



Irma de Vries

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Annalies Corbin: [00:00:21] 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: [00:00:57] Welcome to the next episode of Learning Unboxed. I am very excited, as usual, to welcome our guests and to get ready and have a conversation about innovations and creativity in education. And today, I am particularly excited because I always love it when we have guests from afar. And today, we have with us Irma de Vries, who is the Senior Staff Member for Families and Children in the Education Department at the Rijksmuseum. And I probably completely botched your title more, but hopefully, everybody will forgive me. I'm excited about this because Amsterdam is one of the places that I love very much. I've been to the Rijksmuseum on numerous occasions. And it is a fabulous global resource. And I'm thrilled to have you with us today. So, thank you for joining us.

Irma de Vries: [00:01:51] Yes. Thank you. I'm very excited to join you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:54] And so, I've actually been pestering for Irma for months. We've been trying to get this interview together. And the reason I've been pestering her is because for those of you that don't know, I'll get Irma to give an overview. In fact, let's start with that, Irma. The Rijksmuseum, for somebody who's never been fortunate enough to get to come and actually experience that space, let's start with the sort of the overarching mission and vision of the museum itself.

Irma de Vries: [00:02:21] Yes. Well, we are the National Museum of the Netherlands, so we present art and objects. We present our history, history of the Netherlands from the Middle Ages until present day. And we have, of course, a special focus on the 17th century with all these wonderful painters like Vermeer and Rembrandt and the beautiful Night Watch, as some highlights. And what we really want to do is to link people with art and history to convey sort of a sense of history and beauty. Well, yeah, that's what the museum is about.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:57] And so, I mean, in very layman's terms, the home literally of the Dutch masters. And we all know them, they turn up in media, in documentaries and magazines. Any time anybody wants to

talk about that sort of period of global history, the images that we see, many of them, their home, their home today is Rijksmuseum.

Irma de Vries: [00:03:19] Yes, that's true. Yes. Yeah. We have very iconic works of art. That's why it's such an important focus in our collection presentation. A large part of the building is dedicated to this 17th century, which is of a golden age in our history. It brought us such famous painters as Rembrandt, as Vermeer, as Jan Steen's. Still, I've been there millions of times now—well, not millions, but a lot of times and I still love walking through the galleries and seeing these paintings. It's absolutely beautiful. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:54] It is. Anybody who gets a chance to go, please, please do. You can't miss it. It's fabulous. But one of the things that I really love and I was so excited to see that you're doing, and the last time that I was there, you know, I had the chance again to revisit the museum, but I didn't actually get to do this program because I didn't have time. But oh my gosh was I inspired by it. So, we're really excited to have you talk about it. Because oftentimes, when we talk about art museums, and especially in the global world of education, sometimes, art, especially if you think about high art or you go back to this notion, these masters, these classical pieces, it can be very intimidating to folks who don't live in or love art for purely the sake of being art sometimes.

Irma de Vries: [00:04:41] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:41] And so, it's one of the big challenges that all our museums have is how to, A, make your collections accessible very broadly to a very diverse public set. And, you know, Amsterdam is a place with a bazillion—maybe almost literally, a bazillion tourists. People come from all over the world. It's one of those locations where people are constantly coming and going. So, you have this diverse set of folks that might or might not walk in the doors. And one of the big struggles that institutions like this have globally is how do we make what we have here? How do we make our collections relevant to a broad swath, quite frankly, of humanity? How does the museum think about tackling that? And then, we're going to get into the program itself because this program, I think, does that and does it beautifully.

Irma de Vries: [00:05:31] More broadly speaking, you mean how do we tackle that? Yes. Well, it's, of course, a big challenge for our departments, Department of Education. We have people, my colleagues specialize in different target audiences. And of course, every target audience says different goals, different things that I want out of the visits. And within those audiences, there are huge differences as well. So, that's the question that keeps us busy all day long. Well, we try new things.

Irma de Vries: [00:06:01] I mean, some people are completely satisfied with doing an audio guide, doing some media tour. Maybe some people want a guided tour or other people want just to read the gallery labels, the wall labels. So, it's something that we are continuously occupied with. What is the perfect way, the perfect medium for this audience and for this broad audience? And the program that you're talking about is, of course, that fits in this picture perfectly, it's something that we tried to engage people in a completely new way.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:36] So, again, you know, obviously, I have a purpose for saying, "Hey, I want to have this conversation." And the reason why I have this conversation is because, again, it's very difficult in some cases to be able to draw in a really, really diverse public and make something as complex as the Dutch masters and all the other things that are in the Rijksmuseum, really, really tangible and relevant and meaningful and an engaging and changing way. Because not only do you want people to come, but you want people to come over and over again. And so, you have to get really creative. And I love the fact that the Education Department, you guys came up with an escape room at the Rijksmuseum. So, a program, it's not really a room in the traditional sort of stuff. The entire museum is your experience.

Irma de Vries: [00:07:23] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:23] So, tell us about this program and then, we're going to get into the nuts and bolts about how you actually ultimately made the decisions and the creation components itself. But give us the overview of what it does.

Irma de Vries: [00:07:35] Yes. Well, it is as you said. It's not really an escape room. So, we call it a escape game because you are not locked inside a room. We invite you to go around the whole museum. We really want that. We want people to use the whole building and to see, to go around the whole museum and see all these different things. So, it's not a room, which is one important difference between an escape room and our game. And another important difference is that in most escape rooms, you have limited time, one hour, for example, and we don't set a time limit because of course, we don't really want people to feel rushed inside the museum.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:13] Right. Right.

Irma de Vries: [00:08:15] We wanted them to take their time. So, there's no time limits and there's no—you're not locked inside a room. But it uses a lot of the same characteristics as an escape room. So, it's this mystery game that you play with your team, two to five people. And things that are in common with an escape room is that there is something mysterious going on inside the museum. And we need you and your team to solve it. In the museum, there are all these clues, puzzles. You need to track gold. You need to even break open vaults and ultimately solve the mystery. And we really want this to be about immersion, so you even meet actors and have to role play a little bit. So, it's a totally different new way to go around the museum and to make use of those stories that are hidden inside our building.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:11] So, I love the fact that, you know, it literally is encouraging and it's required. You can't solve the puzzle or the mystery without going all over the museum. And so, that naturally then gets your visitors to see. You know, they may only have an interest in one area of the museum, but if they play the game, then they are immersed in the entirety of the Rijksmuseum in many ways. And so, as you were crafting this and you were leaving artifacts, clues, puzzles, things for them to solve in and around the museum, how do you structure that? And how does the game—those who are playing the game interact with those who are not playing the game? How do you manage these two sets of visitors?

Irma de Vries: [00:09:54] First of all, I think because we really wanted this to be immersive, we started out to people would receive two days in advance. People who would play the game would book the game on our website. They would receive a video two days in advance. And then, this video tells them—well, it gets—makes them know the story. So, it tells them the story about this employee of Rijksmuseum, employee Bert, who is working late in the library one day and he find something very strange. It's a floor plan of the museum.

Irma de Vries: [00:10:29] It's dated two centuries before the museum was built. And it has something to do with this painter, Torrentius. And it's very straight because the next day, he gets suspended. And this floor plan is stolen. And so, obviously, someone in the museum doesn't want him to find out something, but he manages to get this internship. So, he invites the players to stay as interns in the museum to continue his investigation. So, from the moment that the players entered the museum, we don't talk about an escape game anymore.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:04] Right.

Irma de Vries: [00:11:04] So, ask about the escape game, nobody knows what you're talking about, but they do know about this internship that Bert has set up. So, the players will go to the intern desk and they will receive their package and their intern badges and then, they are Rijksmuseum interns. So, it was really, really wonderful to see all those other visitors. They were really recognizable because we had this huge intern badges and you had, as you said, two different sort of visitor streams.

Irma de Vries: [00:11:38] And I really love that because the players of the escape game, they move around the museum in a sort of a different way. They do different things. They see different things. They move on a more sort of secretive level. So, they were easily recognizable among all the other visitors. But we could speak to them about responsibility because they are an intern of the Rijksmuseum, so they have to set an example, so they couldn't run or touch—they have to set an example for the other visitors. So, it was very fun to see those two different visitors, you got visitors mixed with each other.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:15] So, there's a bit of an orientation for this team of interns when they arrive at the museum. Not only did they get their packets, but you're laying out expectations and literally, you sort of—even though they may or may not realize it, you've crafted them as ambassadors of good behavior and stewardship within—while they're playing the game for those who aren't involved in the game at all.

Irma de Vries: [00:12:42] Yes. Well-

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:43] I love that. That's absolutely brilliant, Irma.

Irma de Vries: [00:12:47] Yeah. I guess those are-

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:48] And I can—you know, my brain is like, oh, my gosh, how could we translate this awesome experience at the Rijksmuseum and then, other like schools or community centers, they can create something very similar based on some of these principles and these notions that you've developed. That's the beauty of it. So then, what happens? So, these interns, they come, they've got this orientation and now, they're off and running, but not running. So, what does that look like? What happens to them next? You know, I love that we can walk through the experience for folks who might not get the chance to come.

Irma de Vries: [00:13:23] Yes, sure. Yeah. Well, of course, I can't give too much away because-

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:26] Right. Right. We won't give away the secrets.

Irma de Vries: [00:13:29] No. It still has to be little mysterious. Well, in their interim package, they find his phone. And with the phone, they actually chat with Bert, this employee that they know from the video. So, he gets in touch with them and he sends them on their quest in a museum. So, he is at home. So, from a distance, he chats with them and he gives them directions and makes them look at things and notice things, just find a way in the museum. But they also can ask him for help if they are figuring out something and they can't really figure it out and they can ask him for help.

Irma de Vries: [00:14:12] He will think along with them, although he doesn't know maybe either. But it's really fun that they have this person that they connect to. And we, early in the process, found out that people were really interested in this Bert character. So, they ask kinds of questions about his personal life. So, during the whole game, Bert got this whole backstory. So, people would ask him about his wife. And they really wanted to connect to this character.

Irma de Vries: [00:14:43] Well, he is the one who guides you to the museum. And with him, you find out more and more about this mysterious painter and what he has to do with the architect of the museum, Pierre Cuypers, because they lived two centuries apart. I really love the story about Torrentius. We got to him by talking to curators beforehand. And we asked this curator—different curators for stories that were kind of mysterious feel because that's good for an escape room. Of course, you need something that you can—that is a story a little bit grounded, but maybe still has some room to fill in for ourselves.

Irma de Vries: [00:15:23] And this painter, Torrentius, he is really fascinating. He is very mysterious in himself. He's from the 17th century and he was once mentioned as being as great as Rembrandt. But nowadays, nobody has ever heard of him. And a lot of people from the Netherlands—well, most people from the Netherlands don't know him either. So, that's very strange because the critics of his time were incredibly positive about him and his talent. But he was—he had these connections to this heretic brotherhood. All his paintings were destroyed. Found one of his paintings again in the 20th century as a lid of a barrel. So, all of-

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:03] Wow.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:03] Yeah, it's a wonderful story. And I recommend everyone to look it up. And so, we used this story and this character and we connected him to the architect of the museum. And in that way, we could make people really look for—I mean, you've been to the Rijksmuseum. You know the building and you know that it is full of these symbols and this decoration, all of these ornaments that are—well, very—they ask questions if they—they call them questions themselves. So, we really made the building and the architect the protagonists of the story. And that was really fun to see because people really just—I think people looked around more now and they looked to the building in a new way, in a different way. And that has been wonderful.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:49] Well, I can tell you, I have not done—obviously, I didn't get a chance to do this particular escape game, but I've taken my family to similar ideas at museums or historic sites around the world. And I can tell you, without fail, the kids notice and ask questions and they get engaged in things that had we just walked through the museum. And even if we love the walks through the museum and the things we saw, we would still have not had the time or the inclination or the fascination, I guess, if you will, around the details. And that's one of the things I really, really love about the approach that you've taken, is you're immersing people in the intimate details that would have not occurred to them and you're asking them to ask more about that.

Irma de Vries: [00:17:43] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:43] You're inviting them to be part of your question or your experience or your own learning about the world that you're portraying. Awesome.

Irma de Vries: [00:17:53] Yeah. I really hope people will have such a positive and new experience in the museum. That's, of course, what's most important to us, that they get a sort of sense of surprise about what they just experienced. And I think that's more important and that we conveyed who this character, Torrentius, was or something. It's more about the experience that they had together because they did this with a team. It's a team game. So, you have to gather, learn from each other. I love it when the children see or know something that the parents don't.

Irma de Vries: [00:18:27] And they really have this experience together. And we offer this game not only for families and children, by the way, but a lot of family and children play this game. And because that's my focus, I always talk about them. But what I really love this game is that it was an experience that you do with a team

and that you really needed each other to complete this game because one of the team members may be, one of the children is very good in paying attention to detail. Others are more into puzzling or navigating. So, you really need each other's skills and that's really wonderful.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:07] It is really wonderful. And as you—so, how many years have you been running the program?

Irma de Vries: [00:19:14] Well, it's been running for two years now, but I've only worked here for a year. So, as I only know about this second edition. This was the second year that we ran the program.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:26] And you tweak it a little bit each year, I assume, you know, the notification on my website says, "Hey, the 2020 version of the game is coming soon."

Irma de Vries: [00:19:35] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:35] So, what's the mechanism of the decision making around changing the game from year-to-year?

Irma de Vries: [00:19:43] I think people come back for the game. So, we already get questions about the new way of the next game. So, that's the reason, of course, for us to think about how we can make it a new experience again. It's also about that it was new to us. So, we learned new things from this game, things that we can maybe use in the next edition and-

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:06] And how much do you change the game? Is it radically different? So, a whole new story or is it just a variation on the theme?

Irma de Vries: [00:20:14] No, we did a completely new game. The second.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:19] Wow.

Irma de Vries: [00:20:19] I don't know if will do this again. We do tweak it because we did it in the summer holidays and the Christmas holidays and that was the same edition.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:26] Okay.

Irma de Vries: [00:20:26] So, we tweaked it a little bit. We updated it to make it even more—to flow even better. And maybe we will do this game again next year. I don't know. Maybe we will do a new one again. We still have to make that decision, so I can't say it. But the second edition was completely different from the first one. And one of the most important differences is that we want the second game to be really immersive.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:51] Okay.

Irma de Vries: [00:20:51] So, we wanted people to dive into the story. So, we had rooms completely decorated in—for the escape game and we really transformed the museum in a sense for this game.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:02] Wow. Okay.

Irma de Vries: [00:21:04] And had actors involved this time. So, it was really a different game than the first one just because we wanted to try something new.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:13] I love that. It's fabulous. That's awesome. So, let's talk a little bit about the fact—so, some of the things that you learned along the way. So, let's start with, you know, as you went from version 1 to version 2, there were some—not only did you make changes, but you were very particular about some of the changes, it sounds like, that you made or some of the things that didn't work that you learned that you wanted to change or do differently and why make some of those shifts.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:40] As people think about, okay, I can imagine something like this. I can imagine doing, you know, a variation of this with my kids, my family or whatnot. What were some of the things that just didn't work? And so—or they didn't work the way you hoped they would work. And maybe the participants didn't notice because oftentimes, they don't. But as a practitioner, you're like, "That was not what we intended." So, give us some examples of some things like that. So, as you did V2.

Irma de Vries: [00:22:08] Yes, well, one of the—we worked with a different developer because we didn't—the first time, we did it in collaboration with this Israeli magician. He did it with museums in Israel. And the second time around, we did with an escape room builder from Amsterdam. Regards Sherlocked, they're brilliant. And so, that was a difference. But that was also a difference because we had a new vision about this immersive game. And one of the things that we said to Sherlocked, to the developer of the second game is that in the first game, we saw that there were a lot of spoilers because it was so, so popular that they taught each other solving puzzles.

Irma de Vries: [00:22:53] And it gave a little bit—yeah, it gave away in some cases. So, that was one of the challenges that we had to face and that we tried to solve in the second game. Of course, it's not easy to solve that because we did want enough people to be able to play the game. And I think you will always see each other. But in this, they—Sherlocked found clever solutions to this. So, I think that was one of the things that we want to tweak because we saw that it didn't work that we want in the first game.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:27] Yeah. So, fabulous observation. So, in the same way that there were things that you decided that you were going to change, I would assume there were also some pretty amazing aha moments both in the first game and in the second game. So, I'm wondering if you could share some examples of some of the things that either you saw or you heard back from visitors that struck a chord with you that, "Oh, this is working"?

Irma de Vries: [00:23:53] I have to admit, because I wasn't there for the first time, I did that for the second year and then, the decision was already made that it could be more immersive. I don't really know the process of how this went. I did play the first game myself, so I can, well, tell you from my own experience. But I think what really works well in both the games were the elements of puzzling and that you need to do that together. In the first game, we already had this story, this backstory. And because we saw that potential of this story being grander and being more immersive, that's one of, yeah, the important choices that we make, is to have people even dive into the story more.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:40] Do you hear from the participants? Do they either reach out to the museum or the chatter as folks are going on? I'm really, really curious about the feedback from those. So, now, you've got the second iteration and you're getting ready to start making decisions about, is there a third iteration? And if so, what does that look like? I would assume that participant feedback really sort of—it's something that's important. So, what do you hear? What do you hear from people? What are they telling you?

Irma de Vries: [00:25:11] Well, we did a survey. So, one of the things that we found very important in this, the first and second game, is that we would reach—give people a reason to visit our museum. And people who

maybe, as you talked about before, think of museums as being not for them, we want to be for them as well. We want them to feel like we are a museum for them and that we are a place for them. So, that's one of our goals. And we did surveys. And it turns out that 30% of the people are new visitors.

Irma de Vries: [00:25:47] And really good news because it gives us the confidence that this is something, this is a tool that people know from—they know escape rooms from outside of museums. So, confidence that this is something that they will enjoy with their family, with their friends. And it gives them a reason to come to our museum. And that's really wonderful. So, that's something that is definitely, well, feedback that we could use and that we-

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:12] So, I just want to be clear because wow, that's a phenomenal number. And so, I just want to make sure that I understand exactly the context. So, 30% of the people who were providing feedback in a survey about the escape game came because of the game. 30%. That was what brought them to the museum?

Irma de Vries: [00:26:33] The 30% were visitors who didn't visit the museum before or before, when it reopened in 2013. But 94% of the people indicated that they came specifically for the escape game.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:47] Wow.

Irma de Vries: [00:26:48] Almost everyone really came for the escape game. And we also got very positive grades. So, they graded us with a nine out of 10. So, that gives us the confidence that this is something that people really like to do in our museum.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:04] Wow.

Irma de Vries: [00:27:04] And of those people, 30% were new visitors. So, they—yeah, I think we can-

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:10] Yeah. But that sounds phenomenal, right?

Irma de Vries: [00:27:13] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:13] Because that's 30%. And just for folks to understand, I don't know off the top of my head the total visitors per year at the Rijksmuseum, but it's really, really large.

Irma de Vries: [00:27:24] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:24] So, this 30% is a big number.

Irma de Vries: [00:27:27] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:27] Do you know off the top of your head what the annual visitors for the museum are?

Irma de Vries: [00:27:32] Well, 2019 was a good year. It was 2.7 million.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:36] So, yeah, for my listeners, 30% of that is substantial. Wow. Well, congratulations.

Irma de Vries: [00:27:42] Well, yes, of course, not 30% of those 2.7 million, but in terms of the people who played the escape game, that's still 15,000 people.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:54] Wow. Yeah.

Irma de Vries: [00:27:55] Yes. So, I guess those numbers are really wonderful for us. Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:59] And that's a lot of people to manage in a year. 15,000 visitors, you know, trolling around and doing their internship.

Irma de Vries: [00:28:07] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:08] That's a lot happening. So, there can be multiple players, multiple teams playing at the same time. And the game can literally be played pretty much all day as long as there's enough time to complete the game.

Irma de Vries: [00:28:21] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:21] So, this can be going—this is an ongoing sort of everyday, it's not just here and there.

Irma de Vries: [00:28:28] No. And we offer it only in the summer holidays and Christmas holidays. So, yes, as you said, it would—the museum is overloaded with interns. You see that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:38] I love that, though. That was really, really brilliant on your part. So, one of the other questions that I have and it's probably a silly question, but I really want to know. So, as folks are interacting with Bert and they're asking all these questions. So, is Bert a person, a real person that's talking to them or is this all prerecorded sort of stuff and they get the story in small pieces along the way?

Irma de Vries: [00:29:04] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:04] How did you guys do that part?

Irma de Vries: [00:29:06] Well, it's a chip bot.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:08] Yeah.

Irma de Vries: [00:29:08] But it's also a real person behind this bot. So, I think maybe 80% is the chip. So, that's pre-programmed conversation that you have with Bert. But of course, people ask different questions and new questions. And then, there's someone behind this bot who talks to the players. Well, some of the time, you will be talking to a real person. Some of the time, you will be talking to the chip bot.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:38] That's awesome. But it also means, you know, for folks to really understand from a staffing standpoint, you got a Bert on standby. There's somebody every day the game is being played that's there, ready to answer the question the bot can't get.

Irma de Vries: [00:29:51] Yes. It's really intense job. We have-

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:55] I would imagine, a little curious, too, you have all kinds of things that people would ask. So, interesting. Yeah.

Irma de Vries: [00:30:01] Yeah. Yeah. And that's why we developed this large backstory for Bert because, yeah, well, it was growing and growing and the host behind his chip bot, they all noted these questions and that they would answer along the same lines. Of course, there are different shifts.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:19] Sure.

Irma de Vries: [00:30:20] Did not only have hosts for Bert, we also had hosts who interacted with the players directly. So, you would meet someone in a sort of a research restoration lab, will meet, of course, the one managing the intern desk. You would meet a curator whom you could ask questions and who would give you a new clue which would make you continue your quest. So, there were all different kinds of hosts spread across the museum.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:54] That's fabulous. I absolutely really, really love that. That's great. I guess two more questions as we sort of get ready to wrap up. So, the first one is how do you capture the sort of takeaways of the experience? So, you do the survey and do folks interact with you or with the museum after the fact? Do they reach out? What's their tangible sort of thing? Because the reason I'm asking the question, so, for example, if you do a Google of things to do in Amsterdam for families, this pops up, right? And so, obviously, there are folks that are writing reviews. There are things that, you know, mom blogs and things like that.

Irma de Vries: [00:31:46] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:46] So, people are talking about this. How do you capture this extraneous information or do you—and the reason I ask this question is because we get asked all the time as schools or communities or museums, because we talk about stories and these great experiences or opportunities kind of all over the world. And people ask me all the time, how do we gather all of the stuff that's happening sort of out here versus right here in the center of it? And then, how do we effectively use this? Because it's a great informational tool when we develop programs.

Irma de Vries: [00:32:25] Yes, of course. Yeah. How do we use all of these? And how do we incorporate the voices of the people who play? I guess that's still a challenge for us. We-

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:37] I think it's a challenge for many. I didn't mean to put you on the spot because I ask the question because I get the question a lot, right? Because folks are struggling with this. All kinds of institutions, big, small, local, you know, national. So, I just was curious. I keep hoping somebody will say, "Hey, I have the magic bean for how do you do that."

Irma de Vries: [00:32:57] Well, a part of the thing in this escape game, this edition of the escape game was that you find something in the museum that is something that you have to keep secrets. So, you become part of the secret. So, you can get this secret stamp that's only visible under UV lights. You know it's there, but it isn't really there. And then, you can't even tell Bert. So, it's just really fun at the end of the escape game that we saw the interns again at the intern desk and we ask them, "So, how was your experience? and how did you—did you find something? Did you find your quest?" And they would say, "No, no, we didn't find anything because they knew they had some secrets about it." So, they really were still into this game. But of course, people would react very fast and they would have such a fun experience. And they are talking about it online.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:51] They are.

Irma de Vries: [00:33:52] Yeah. And we do want to do more with that. We do want to give them sort of an experience that lasts beyond game and to do more with their voices when they have finished the game so they can maybe enjoy it again and again and again. So, that's something that we're still working on. How to—maybe this will be something that we can use in the third edition.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:13] Right. Right.

Irma de Vries: [00:34:15] Yeah. How do we use all these reactions from the public and would write that in a product? Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:21] Yeah, that's very fair. And thank you for that because I do—like I said, this is a question I get all the time. I'm like, "I don't know." I ask everybody, "How are you doing this because it's awesome?" But I will say, I have not seen folks online and I did a pretty thorough search. People are not giving the secrets away. That's why I was like, "Okay, how did this really work?" Because you can't truly glean. So, that's a good thing.

Irma de Vries: [00:34:43] Yeah, that's a good thing. They have-

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:44] Incredibly effective-

Irma de Vries: [00:34:46] They understood the story. Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:47] ... in getting people not only to believe in the experience and the story, but believe in the power of it that if they give the secrets away, it takes enjoyment away from others. And I think that's a—you did a beautiful job. But also, you know, a lot of faith in humanity in understanding the premise. So, I love that. I always like to close the program by recognizing that there are folks all over the world who are listening, who are thinking to themselves, "Well, I unfortunately am never going to make it to the Rijksmuseum. I'm not going to get to meet Bert, be an intern and play the game.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:25] But I would really love to take elements of what I just heard and incorporate it into my community, into my after-school program, into my summer program, into what's happening in my school or my community center or maybe go talk to my local museum about doing something similar." So, what are, you know, your big giant sort of last lob for folks that are sitting back and saying, "Hey, is it possible that I could do even a small piece of what I just heard Irma talking about? So, what would you recommend to folks in terms of if they wanted to try something similar about how they would just get started thinking about it?

Irma de Vries: [00:36:05] It's about thinking—well, if we're talking about our own collection or did you mean, how could I use our collection, our museum or how could I use these principles of the escape room, of the escape game in their own practice?

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:20] Well, let's run with both since you offered both. So, from the outside, how can I— if I can't ever get to the Rijksmuseum, how could I utilize museum resources in, for example, my own classroom? Let's say, I'm a teacher in South America, in India, in wherever, right? And I'm not going to be able to get there, but I very much want to be able to utilize resources. That's one question. And the second question is, then how could I use some of things that you've learned about crafting an escape game because it's engaging? What I love about it is what you've done is you've just sucked the learner in, right? No matter what age, their kid or the adult, you've got them, they bought in with you.

Irma de Vries: [00:37:03] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:04] They're there.

Irma de Vries: [00:37:05] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:05] That's a magical thing in the sort of global difficulties, I guess, if you will, around how do we do really, really high-quality teaching and learning.

Irma de Vries: [00:37:17] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:17] That two hours, man, it is not lost, right?

Irma de Vries: [00:37:22] Yeah. Well, for the first part, I guess, well, we really believe that the people who know how to use the material best are the teachers themselves. So, we offer these collections in our website. We have something that's called Rijks Studio, which is, our whole collection is online and you can look it up on the website. But we also make selections for teachers so they can use and we give them tools and questions so they can use that in their own practice, engaged with to the way they would like to use it in their classroom, for example.

Irma de Vries: [00:37:57] For the second part, as far as the escape game goes, I think, yeah, we had a couple of learnings that were important to us. And one of the things that was most important to me as an educator is that I really had to keep in mind that I didn't need to educate too much because the experience that it was about that people had a fun experience with each other, a fun experience with each other in the museum. And it was not about making them learn about this painter, Torrentius, or making them learn about Rembrandt, it was about them interacting together, with each other and with our collection.

Irma de Vries: [00:38:38] And I really firmly believe that people really remember more than you think, even though you don't really impose these lesson goals in your program. So, to balance sort of substance and entertainment together, I think that was a challenge and also a learning for me, that, yeah, to be confident that people will take a lot longer way into their positive experience in our museum was most important. What I found really interesting is that the story and we had thousand objects in the museum and they all have wonderful stories, but the story that is mysterious and that makes you wonder and makes you question things, that's the story that you need if you want something if you want to make an escape game, experience yourself. So, the story is an important factor as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:31] Absolutely. And what an engaging story it is. So, you did a fabulous, fabulous job. So, thank you so much, Irma, for spending some time with us and sharing the story of the escape game. So, we will post the resources on the website that goes with the episode when we let it go. So, I hope lots of people visit you online after they hear your story. So, thank you again for joining us today.

Irma de Vries: [00:39:59] Yes. Thank you so much. It's wonderful.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:03] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media at Annalies Corbin. And join me next time as we stand up, step back and lean in to re-imagine education.