



Riley Andrews

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Annalies Corbin: [00:00:16] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:50] So, on today's episode on Learning Unboxed, I am super excited because we are going to have a conversation with a kiddo that I have known now for, oh, I don't know, three, four, maybe years longer than that. And we're going to talk a little bit about a student's journey, those big transition points that are always a big point of conversation in many schools, and many, many communities, and in many families, too. And these transition points are really super, super important as we sort of consider a student's journey. And so, joining me today is my good friend, Riley Andrews. So, Riley, thank you for joining us.

Riley Andrews: [00:01:31] No problem. It's my pleasure.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:34] So, just a bit of background for our listeners. So, Riley, I met Riley when she was in the sixth grade and Riley found herself as a sixth grader having one of these big transition moments where she had gone from a private parochial school into a STEM school. And that's not an easy transition. And the transition out of fairness to Riley from elementary into middle school or junior high, depending on where you are in the world, both those are tough transitions anyway. And I would imagine, Riley, that it's particularly tough when you go to a completely different school. So, I'm going to start with just a little bit of conversation around sort of what was that like for you. But more importantly, share with us a little bit of the decision to go from one school to another. Why would you do that?

Riley Andrews: [00:02:26] Well, honestly, it wasn't exactly my choice to switch schools. My mom had a lot to do with it because my private school was very expensive. And since it's just my mom and me, she is like, you can stay here for like two more years, but then you'll have to go to a public school, because we couldn't afford to go into the feeder school, the private feeder school. So, she was looking into it, and she found Metro, and she was like, oh, this is interesting.

Riley Andrews: [00:03:03] It's like a lottery-type school. And so, she was like, okay, I'll go ahead and like put you in. I had no idea she would put me in. So, when she told me that my fifth grade year in the summer, she was like, when she said, oh, yeah, you're going to be switching schools this year, I was not very pleased at all.

In fact, I was very angry, because I was like, I didn't even know what STEM was. So, I was like, what do they do? Do they just like play on computers all day and like do stuff like that? And she's like, no, it's like, it's all about like sciences, and maths, and all that kind of stuff.

Riley Andrews: [00:03:45] And I was like, oh, pity, because math has never really been my strong suit. So, I was very hesitant. And then, actually going in, we actually did the tour in the summer like two days before the school year started. And I was like, oh, this place is interesting, because it was a lot smaller and it looked like an office building. And I was like, I remember, I fell in love with the chairs, because we have like all these chairs. I was like, oh, this is kind of cool. So, I eventually got used to it, but sixth grade year was definitely very, very tough.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:28] And I met you, Riley, when you came, so the school the Riley's talking about is actually a partner school, and a school and residence partner with the PAST Foundation. We talked about Metro school and this program many, many times. But part of it is because we have this fabulous access and this partnership with the school, so we get access to lots of students, lots of teachers. And we utilize a lot of opportunity, if you will, to experiment, we're not supposed to experiment on children, right, Riley?

Riley Andrews: [00:05:01] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:01] But we do experiment with children. And what I mean with the with part is in collaboration very deliberately, by design, work with students to co-design and develop programming together. And so, I met Riley, because Riley as a sixth grader, went from her metro school, and then we had an after-school STEM program called the Innovators Club, which we still run in non-COVID times. And it's a wonderful program. And the purpose of the program for our listeners is that we want to be able to have a small group of dedicated kiddos like Riley and her colleagues, and we want to be able to bring in program ideas.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:47] So, in other words, if I was going to do a really cool either after school, or summer program, or an extension, or maybe even something that will end up inside of a classroom someplace, whether it's a STEM school or otherwise, but we want to design, develop, and field-test these programs with real kids, with real teachers, and a real learning environment, but more importantly, we want to make sure that the kids involved actually help us design appropriately. And so, that was the environment in which I met Riley.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:17] And so, Riley, could you talk with us just a little bit? You don't have to give a whole bunch of examples, but I know you participated in the years that you were in the Innovators Club in a number of different, of these pilot experiences. And you got to learn a variety of different things that hopefully we're enhancing in the work that you were doing over in school, but oftentimes, you got to try out and do some things that you aren't doing in school at all. So, tell us a little bit about why that experience was useful or valuable to you as you sort of make your way through middle school, because middle school is not easy for anybody?

Riley Andrews: [00:06:54] Well, I really, really liked Innovators Club. I like all the people and I love the teacher, Ms. Ashley. She was amazing. She still is amazing. And so, we did a lot of stuff. Like I remember specifically this one time, we did like it's a Goldberg type.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:16] Rube Goldberg, yeah.

Riley Andrews: [00:07:16] Yeah, we did those. And I loved those, because we had to design them, and we like drew valid stuff, and we had to get all the supplies, and then we would test them, and you could see everyone's. And I think that really helped with design challenge at school at Metro, because we have a lot of

time to have to build models there. And you have to go through the design process, and like brainstorming, and all that type of stuff. So, I was already kind of accustomed to it like by being in Inventors Club before we even did a design challenge at the end of the year. So, I was like, oh, I'm already a pro on this, I don't need the teacher's help as much as everyone else does. So, I thought that was really helpful. And yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:04] So, you are a fearless flyer because of the experience?

Riley Andrews: [00:08:07] Oh, yeah. It definitely, definitely helped me.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:09] And that's one of the primary intents of the program, is to really make sure that we can build up or scaffold students, and also, to provide some support. And you, very bravely, and I want to thank you for bravely stating that math was one of the things that is not necessarily your strong suit. And it was a little bit scary for you. And I do remember this, because one of the things that we built into the Innovators Club, and that's not really what this piece of the program is about, but I really am hoping that you'll be able to sort of share how some of the scaffolded pieces that we built into the program are really sort of helping you with your dreams and your aspirations, which we're going to come to in just a minute.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:49] But let's talk a little bit about the math piece, because one of the things that we recognize that for students to really get the most out of the notion of being active designers inside of an experience or opportunity for students, for themselves, and for other students is that we make sure that any of the things that you're uncomfortable, or insecure, or unsure about, that we scaffold you to build that foundation to make it very, very solid.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:17] And so, one of the things or one of the experiences that I know I witnessed Riley have repeatedly inside the program was working directly one on one or even in small groups with Ms. Ashley, who she referenced a minute ago, Ashley Price, who runs the Innovators Club program, and to get help, in Riley's case, with math. But whatever subject the students showed up with saying, hey, I need some help, there was a dedicated amount of time every day to ensure that you got the supports that you needed. And it was almost sort of a live wraparound tied to your ability then to co-create programming. So, talk a little bit, because it was more than just tutoring, yes?

Riley Andrews: [00:09:59] Oh, yes. I think so. So, pretty much, it kind of started, we called it like homework time or like that kind of thing, but I really feel like it's more than that, because like it helped me with my homework for sure, because-

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:16] We didn't want any kid to go home with homework if we could help it, right? Because we want you to engage in your family, right? Absolutely.

Riley Andrews: [00:10:22] So, it helped in my homework for sure, but I think it definitely helps with like activities and like that we were doing that specific day, and like the design process as a whole, and like the math side of the engineering, I guess, you could call it, of like the activities we were doing, it would make it feel like—so, one activities we did was like Minecraft and we had to like build like a whole building or whatever.

Riley Andrews: [00:10:51] And sometimes, you wouldn't know how many blocks you need, and you don't want to just sit there and just keep pressing, like add more, and more. So, if you could do the math in your head and type in, like I need 24 blocks for the foundation or whatever, then it made it a lot easier. So, that's just like a tiny thing. But like I definitely think it helped, like you said, build that strong foundation.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:15] Absolutely. That's really important when you're in a school like the one that you're in, because many of the STEM schools—and this program is about more than just STEM schools, but we do talk about them a fair amount. And a fair number of specialty schools, whether they're STEM or art, or others, they're often accelerated programs, and that is definitely the case. I thought Riley's eyes for our listeners who were not watching on the video feed, Riley's eyes got really big.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:42] She's like, oh, my gosh, yes. It's an accelerated program with the idea being that you can complete partially through middle school. But certainly, in your first few years of high school, the goal is to get as many students as possible completely finished with at least the majority, if not all, of your high school graduation requirements, those state requirements, so that as juniors and seniors, you can move into these accelerated career awareness pathways.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:11] And the idea there is that we want students while they're still in high school, before the stakes get too high, especially from a financial standpoint of paying for college and all these other things, you get to try potential careers out, so that when you actually do start taking college credit, that you have a path, and you've got a plan, and you're ready to roll, right? And so, Riley shared with me that she is very interested in health sciences, and health care in particular.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:40] And I love this. She's already chosen her university, which we're not going to say because we're in the wrong state for that. But she would like to go study pediatric surgical nursing. And that's an ambitious pathway, right? But the acceleration, come on, because I want to talk a little bit, because again, we're back to talking about another one of these transitions, because you move from that middle school experience like many, many other kids, but you're in an accelerated program, and now, you're transitioning from middle school into high school into an early college high school with that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:13] So, let's talk a little bit about that transition point. It's much easier, you didn't change schools this time. This is a small school environment. However, the transition is still a fairly substantial one. So, talk to us a little bit about that experience for you. What was tough about that? Let's start with the hard part, and then we'll get to the fun stuff.

Riley Andrews: [00:13:34] Well, first, I would like to say, it is much easier coming from the middle school side going to the high school side, because I do not think that if I came from the school I was previously in straight the high school, I would survive, because it is very difficult, and it chews you up and spits you out. It really filters through like delete, I would like to say. But it is very difficult. My freshman year of going from eighth grade to freshman year wasn't super duper hard, because the structure was the same and my class wasn't super difficult yet.

Riley Andrews: [00:14:15] But I did notice a very big transition from freshman year to this year, because my classes are a lot harder, it's a lot more homework, a lot more spending time, which is kind of hard to balance, but I'm doing it. So, I would say, and then you have like—you're trying, like you said, since it's very like fast-paced, you have to keep it moving. Like you don't want to sit on anything too long, so you've got to get your stuff done.

Riley Andrews: [00:14:45] So, I would say like trying to get my stuff done and have good grades, because you do have to maintain that if you want to move on, because that's just step in school since it's mastery. I would say that's difficult, like saying, keeping up with the mastery while still trying to go fast, because you want to learn all the stuff, but you're also like super excited, you're like, oh, when can I get in these pathways and do what I actually really want to do? That was my thing. I really want to do Bodies, so I was like, oh, I need to hurry up and just get all my credits done.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:22] I hear that from kiddos a lot, right? They're very, very excited to move from the freshman and sophomore year, sort of let's get all these credits taken care of and move into the pathway that I'm interested in. And a couple of things, Riley, that you just mentioned. So, the first one is I'm thrilled to hear you say that the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade at your school was not as stressful as you thought it would be.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:50] But I would also like to point out, Riley, that I think that part of the reason for that, and correct me if I'm wrong, please do, but I think part of that is you had a really solid foundation, because the reality is, even as a freshman, you went into a fully accelerated program. And again, I'm thrilled that it felt that way to you, from the outside looking in, what I can tell you is the world watching what you're doing, and thinking, oh, my goodness, that's a lot of stress on this child or any child participating in that program, and yet I think one of the reasons you said, well, it wasn't so bad, is because you were prepared for that.

Riley Andrews: [00:16:27] Yeah. I would definitely say, for me, I was kind of one of the few, because I knew some of my friends, they were like super, super stressed. And I was like, guys, chill, we've done this, we've been through this. But they were like still, but I'm just kind of a chill person. I don't like to stress too much, but I definitely saw some kids, like you said, it was a very hard transition for them, but yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:52] Yeah. And it can be. That's absolutely a fair statement. So, let's talk a little bit about the pathway opportunity, because I do hear that frequently from students. They are so excited to be able to get into that pathway moment. And Riley mentioned something called Bodies, which is the Metro Early college High School pathway that's housed at the PAST Innovation Lab that's all about health care, and health care sciences and careers. And it's a whole array. And it's one of five programs, pathway programs, that currently exist at the schools for the opportunity to be able to move into that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:32] So, just to give our listeners a bit of context, when you're talking about Bodies, we're talking about a program, not a horrific experience in terms of those types of things. So, Riley, you haven't started that program yet, and partially along the way, in the late spring of your freshman year, and certainly, all now through your sophomore year in this expanded accelerated program, a global pandemic hit the world. So, I know. Yeah.

Riley Andrews: [00:18:04] Yes, it did.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:04] So, let's talk a little bit about the experience with managing all of that inside of what largely is a virtual-only environment. So, share with us a little bit about that, because last year, before the pandemic hit, and in the state of Ohio, most of our schools shut down mid-March and most of them did not reopen for the rest of the year. Summer was not the summer we had. And then, again, you started right back where you left off in virtual and you're still going into that space.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:40] So, let's start with, how do you think the—there's nothing that we can do about this. We have zero control over a global pandemic. And I don't want to get into the nuts and bolts about the application of a particular school. I don't necessarily think that's fair, but I'm really, really more curious, Riley, about your experience, just sort of as a student inside of the pandemic. There's a lot of chatter all over the media about kids being left behind, kids really struggling, and yet you hear stories of kids still succeeding and you hear a variety of different sorts of things. And so, I want to know, Riley, what's this been like for you?

Riley Andrews: [00:19:18] Well, some parts have been difficult, but I would definitely say, it hasn't been as tough as probably some of the other kids who have had different other schools or something, because Metro,

we have never had snow days. We've always had virtual days, which is like, well, exactly what we're doing now.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:41] So, you've got to practice long before the pandemic.

Riley Andrews: [00:19:43] Yes, long before. So, like all through sixth grade, they would have these like snow days, which I did not particularly like. We didn't actually get the day off. We still do homework, but they were like shorter classes, kind of like now. So, that definitely helped, because I didn't feel as unprepared as I probably would have felt if I was like in a public school, where this is all new to everyone.

Riley Andrews: [00:20:12] But I would definitely say, like I said before, math has never been my strong suit, so I did find some challenges like learning particular topics such as math over the computer, because you don't have that hands on, and like the teacher can't really like—if you don't have a camera, if your program doesn't have a camera, they can't really see what your facial expressions are. And like they can't tell kind of what you're thinking, and like we do warm ups and stuff, so the teacher can't walk around and see your progress, and be like, oh, you need to fix this or something like that.

Riley Andrews: [00:20:54] So, it's definitely lacking in the social aspects, like how the one on one and that type of thing, but it hasn't been all bad because I guess you have more time for homework. So, like they give us more time for sure, but I would definitely say it is a struggle like if you're not super determined or like don't really know what you're doing yet and that kind of stuff to like get motivation. That's really the hard part. You got to get motivation to actually want to do your work and do that kind of thing.

Riley Andrews: [00:21:33] So, that's something hard. I'm not going to say that I'm always motivated, because when it comes to math and other certain things, I'm definitely not. So, I would definitely say, that's probably one of the hardest parts. But I feel like, like you said, you keep mentioning the foundation, I feel like I really had a strong foundation, so I didn't feel as unprepared or unwilling to do this. But I was kind of looking forward to like last year, last summer when it first started, I was kind of hoping we would go back to school, because like you definitely lose, like I feel like I'm losing some of my social skills. I'm like, this is kind of awkward when I talk to people, but I think it's going to get better.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:17] Yeah. Well, we hope, globally, that it's definitely going to get better and that we're going to be moving through. But that was a tough transition since we're talking about all these different sorts of transition opportunities and you're getting ready to gateway. And for our listeners, basically what that means is that Riley has, by the end of the spring, she will have completed the necessary high school graduation requirements in Ohio to be ready, deemed ready both academically, socially, emotionally.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:51] There's many components that go into the determination around readiness. It's not just completing some credits to say, Riley's ready to move into this career pathway experience. And in her case, the Bodies program, which is about health care, and as part of that, to start taking her first collegiate credit. So, let's talk a little bit about that, because while you've demonstrated mastery and that you're ready to make this transition on paper, your transition, I would argue, is a little bit different than lots of kids, because for the most part, of a two-year period of time where you would be prepping and getting ready for that, you weren't sitting back, to what we were just talking about, in a regular class.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:38] And Metro is a public school, so I just want to clarify that for our listeners. Metro is a public school, but it is a public specialty school, a STEM school. But that part's neither here nor there in the sense that your prep time has been during a global pandemic in a virtual world with all these handicaps in

many ways. And I've heard from numerous students that the self-motivation piece, it's tough, right? My parents are working. No one's here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:09] I don't have that teacher standing there with me all the time. I don't even have my friends easy access encouraging me to be better or to stick with it. And so, how are you feeling about this upcoming transition, opening a course that next year, we are fully in, we are, in fact, getting ready to move into some hybrid learning for the spring. So, the hope is that for many students, they at least get back on campus to some extent, remains to be seen what it will fully look like, but how are you feeling about this upcoming transition into the post-secondary piece of your high school experience, Riley?

Riley Andrews: [00:24:49] This one, I'm actually very nervous, but I'm excited. But I'm also very nervous, because like you said, it's not high school or middle school where the stakes aren't—I mean, they're not super high, but they're still pretty high, like you still want to do good and stuff like that. So, I'm definitely really nervous about that. Also, considering we're all online, I'm all online, we're all online right now, so that definitely makes it difficult to like prepare and like know all the things I need to do and make sure I have all my stuff. Like not even like credit-wise, just make sure I have all my ducks in a row.

Riley Andrews: [00:25:29] And I'm definitely hoping that by the time fall semester comes that we'll be in person, because I don't know if I'll be as successful as I hope for all online, because I'm very hands on. That's one of the things I loved about like Innovators Club, and that type of stuff, and like the design process, and that kind of thing. I'm very hands on and I'm very one on one, I'm that type oriented, because I like to make sure I know what I'm doing. And I don't want to just flail pretty much. So, I'm definitely hoping that we're going to meet in person during fall, or spring, or whatever. So, that's definitely going to be tough if it's not, for sure, because it's not like high school or anything.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:18] Yeah, it has been tough, and it has definitely been tough. And it's tough to be in one of the learning lab or the pathway programs, all virtual, all remote. For my listeners, my son is also in the same school with Riley. He is a year ahead of Riley, so he's a junior, fully in his pathway program, and it's not easy, right? Because these programs are intended to have an awful lot of full-on experiential opportunities out and about in the world, experiencing the field of the career that you're tapping into, and they're also intended to be very, very hands on and very, very collaborative.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:01] And so, although that's all been achieved in the virtual environment, it's definitely not the way you would choose to do it for most folks. So, Riley, as we sort of wrap up the program here, as the powers that be out in the world, whether they be parents, or teachers, or community leaders, policy makers, thinking about some of the long-term impacts, both positive and negative. Because we talk a lot about the whole virtual learning in the pandemic, and the negative impacts, and there are many, many of them, but it hasn't entirely been all negative, because there have, in fact, been some really positive innovations that are coming from everybody's school.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:48] Teachers and administrators are working really, really hard to figure out how to do learning differently in that environment. And we recognize that there are many students all across the US and around the world that just virtual hasn't worked at all because of access. And that's a whole another conversation that we're going to have on the program. But, Riley, if you were to sort of step back, and say, what's one big giant takeaway that was positive for you as part of this sort of pandemic transition that you never planned to be part of, what might one of those positive attributes be? Because we want to end the conversation talking about those positive outcomes. What do you think?

Riley Andrews: [00:28:30] Absolutely. Well, it's definitely, it is not all of bad. I would say I really like having a lot of time and I really think that the teachers who are teaching right now, all teachers, have been very helpful by like opening themselves and making it so students can contact them. So, I would definitely say that it's a super positive thing, because even in school, I don't think they were as contact or as willingly wanting to help as they are now. So, I would say everyone's attitudes being changed would definitely be a positive thing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:18] Yeah, absolutely. That's good to hear that that was such a positive impact. So, Riley, I want to thank you very much for spending a few minutes with us today to have this conversation and share with us a little bit about your K-12 journey, your sets of transitions since middle school, and sort of the impact of that journey has had on you, and we wish you the very best of luck making it through the rest of this academic year as you work towards your gateway in the spring. So, thank you for joining us today.

Riley Andrews: [00:29:53] Thank you for having me.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:57] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media @AnnaliesCorbin, and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.