?

Abby May: [00:32:48] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:48] And to put a greater diversity of voice and experience into all aspects of the world of work. But certainly, into the STEM fields where we tend to, to your point, see more men than women.

Abby May: [00:33:03] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:03] And so, as you have those conversations with folks and you come to something like a Girls Who Lead Summit, to your point, there's so many career choices out there, but how do you know which one is right for you.

Abby May: [00:33:16] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:16] And so, it sounds to me like one of the things that you're looking for is a chance to experience a small little piece of lots of things so that you can find the exact sort of fit for you.

Abby May: [00:33:26] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:27] And so, how do you go about doing that outside of events like this? So, for example, in your school, do you have the opportunity to explore very broadly across things?

Abby May: [00:33:36] I would say yes. But at the same time, you know, I'm busy with school work, homework, and trying to do everything all at once.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:48] Right.

Abby May: [00:33:48] And that's like the number one problem, I think.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:52] Yeah. So, if you could imagine, so let's sort of step back and say that you're not a senior in high school getting ready to go on to whatever your post-secondary experience can be, but you're your younger self, right? So-

Abby May: [00:34:09] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:09] Say middle school, what is it that you would need? If you could imagine school a blank slate, right? A plot of ground hasn't even been selected, if Abby got to design her school, what are some of the key things that you would ensure that it had?

Abby May: [00:34:29] I would say you would have people who are in the fields of all aspects. And then, I actually had an idea, to teach kids, you know, you have someone who is an engineer, someone who's in music, like someone who's in everything. And then, they bring on stuff that, you know, the kids could have hands-on experience with. And instead of just being like, "Oh, here's a piece of paper, you know, you need to study this, you need to learn it." No, you get hands-on experience because like learning like that never interests me, but when someone's showed me like a motherboard and computers, I'm like, "Oh, that's so cool."

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:10] Yeah, yeah.

Abby May: [00:35:11] And I think just studying isn't going to do anything.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:14] Right. So, you're really looking for a very, very hands-on experience that's led by people in those careers.

Abby May: [00:35:23] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:23] So, very industry-focused so that you can dig in on something.

Abby May: [00:35:27] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:28] Yeah. There's a lot of folks who do better learning like that, you know. And one size definitely does not fit all as it sort of relates to it, but I appreciate that because that's definitely, for me, the same sort of experience.

Abby May: [00:35:41] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:42] Yeah. So, when you think about, though, the opportunity for you to grow as a leader, so as a senior in high school, you're getting ready to go off into the world, are you going off to college or to trade school or taking your break or have you decided yet or it's all up in the air for you still?

Abby May: [00:36:02] I'm looking at college or just getting into the field, what I want to do. It's kind of confusing, you know.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:10] It is.

Abby May: [00:36:10] There's so many things.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:10] And it depends on what you're doing, right?

Abby May: [00:36:13] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:13] And so, you know, if you're interested in computer science and IT and all of those sorts of things, those paths have become very divergent. It used to be that you had to either just go off and go to college and see, but you have options now that we never had before. Is that daunting as a student trying to figure it all out?

Abby May: [00:36:31] It is a bit. But-

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:33] How do you sort it?

Abby May: [00:36:34] I guess like nowadays, when I was in elementary school, I grew up in a small town. So, there weren't a lot of opportunities for me to take classes. But now, I'm hearing like they're starting fifth graders, like there's programming. I think like if I would have started young learning different fields, you know, but now, I'm trying to like research it on my own and look up all the different fields. There's not very much out there-

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:08] Yeah.

Abby May: [00:37:08] ... on YouTube.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:09] Yeah.

Abby May: [00:37:10] Because I mean, you could be like, "Oh, what is this field", but you don't know like there is a field and then, there's different fields inside of that field.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:20] Yeah. Exactly, exactly. Yeah. And so, for you, is it really sort of IT and computer science or is it some other aspect of engineering? What appeals to you the most?

Abby May: [00:37:32] I think I've looked into the most, engineering, but robotics, anything in computers. I don't know if I'll stick to robotics, but I do know it's something that I was like, "Oh, that's kind of cool", you know. Robotics are part of the future.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:50] That you're really interested in.

Abby May: [00:37:53] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:53] Yeah. And are you not getting exposure to those things in your current school?

Abby May: [00:37:59] No.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:00] Why do you think?

Abby May: [00:38:03] I do know like they have robotics teams in different schools, but at Grove City, I don't know why they don't, maybe they don't have the people who have introduced it. But I think 100 years ago, school was the same way it was today. So-

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:24] You don't think it's changed much?

Abby May: [00:38:26] It hasn't changed.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:27] Not for you.

Abby May: [00:38:27] Yeah. No.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:28] Yeah. If you had the opportunity to, say, start a robotics team at your school, do you feel equipped to do that?

Abby May: [00:38:39] No.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:39] No.

Abby May: [00:38:40] Because I don't know how, like I don't know where it starts.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:43] Right. Right. You haven't been exposed to that.

Abby May: [00:38:45] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:45] So, even the business and entrepreneurship side of starting a new endeavor—

Abby May: [00:38:50] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:50] ... you've not had exposure to that.

Abby May: [00:38:52] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:53] So, your message then, Abby, to your school, and not to put you sort of on the spot, but what is your message to the adults in your community?

Abby May: [00:39:04] I would say a lot of times, you look at teachers in my school and they're trying their best to help the students. But like for example, ACT scores, that I got a 19. I know I'm smarter than that, but I don't do well on tests. I don't think taking tests like that really determines how smart you are. Like, I think in Finland, I've looked in Finland and they say to teachers, "This is what kids have to learn. You know, you teach it. I don't care how you teach it, you know. And as long as they're learning, you know, that's fine." But I think if schools started teaching the kids and said to teachers, you know, like, "You can teach them how you want to teach them." But teachers, I've talked to teachers before, I'm one of those people who aren't close to people my age and I'm close to older people, I've always been kind of like an old soul.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:06] Yeah, yeah.

Abby May: [00:40:07] But I've talked to them and they're like, "Oh, like I want to teach them this way, but I have to do this. It gets in the standardized test. I have to do all this different stuff that I don't want to do."

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:20] Well, yeah. And it's a tough space to be in. So, is an event like this and the potential of crafting a network for yourself helpful to you?

Abby May: [00:40:33] Yeah, very.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:34] So, this is something that if it were to happen, say, if there was a networking group or sort of a huddle group like one Saturday a month with the girls who participated in this, is that something that you would invest time in?

Abby May: [00:40:48] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:49] You would?

Abby May: [00:40:49] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:49] I think that's really helpful feedback for adults to know that you're craving mentorship.

Abby May: [00:40:57] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:57] Yeah. Is that a good way to put it, you think?

Abby May: [00:40:59] Yeah, that is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:00] Yeah. So, I think that that's really awesome. And I do think, Abby, there are options out there for you.

Abby May: [00:41:09] Definitely.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:09] And I am so grateful for you to take time and to share that with us. Before I sort of let you off the hook, so to speak, you know, we talked about what you need from the adults in the community. What do you need from the kids in your community?

Abby May: [00:41:30] I think one of the problems is I've always saw outside the box. I have always been analytical, like I'm like, "So, this is the problem. What is deeper than that?" I've always seen kids judge me for that. I think there's too much judgmental thoughts going around, like just because somebody is different, just because someone thinks a different way doesn't mean they're wrong. Like I'm a Christian, you know, like I believe in God, but if someone says they're gay and they don't believe in God, I say, "Okay, I respect your views", you know, like I'm not going to put you down for it. And so, that's what I think we need. Kids need to come together and be like, "Okay. Like I don't really agree with you, but I still respect you and I still love you." So, I think that's what kind of we need to go towards.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:27] And so, it's an interesting path to get us through.

Abby May: [00:42:30] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:31] Yeah.

Abby May: [00:42:31] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:32] Well, I suspect, Abby, that one day, we will all look up from our various and sundry digital devices that we seem to have our heads buried in-

Abby May: [00:42:41] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:41] ... and we will see Abby May standing in front of us having solved some of those amazing world problems. So, I want to officially say thank you to you for being here not just with us, but as part of this endeavor-

Abby May: [00:42:56] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:56] ... as part of this movement and for being brave enough to add your voice to it. So, thank you for that.

Abby May: [00:43:00] Thank you. You're welcome.

Annalies Corbin: [00:43:02] Big takeaways. I think the amount of energy that was exchanged not just by the girls, but also with like the people they were speaking to. So, every time I walk past a conversation, all the body language was all in. Everybody was excited. It didn't matter what the topic was. They were in. There were so many tears and so many hugs today, I feel like an Oprah Winfrey Show. I mean, it was like I can't tell you the

number of participants, whether they were speakers or their kids or their parents who came up and gave me giant hugs and just said, "This was amazing. I loved it. Do it again."

Annalies Corbin: [00:43:31] You know, the really in-depth conversations that happened that you didn't expect to spark. Like people would start out with a very serviceable question and then, they just went down the rabbit hole of what does that mean. So much excitement about that back and forth. And I think just the exchange of network, I saw a lot of professionals who are handing their business cards to kids. And the kids were then turning around and going, "And here's my email address, I will be in touch", right? They form these really amazing networks that I think will supersede this day.

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:02] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, 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 at Annalies Corbin. And join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to re-imagine education.