



Brittany Turner and Daniel Sokolovic

Brittany Turner: [00:00:00] The hardest part, it's going to be mental. So, the hardest part is just going to be taking that first step. And if you're really passionate about that stuff, that passion drives you forward after you take that first step.

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 irrelevant, it's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we re-imagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:52] So, welcome to the next episode of Learning Unboxed. This is your host, Annalies Corbin, and I am as excited as always today to bring two guests who are going to talk to us about the starting of a program called Love A Sea Turtle. And if nothing else, you have to love the name of this organization and be really, really excited about the potential of what it's all about. So, we're going to dig in today and have that conversation and find out what Love A Sea Turtle is doing, how it got started, and how other folks can get involved. So, joining me today is Daniel Sokolovic, who is tied to the founder of Love A Sea Turtle and heavily involved, he and his wife, and I suspect family, but we're gonna get into that as well around creating a program in a nonprofit that's all about youth leadership and development with an environmental focus. And so, we're very excited, Daniel, to have you join us today.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:01:50] We are pleased to be here. Thank you so much for the invitation.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:53] Perfect. Perfect. And joining Daniel is Brittany Turner, whom Brittany started out five years ago volunteering with Love A Sea Turtle and has stayed involved in a number of different capacities, which we'll talk about today. And Brittany is still a student, I believe, yes, at East Carolina University, an undergraduate student?

Brittany Turner: [00:02:15] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:15] Yes. So, welcome, Brittany. We're excited to have you as well.

Brittany Turner: [00:02:19] I'm so excited to be here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:21] So, Daniel, I want to start with you. So, tell us what Love A Sea Turtle is. It's a nonprofit organization. What does it do and why did you guys get involved and start this thing?

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:02:34] Our daughter took a school field trip and we think school field trips are so integral to student learning. They took our daughter when she was in fourth grade down to the Caribbean Sea, Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center at Topsail Island. She went down there and she came home in the car with her mom, she said, "Mom, I have to do something to help sea turtles last." Love A Sea Turtle, LAST. And it was born. And then, a friend of ours did say, well, a good friend of mine at Duke University, Dr. Karen Eckert, who is an expert in sea turtles and she was part of the program there, the Nicholas School, the environment, she was head of it then.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:03:11] I said, "Well, let's go meet with her and find out what you can do." She told us that when we met with her, she said, "Casey, I want you to act locally, but think globally and do what an eight-year old can do." Driving home, Casey said, "Well, the only thing I can do is make cookies and have cookie bags and cookie sales, to sell that." So, she started from there. So, she started making sea turtle-shaped sugar cookies.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:03:36] I would drive her around to toll gates at ECU, grocery stores, Walmart, stand out front and she would sell them. And \$1 cookies a year later led to her donating several thousand dollars to Sea Turtle Hospital. And then, she said, "Well, I need to have something more to attract adults." So then, we developed the coffee blend with Joe Van Gogh Coffee called Sea Turtle Blend Coffee, which will lead to national distribution and fresh markets.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:04:06] And it is one of the biggest sellers online as a cause coffee, knows that money gets donated to the Sea Turtle Hospital. And then, she started doing beach cleanups. And it went from there. And then, she said, "Well, I have to do more. I have to be able to share what I love with students who don't get to do what I get to do." Because we taught her at home, "Too much is given, much is expected." But she said, "Well, I want to do something more."

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:04:31] But then, she said, "Well, I want to have a website and want it built, Love A Sea Turtle." And after two years as well, "I'm sorry, I'm not going to invest my money to run your program. If you're going to do it, you're going to have to self-fund it, run it like a nonprofit, run it like a business. And you have to repay me for the cookies, website, name, everything." So, she did. And she began running it like a business when she was ten.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:55] Wow. Wow.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:04:56] And then—yeah. So then, she said, "Well, I want to do a summer camp program for Boys and Girls Clubs and active rest youth." She developed that program. She went out to seek people who could help her. We got tied in with a person who's actually from Ohio originally, Dr. Melani Duffrin with FoodMASTER, who gave us the nutritional strength because we really like nutrition, the outdoors. And it's just gone from there and it has evolved.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:05:20] And then, she's run it all these years and she said, "Well, I need to ensure that students run it and students get to dictate what we do and how we do it." So, we've never had employees, it's always been student-led and adult-advised. So, they dictate the programs and it has evolved. And Casey who graduated four years ago has turned the helm over to the youth that are leading it now. And they get to decide what we do and where we go. And it has evolved from sea turtle cookies to Sea Turtle Coffee to a summer camp program, to year-round hands-on learning, to community service programs, to garden programs.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:06:04] It's all about youth leadership. We're giving them a platform for their voice. And that's what we do and that's what we endorse and we thought. And people say, "Well, what does your Holidays

of Hope party", where we do a can drive, "have to do with this?" So, it's still about youth saying, "This is the way I want to go. This is my passion. This is what I want to do." We give them that platform, but we try to tie everything back into environmentalist, everything we do.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:30] Well, this is absolutely an amazing story of how a nonprofit organization not just starts on a kid getting inspired by a hands-on field trip, something out of the traditional sort of a classroom setting that says, "Hey, this is going to be a passion for me." And fortunately, a child who had a family environment that fostered said passion and turned into something that has a life of its own. That's, to me, part of the story that's so remarkable. Brittany, so let's sort of talk about your entry point in all of this thing. So, at this point then, as you sort of joined and get involved in this organization, it kind of sounds like from Daniel that it's kind of doing its thing and that Casey has sort of pushed it on its way and out the door. And so, tell us a little bit about how you found Love A Sea Turtle.

Brittany Turner: [00:07:27] Yes. So, I started my freshman year of high school. I started by running a 5K that Love A Sea Turtle was hosting. And from there, I found out about all the amazing programs they were hosting, what they were doing in the Greenville community for the environment. And so, after that, I started my volunteering at one of the summer camps they were doing and you can hear Dan tell the story. I showed up to that summer camp that first day. I did not talk to anyone. I was one of the most shy people.

Brittany Turner: [00:08:04] I don't know why I felt I could be a camp counselor for people. I sat on the little turtle beach and not talk to anyone. I barely talked to the kids there that I was supposed to be the camp counselor for. But it was a life-changing experience for me. I saw the youths that can impact these. I mean, they were the under-served youths in our communities. And we were nursing them in sand-based activities. We were giving them experiences such as kayaking, teaching them how to ride a bike.

Brittany Turner: [00:08:35] We were doing water testing with them, nutrition, hiking, all these things that they wouldn't otherwise experience. And I mean, I came back for four more years and ended up being one of the directors of the summer camp. And I loved it. But that's how I started with the camp and I went with it. And from that summer on, I became a year-round volunteer. I became a commodity at every Love A Sea Turtle activity they were having, every event they were hosting.

Brittany Turner: [00:09:10] And I now lead these, the events that's happening. Like I said, I'm a year-round volunteer. And now, I help other youths lead their initiatives that it has. We have many other high schoolers in the program and I help them find what they're passionate about, help them lead their initiatives, help them take forward whatever they're willing to do. While I was in high school, I led an initiative called STEM Explorers, where I worked with under-served youths in their community and help them find their voice on what they were passionate about.

Brittany Turner: [00:09:46] While I was doing that, I found my voice. And what I was passionate about was seismic blasting off the coast of North Carolina. So, I did a letter-writing campaign to the governor and I went to Boys and Girls Clubs and I read thousands of letters. Well, I had youth write thousands of letters to the governor and I hand-delivered those. And I used my voice about something I was passionate about to help the youths find their voice on what they were passionate about. So, it was just very inspiring to me to be able to help these youths do something and have this experience.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:26] Which is really, it's a labor of love, you know, oftentimes. And whether you've self-identified this way or not, Brittany, you have found yourself to be quite the teacher, right? And you can sort of just tell from the passion that you sort of bring to this, right? But that's half the battle, you know, learning to find your inner voice and then, helping others figure out how to do that themselves. So, I would say bravo to

you for that. So, you started out as a freshman in high school and you are still heavily involved throughout your collegiate career in this space then?

Brittany Turner: [00:11:07] Yes, ma'am.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:08] So, Daniel, I want to talk a little bit about as the program evolved and it got to the point where Brittany became a part of it and others very much like Brittany and the camps are running. Talk to us a little bit because this is going to be one of the questions that people want to know is, so you have this great idea, you have the inspiration, you have a kid who really wants to run down this road, but ultimately, you know, as you've described, this program has to sort of figure out how to be sustainable and live on its own.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:38] And that is one of the single hardest things that happen in any type of community-based action. Whether it's traditional education, it's advocacy, it doesn't really make any difference, right? The hardest thing is to not just get something launched, but then, to have it be sustainable. So, talk to me a little bit about how you helped take the program to get it to the point where it could have a life beyond those who started it.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:12:09] It has taken 15 years to figure out the sustainability part. What we knew early on is that we had to design a model, number one, that we have no building, we have no rent, no overhead, and we're all volunteers. So, it's been sustained by that. Had we had to go down the traditional route of having the executive directors, paid employees, it might not have been. So, our model is very inexpensive and it's easy to sustain.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:12:38] And that was first off okay. If we're going to commit to that, my wife and I being retired and having a lot of professional board members to help us, then it would have been different. So, it doesn't take a whole lot to be sustainable. And then, over the first couple years, it was writing small grants to YSA, EarthEcho, Oceana, getting just small amounts to sustain what we needed and is seeking locals or a local corporation, whether it was Bojangles', who's made it here to our region, Grady-White Boats and their foundation, who helped us with small donations.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:13:16] We've been able to do like that and to nurture. But then, also, we had Casey and this generation, they're so slick and savvy with social media and Facebook and they understand the need to give them like, "Well, what did I get for my couple thousand that I gave you?" You know, we're able to show them metrics and likes and, you know, shares, your banner, your sign, what we did went out to all these people. So, they all know that. That's been where we've had to learn this business. Because my wife and I have no background in this, you know. We knew nothing about sea turtles then, if you'd ask us 15 years ago.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:13:55] Would this be what we would be doing in our retirement? We'd have thought, "Oh, no way." I mean, there's so many other things we'd like to do. This has turned into more than a passion. It is, you know, 30 years of marriage, 15 years of running Love A Sea Turtle, 25 years raising kids. It is part of the fulfilling life that we have had. This is it. You know, Brittany, yeah, five years. Five years. Well, you know, the other time, we had our end of the year reflection, one of the students that was there, she's a teacher. She teaches biology. She has a baby. She was one of our original volunteers.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:33] Wow.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:14:34] Yes. So, it really has come full circle with our teachers. And uniquely enough when you spoke about Brittany, Brittany is in the school of education. She's going to be a teacher first.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:43] Oh, excellent.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:14:45] Well, yeah. So, it's funny you pick up on that. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:48] Oh, no. Absolutely. And, you know, that's one of the other things that we need is that we collectively need people who find things that they're passionate about who can then bring those passions into the variety of educational settings that in the 21st century, we now have the opportunity to offer. So, whether that's informal education through outreach programs, summer camps, after-school programs, you name it, or more traditional in-school settings, we still need people who can adapt that sort of applied and hands-on learning opportunity and make that the everyday experience for our kids.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:25] Because, you know, to your point and your experience that you had with your daughter, I mean, she walked away from that initial experience with those turtles with something that she just believed adamantly in. And I suspect no matter what she's doing that that's something that stays with her for a lifetime. And certainly, clearly, it has for Brittany or Brittany wouldn't have been this long-term volunteer all the way through high school and college and so on. So-

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:15:51] It has been transformative. And then, we realized when Casey has talked about the impact that she was making with going to boys and girls club. And then, she wanted to increase that from just doing a one-off program in the summertime. It's like to use it throughout the year. And then, it also evolved when Casey realized the experiences that we learned with our daughter as she transitioned from middle school to high school and then, during her college, "Oh, this is another need." And then, Casey said, "Well, we need to switch into the gear of how can we help other folks that also has been the 20, 30 kids who were part of the summer camp counselor program write a resume, take college tours, learn how to interview, learn how to prepare themselves and position themselves to be a student that's going to be selected for a national scholarship."

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:16:40] And I mean, that has been an area that we have wandered into like sea turtle-like journeys. We've wandered into that. So, we work with students to work on their resumes, to work on their college applications, to craft their essays, talk about what they want to do. I mean, we've done that and our organization in the State of North Carolina, which you are familiar with, we have multiple art scholars, NCSS, North Carolina School of Math and Science students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:10] Yeah.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:17:12] We have more Head Ks, we have LaVigne's, we have Eastie honors and scholars students, and we have multiple national Coca-Cola scholarship come out of our program because of the lessons that Casey helped pave. It's like, "Okay, here's a student, Brittany herself, highly-decorated student."

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:30] Right. Right. And so, for all of the participants in this program, one of the things that I found particularly intriguing in looking at it was the fact that you really focus on the youth or student-led initiatives, right? And so, I really love that. And so, Brittany, I would love for you to be able to sort of walk us through just a little bit about how the decisions get made, right? So, you're gonna take on a new program, a new idea.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:59] And just for our listeners, you know, if you go to Love A Sea Turtle and we will provide all the resources when we post the episode for the website, what not, but you will see a list of programs, River Guardians, Paint The Drain, The Green Team, Plastic Free North Carolina. So, tell us,

Brittany, how did those individual initiatives not just get started, but have enough sort of legs or sea legs, if you will, to actually become a thing that as an organization you sponsor and you continue to do? That becomes more than just an idea on paper, but is an actual action that's taking place. How do you guys make those decisions? What's that look like?

Brittany Turner: [00:18:41] So, it all begins with the youth's ideas. So, many programs have many ideas, they all have different passions. So, if someone is really passionate of art or storm water or whatever they're passionate, it's whatever their idea is, whatever they want to do, and we just lend support. And we offer them as many resources as possible, get them in contact with the people they need to talk to and try to get them opportunities to apply for grants or funding and just offer them as much support as possible to be able to make their idea possible. But that's our main goal, so many people have ideas and they just never get done, but they are possible, feasible ideas, they just need support. And so, that's our main goal as an organization, is lending support, lending help, and giving the youth what they need to actually put their idea in action.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:40] Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:19:41] A process that Brittany would do when she started hers is something that we've also experienced at different youth events in terms of writing the small grant. In the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit, which is Sean Russell out of Mote Marine Lab, he does an event where he ask you to write a small grant. And so, we have copied that and made it our own, where we ask them to do a SMART grant, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time bound. And then, for us, we had to make it SMARTS.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:11] Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:20:12] That's sustainable. So, "Tell us how you're going to do it." So, every one of the youth, they've gone to the Youth Ocean Conservation Summits over the year and then, they've attended our youth leadership program in the summertime, "Here's my idea." "Write your grant. Tell us your grant and fill out the box where it says SMARTS. Tell us how you're going to do it. Tell us how much money you're going to need. Give us your budget."

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:20:34] So, they're walked through that process. And then, we just, I guess, "We're going to fund you. We're going to help you seek funding." And when we ask money from our funders, we fund them. So, we microgrant them to get started. And then, they go out and raise their own money. You know, the young lady who's running the North Carolina Monofilament Recycling Program, still looking on forward, they've attacked, she self-funds, she goes out and raised plastic free. He's been getting sponsors for Plastic Free NC to fund his and he writes grants also. They all have done it.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:21:07] So, they've all had to go through that process. When we went to the Points of Light Summit, they went down there. They had a youth component. All of them went down with their pitches ready to pitch to panel there to get money. So, they're asked to get up, stand up, and speak and publicly talk about it. "Here's why, you know, I should get a grant and here's my SMART presentation." So, when they do that, they look very intelligent and they know how to do it. This is the pitch. This is my SMARTS free pitch.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:37] Yeah, that's absolutely fabulous. And we see the same thing. We have a number of different programs that we advocate for also at the PAST Innovation Lab and we have found those very same components, that when you lay out and you get the participants, some students, whether they're young students, elementary, middle school, high school students, or even our collegiate students just sort of walk through an RFP process, very similar, all steeped in design thinking, and you have them pitch.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:04] It's incredibly powerful. That is such an effective way to get students to really think about and flush out multiple components or facets of ideas they have. I love that. So, in all of these cases, the programs, for example, that are on your website, then those are actual programs that are still running in some capacity today. And so, my question for you then is, are those programs—so, for example, Paint The Drain, which is about storm water awareness and storm drain stencil program, I just chose one off your list.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:38] So, for example, as that program sort of moves forward, is it something then that other groups, girls and boys clubs, 4-H clubs, Girl Scout, Boy Scout, schools, can they pick those things up, Brittany, and then, do variations of their own or do they just support the existing program? How does that work? Because one of the things I can tell you that people are gonna be really, really intrigued about by this is, "Hey, I love the idea of this thing. How can I bring it into my own classroom or into my own after-school program or my own 4-H club?" So, how does that work?

Brittany Turner: [00:23:14] Well, each of these programs is a little different. But for example, with Paint The Drain, we get many different groups, like for example, boys and girls clubs or a lot like high school groups, like honor societies or groups like that to come out to our events and help us paint the drains. And with the recycle art programs, we go in the boys and girls clubs and help us make the art to go out in the community. And with the cycLAST programs, we'll go out and get the groups like the Boy Scout what they need to come and ride bikes with us. And so, we usually find groups in the community that meet the needs of the project and go and do the project with them.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:56] And so, these projects are then ongoing. So, back-

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:24:00] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:00] ... to what we talked about earlier there, they were all sustainable. But literally, these programs in one capacity or another are doing. They're actually actionable today.

Brittany Turner: [00:24:09] Yeah.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:24:09] Yeah. Annalies, they're very replicable in their own area. And we enjoy being contacted by folks, "Well, how can I do this in my area?"

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:17] Right. Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:24:18] For example, the Stow It-Don't Throw It project can be done anywhere. The stickers are available. They can be personalized. The Plastic Free NC, David Yoon who heads up that program, his sticker that is out there, he actually has it set up on file. He has one for every state.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:39] Wow.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:24:40] Anyone can contact and, "Here, let me give you sticker for your states, then you can go out and print it." So, for a couple hundred dollars, you can get a thousand stickers and you can be in business.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:48] Yeah. That's perfect.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:24:50] Yeah. So, it's really easy. You know, recycle art, there are so many links that we send people, "Here's the recycle art link that you can go to start this in your area." CycLAST, that's a community biking program in many areas in that community-

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:03] Sure. Sure.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:25:03] ... and cycling missions. Keep Your Bottom Clean, that's kind of niche-specific because it's a student athlete program-

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:13] Right. Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:25:13] ... with water, but you can do river cleanups, they advocate at the side of the river, all that stuff. The River Guardians project, if you saw the water monitoring, that's what we were originally funded to State Farm, through their youth advisory board. That was a big one where we put rudimentary water testing equipment and then, for near lab quest and Hach spectrophotometers actually in two classes, we up-fitted twelve schools.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:38] Okay.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:25:38] And after that, because purchasing \$6,000 per school wasn't sustainable-

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:44] Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:25:46] ... we worked with Philippe Cousteau, Sean Russell at EarthEcho International, they have the water challenge program. So, that is an easy way for a school to enter into that one. So, we don't have to do it, we direct schools to those folks.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:59] Right. Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:26:01] It's highly replicable and that is a very successful program for us and for EarthEcho that we really enjoy being part of.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:10] Right. And so, for communities that are contemplating doing programming like this, one of the things, questions that we get asked all the time as we send, you know, just a tremendous number of resources sort of out into the world, schools in particular depending on where you are, if either be US or other parts of the globe, are always looking to have programs that are standard-aligned so that they don't have to take inside of formal learning environments.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:39] And I'm really speaking about those formal learning environments at the moment that they can use it in place of something else they would traditionally be teaching. And so, Brittany, since you are headed down the path to being a teacher, so have any of these programs been pulled or set aside and been state or are federally standard-aligned or do you have any aspirations to do that for some of these programs? Because it seems to me it would be that difficult of a task to do. So, where are you with that?

Brittany Turner: [00:27:10] I mean, I definitely think it would be-

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:16] Sorry. Did I catch you off guard with that question? Because I know teachers are looking at this, they're like, "Oh, my God, that sounds really, really cool. But, you know, my principal will never

let me use it because, you know, it's not standard-aligned" or "I don't have time to do that sort of piece of the work", right? So, that's a pretty sort of traditional sort of approach.

Brittany Turner: [00:27:33] I would say, long-term, my goal is to go into like administration with school, because I definitely may go like public school system, there's a lot to work on, there's a lot to be done. And I think it would be really cool to like have a lot of positive distractions maybe implemented into our school systems. And there's a lot of things that I see a lot of states will do like with our summer camps.

Brittany Turner: [00:27:56] And with like we have an interactive water lab here in the community that I along with a few other people involved with Love A Sea Turtle do that we do in the water lab that I think could be really beneficial at another school systems, that I think would be awesome if we put it in their classrooms. I think one day, it would be amazing to see that be offered to every child instead of just a few or the ones that come through our summer camps or the ones that are able to come in through our water lab.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:27] Yeah, it's not hard to do. And I would think that there definitely would be some grant funding out there that would make it possible to sort of do that. So, let's talk a little bit about the summer programs, because we've mentioned them several times now. So, are these a day program? Are they a week-long program? What's the structure of the summer programming and how do you make the decisions around the structuring of the summer programs?

Brittany Turner: [00:28:52] So, we've done it differently for different years. We have done day programs before, but we've also done week-long programs. But with these programs, we generally do the same thing. There are some base camps, we do a lot of water testing and then, STEM programs, but we also give kids the opportunity to ride bikes and teach them how to ride a bike if that's something they haven't learned how to do. We do kayaking. We learn about nutrition, hiking, and we do a lot of outdoor activities because that's something that unfortunately today, a lot of kids don't come outside.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:29] They don't. I hear that over and over again. It's that sort of lost thing, right? Going outside. Yeah.

Brittany Turner: [00:29:37] And then, we've also done some stuff with scuba before and like snorkeling camps and skuba camps, and that's another camp structure we use expense and stuff on.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:49] So, Daniel, when you sort of think about the multiple iterations, I assume, over the last 15 years that you've seen the various programs and the camps, what would you say are the highlights for you that you see consistently over and over again, which sort of get to prove a concept, I guess, when you think about the way the programs work?

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:30:10] For me, it's been the growth from having, you know, four summer counselors our first year to this past year where we had 40 counselors a day.

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

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:30:19] Yeah. For 70 youths we were serving. So, we do what we call a counselor and then, we do a junior counselor. We have a seasoned counselors that served a season with us training a junior counselor. So, they're paired up together and they get a group that they leader out. So, we see that continual growth from that, that is for us, it's like, okay, that's an affirmation that's been successful, people want to come. And we don't advertise or even seek counselors, they just keep appearing and calling us, e-mailing us, "How can I get involved", through word of mouth.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:30:48] And the other thing is when we drive around town and a student sees me in my Sea Turtle shirt and they come running up, "Man, I went to your camp. That was the greatest thing." I say, "What was your most funky thing that you did?" "Riding bikes, I mean, water, science, and the nutrition." And that doesn't happen once, it happens all the time, every day. So, sometimes, I don't even want to wear a Sea Turtle t-shirt thinking I'm going to get run down by a parent or by a student.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:18] Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:31:18] I mean, that. And then, also, the demand for the program from organizations to water services. So, that keeps growing. And then, every time a student comes, says, "I have an idea I want to pitch to you" or "I heard, you know, you help students do this, can you help me?" And it is a seven-day a week job now for my wife and I.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:38] And it sounds like it's pretty powerful. Yeah. Yeah.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:31:43] Seven days a week, I mean, we're here and available to the students when they need us. And quite often, their lives are so busy now Monday through Friday, Saturdays and Sundays are the only time they can get to us. And so, our home is open seven days a week. We do it, it grows. In our recent reflection, we had 165 people there, probably could have taken more. These were just families and youths associated with it. It grows. You know, going back, you were talking about the tying to the standards, our programs through the EarthEcho world water lab are completely tied to NC4 curriculum. Our water lab, the LAST STEAM Lab at River Park North is set up to deliver programs that are absolutely tied in the curriculum.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:28] Perfect. Perfect.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:32:29] Yeah. Every everything else that we do, whether it's Plastic Free NC or cycLAST or storm drains are tied into the water cycle, part of the NC core curriculum. And the teachers can do the same thing because it all has a science backing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:41] Sure.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:32:41] The nutrition component, that comes out of FoodMASTER, which is a national program. Dr. Duffrin out in that and I knew right there in Illinois. It's tied to the curriculum. Everything we do, we do tie it back. So, there is formal learning through informal method.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:00] Exactly.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:33:01] And working with FoodMASTER, we've designed what's called a FAN cart, Fitness And Nutrition. So, we have just, you know, a little plastic-laminated card that has information that's a quick hitter. I mean, as the page today, "Why don't you need Gatorade? This is why you should be drinking water instead of Gatorade."

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:17] Right.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:33:18] And then, our garden project, we have garden science in there to talk about the benefits of tomatoes. Now, why tomatoes? And then, that absolutely is tied to the 4 curriculum. It gives them the facts and science behind it. So, we tie that in.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:34] That's perfect. Yeah, that's absolutely perfect, because obviously, you know, like I said, when teachers are looking to bring these amazingly innovative programs that they find whether on the internet or in their own communities, one of the big struggles that I hear repeatedly from schools and teachers in communities is, you know, how do I make time to transition my classroom or transition the experience of my students and to be this more hands-on and applied when I've got, you know, this can or this wrote curriculum over here that my district or my community has invested in?

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:06] And so, oftentimes, what I spend a lot of my time encouraging folks to do is to swap it out, right? So, not added on, but do it in place of. So, I'm thrilled to hear that you're making it easy for the teachers to be able to do that. I want to talk a little bit about sort of best recommendations, I guess, really from both of you. You know, as folks are contemplating doing something similar, what's the advice that you have both on the, "How do I get something up and running and started" and then, "How do I make it sustainable and sort of build momentum for it"?

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:46] And now, I toss that out to both of you, and either one of you can answer the question. But, you know, oftentimes, those are some of the questions that I get all the time is, "Hey, you know, Love A Sea Turtle sounds awesome, but how do I do something similar in my community? I'm not on the coast. My kids don't even understand, you know, sea turtles, but, you know, we've got a buffalo ranch, you know, around the corner", as an example or "We've got this massive cactus farm."

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:12] And what I always tell folks is that, you know, you take and you tap into that local resource and that's the thing that you use as a driver. But it's one thing for me to be able to say that, but they're really looking to folks like you who've actually implemented utilizing your local resource as their guide for, "How would I do this?" So, Daniel, let's start with you. What would you tell folks who are contemplating running down that road?

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:35:38] It can be done anywhere. And it's funny because this year, we ran into Zack Rago, who's the Chasing Coral and the Chasing Ice guy and he came out here recently. He's located in Boulder, Colorado. They have the largest youth scuba program in Boulder. And we used to look at that and we always said, "How in the world do they do that?" So, we've finally got to ask him that question. But anyway, you know, we talk to kids, our camp program is called Upstream Downstream.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:36:07] And we always ponder, "How do we make the young person in Kansas care about putting a plastic bag on the side of road? How's that going to get us here?" It's giving them those connections. It is tied within, everything you do upstream has an effect downstream, so no matter where you're at in the United States, you're going to have a downstream impact. And it doesn't have to be about impacting sea turtles, it can be impacting the gulf. It can be about exactly what's going on in Texas or Colorado or going down to Mexico. You know, we're still sending water there, but that type of thing, you know, it's like that.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:36:42] So, getting them the care, and that's what we're trying to do. You know, if someone has a cactus farm, you're right, utilizing what their strengths are, what they have around them as a resource. And then, I would tell anybody, start small. Ambition is great. Start small and let it become organic. And if it's organic and it grows, then run with it. And see how it can keep going. And then, allow the students to dream and allow them to figure out, "This is what I want to do and this is how we're going to go."

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:37:14] And as the adult supervisors and people behind the scenes, "How can I best support them?" We let them struggle mightily at times, but I don't let them fall off the cliff, we don't let them fail. If we see them running off the cliff, we might want to think about the circum-Socrates and I'm going to say, you

know, "Because you're about to drive off the cliff, this is not possibly the best decision, we need to rethink this." So, we don't let them fail, but we have had failures.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:46] Sure.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:37:46] But they are failures that we see that are going to happen and it's okay because it's part of the learning experience. So-

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:51] Brittany is shaking her head, so you can tell that she's like, "Oh, yeah, I've experienced, you know, this potential to fall off the cliff and someone's helped me sort of redirect and come back around." So, Brittany, what would you like to add?

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:38:06] As if you're falling off a raft.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:07] Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Brittany, what would you add to that? You know, again, thinking about, you know, somebody out in the middle of Iowa who says, "Oh, my gosh, you know, Love A Sea Turtle is the most amazing organization I've ever heard about and I want to do something very similar in my communities." What sort of advice would you have for folks?

Brittany Turner: [00:38:28] I would say the hardest part, it's going to be mental. So, the hardest part is just going to be taking that first step. And if you're really passionate about that stuff, that passion drives you forward after you take that first step. And if it's something you're really passionate about, you're going to go vying for it after that. And just let that passion drive you and you're going to do something amazing from there.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:52] Yeah. And I see that all the time. You know, we actually have little sticky notes printed for our teacher training and professional development programs that we do in STEM. And at one point, I had printed on these sticky notes, teach your passion. And to your point, right? We're very deliberate about that. You know, tap into the thing that you love because if you, as the adult, love it and can be supportive of the student learners sort of in that space, they're going to pick up on your excitement about it as well. And I would imagine that you've seen that numerous times in your own journey with teaching kids.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:28] I want to thank you both very much for making time to talk with us and to share your story. It's absolutely remarkable in the sense that I just love the fact that you have figured out a way not only to tap into folks passions, but more importantly, to foster that sense of creativity and scale and commitment and that there's a deliberate process around the work that you're doing just sort of scaffold youth to become these amazing adults who are gonna go out and be part of their own communities and to care about the world that they live in. So, I want to thank both of you very much for making time to share your story with us today.

Daniel Sokolovic: [00:40:07] It has been a pleasure meeting you.

Brittany Turner: [00:40:09] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:10] You're very welcome. 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.