



Rich Rosen and Annalies Corbin

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:00] For every single week for me, it is reiterated in the conversations that I get to have with these amazing people that are doing amazing things that may or may not be the way that I would imagine that they could or should be done, right? And yet, they're brilliant.

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: [00:00:51] So, welcome today to Learning Unboxed. Today, we have a very special treat, because this is our 100th episode of Learning Unboxed. And to celebrate 100 episodes, we're having a bit of a reversal and a mic takeover. So, the PAST Foundation's Board Chair for a number of years now, the wonderful Dr. Rich Rosen, is going to be taking over the mic and he is leading this interview today. So, this should be fun. So, Rich, welcome to the program.

Rich Rosen: [00:01:23] Thank you. Thanks for having me back. I've enjoyed listening. I've enjoyed being part of one a long, long time ago. Congratulations on number 100. That's a big milestone. So, we're all very proud of this podcast at PAST. And I'm thrilled to be the one to have a chance to, now, turn the mic on you and have a chance to ask you some questions.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:43] There you go.

Rich Rosen: [00:01:44] So, thank you for doing it. We've known each other a long time, but I'm sure I'm going to learn a few things about you in this process.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:51] We have, so I don't know why anybody wants to hear more about me or what I've got going on. But like you said, we are super proud of Learning Unboxed and we love the chance to highlight all the amazing things that are happening out in the world of education today. So, Learning Unboxed is a really, really passion project for not just myself, but the entire organization. So, yeah, absolutely.

Rich Rosen: [00:02:15] Truthfully. So, let's do this. Before we jump into some of the things that have happened on Learning Unboxed throughout the first 100 episodes, let's talk about you, and what has happened in your story that has influenced kind of who you've become? So, tell us a little bit about you and sort of your origin story. And then, what are the either experiences, or people, or events that have influenced the things that you find yourself doing now?

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:47] Wow. That's a heavy question there, Dr. Rosen. Origin story is a funny thing. And I think that there are lots of opportunity to reflect over time. And I think we all do that naturally as we get older, we have more experiences in life. But I think that there are likely several key sort of things for me that were heavily influential as it relates to me landing in the space I am in 2021 in particular. I think first and foremost is that I loved to learn.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:22] And as a little kid, I was very fortunate that I had a family that believed I could do anything I wanted to do. And for better or worse, they failed to point out. Sometimes, that might not be the best choice for you or maybe you want to think about something a little bit differently. In hindsight, maybe you would want to know that before you got too far down the journey.

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:44] But I think most important in all that was that love of exploration, which, as I went through my academic journey, I was that kid that was uber bored in school, so I tried everything. And again, my family was really supportive of that. So, I started taking college classes way, a million years ago, is how old I was, back before we had AP, or any of these other alternatives, or early college, all the things that we talk about on this program. None of that stuff existed, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:13] But my parents had the wherewithal to say, okay, well, let's go take some classes at the community college and things like that. So, I developed a very early love for community college and all the things that you could explore in that sort of venue, in that setting, and started taking classes. I think I was 13 maybe when I took my first college classes and just experimented along the way. So, that was heavily influential. And what it meant for me was that I tried a lot of stuff.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:40] I was that kid that most of the majors in college, I at least dabbled in them for a little while, trying to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. And I don't know that I necessarily fully have that solidified now, but it also meant that I spent a lot of time in school and a lot of time in college. So, multiple undergraduate and graduate degrees ultimately landing on becoming an anthropologist and an archaeologist.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:06] And for many, many years, for me, that was a tough road to get to, because I had this idea that to be an archaeologist, it wasn't a viable career option. I had an example in my family, an uncle who was an archaeologist. He was this kooky dude who showed up at the family dinner table with a brown paper bag full of these artifacts, and he would pull them out, and he would tell these fantastical stories. And I loved it. And I thought, oh, my God, this is so cool.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:34] And then, I looked at my Uncle Jim, who I adored, and think, he's just a kooky old professor kind of dude, but is that really a job? And it sort of occurred to me that it could be a job, and yet all the way through my collegiate journey, it was always classes in anthropology that I came back to, whether I was in pre-vet, whether it was physical science, whether I was studying chemistry. And again, I tried them all, not engineering, but I tried lots of other things.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:00] But that was the fun classes that I would take. I'd take these crazy hard classes that were really, really stressing me out or taxing my brain and my thinking, and yet I'd come back to an anthropology class. And what I discovered along the way is that I loved the human journey and I really loved having an understanding of all the different factors that came to play. And then, for me, I also loved archaeology and underwater archaeology, which is where I ultimately landed, because it was so interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, to use a word that we use at PAST all the time, meaning I had to take my entire team, the entire intellectual capacity of these great thinkers all around.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:43] And we had to go to the field together to do a thing or we wouldn't be successful, to ask the right questions, to have the right techniques, to understand all the science. And that was a huge influencer for me. And it's the basis then of the PAST Foundation in the sense that we wanted to create an ecosystem where you were immersed in that collaborative endeavor, and that you didn't have to know the answers before you got there, and that the journey was part of the discovery along the way, and that everything was very applied on a hands-on. And then, that sort of progressed.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:17] And then, I got to, quite frankly, meet people like you, like yourself, right? And so, when PAST decided to shift from a casual sort of, everybody had a day job in 2005 or '06 when we decided we needed a full-time operating endeavor and we needed a real lab in which to test things. That's when I met you, because you were so heavily involved in the start of what became the Metro early college STEM experience. And that was incredibly helpful as well, because I met like-minded people, who said, hey, we don't have the answer, but that's okay. Let's be collaborative and do this really, really cool thing.

Rich Rosen: [00:07:55] I remember those days well. So, thanks for picking those up. So, one of the things that happens at PAST and with all the folks that you have interviewed, there's often a common element of how they interact with their students or adults, whoever that it might be. And there's typically some sort of capstone event that happens. So, before we hop off of your back story, there were some other things I want to ask you about, are there some capstone things in your life that you think about from the time you wandered into archaeology and found the love of archaeology, did various projects and things? Were there any capstone activities, that are like, I think back to that, even now, that shaped my thinking or it did something for me that helped in the trajectory of the career?

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:56] Yeah. I mean, I think that's a great question. And it's hard to choose just kind of one or two. I mean, interestingly enough, for better or worse, certainly, when I was really sort of getting my flippers, we'll use that term, underneath me and sort of the world of underwater archaeology at the time that I was going through in graduate school, we were still a relatively small group of professionals around the world. And that is still, relatively speaking, a small group compared to other research sciences.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:28] But what it did was it meant that we all had to help each other. So, whether you were an expert in X, Y, or Z, whatever the project was going to be, if the call went out, you volunteered, because you're going to need those exact same professionals to come help you, because there just weren't enough of us to draw from. And what I can tell you from that is you very quickly became willing to say, sure. And you let go of, I don't know how to do that or I don't know what the expertise is going to be.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:00] And a great example of that for me was in 2003, I had the chance to work with a wonderful group of researchers with, at the time, was a company by the name of C&C Technology, they were working in the Gulf of Mexico. These were colleagues I had gone to grad school and they were doing deep water research in the Gulf of Mexico. And they stumbled across an anomaly on all the scans that were taking place to lay pipe in the Gulf of Mexico, first part of the oil industry.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:29] And they quickly decided, hey, the anomaly on these scans is the U-166, a German U boat. And then, the other anomaly over here, we think, is actually the vessel, the Robert E. Lee, that U-166 was reportedly to have downed during the middle of the war. Big, big, big piece of American and global history, and yet it was more than 6,000 feet down. And the team came to me, and said, hey, you're really passionate about the outreach and engagement component of the work that we all do, could you help us figure out how to engage the world in this research science?

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:09] And that part was the easy part, but the hard part was, how the heck do you do that from 6,000 feet beneath the surface? Right? And something on that scale, in that depth had not really been done before. And so, I think from a capstone standpoint, that was pivotal to me, because we just launched and we tried it. And it was a game changer for me, because it really set the stage for a couple of key things.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:34] One, that sort of fearlessness around saying yes, but two, embracing technology, and the rate and pace of change of scientific knowledge, endeavor, and understanding, because of the rate and pace of change of technology making it possible. So, suddenly, for example, everything we knew about physics and acoustics prior to, to some extent, we were able to do all the things that science only imagined, right? It's like the same sort of thing that happened when we actually were able to put men on the moon. We imagined that. We thought we had the understanding to do it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:11] But at the end of the day, until you actually try it, can we pull it off? Do we have all the pieces? That was really seminal for me. And it has placed into almost every decision, I think, that we've made and projects that we take on at PAST. I like to do things more than once, but I don't like to do them over and over again. That's part of my own leadership philosophy, is like, well, we've been there, done that. It's not that it's not worthy, but there are now others out there that have experienced it, too. Let them do that. Let's find that sort of bleeding edge space that we should be thinking about instead, because I think that's our sweet spot.

Rich Rosen: [00:12:42] Sure. And you can see that in the work that takes place. So, I'm going to switch gears now to talking about kind of the contemporary things that you're involved with and maybe some contentious things that I want to get some viewpoints on. First one is going to be about gender. And so, I spend a lot of my times in teaching. And many of my wonderful students are women. They have wonderful, wonderful ideas. And they're very accomplished in their own rights in the programs that we're involved with, doing tremendous things.

Rich Rosen: [00:13:22] And I see that even when I look across your 100 podcasts, I didn't do any statistics, but I would venture to say that there are more women than men in most of those conversations. So, the question, I'll default on that women are better at this than men, because I actually believe that. I actually believe that there's a role for all of us, but I think there's a really strong role for having women in leadership roles. But here's my question about change.

Rich Rosen: [00:13:54] We're in a situation where the dynamic is that to move from all of these wonderful sort of spot programs that work, they make a difference for the people that have the benefit of being able to be involved in, they change lives, but to make a more systemic kind of movement around those, it requires you to be you, and those like you to be in front of legislators, in front of policymakers, et cetera, in a world that is dominated by men and older men.

Rich Rosen: [00:14:30] And so, this is not a man versus woman question as much as it is a question about your instincts and advice about, what do you keep in mind when you are talking with an audience that is well-intentioned, but maybe out of date about what school is, and about what education means, and so on, so forth, but certainly, in their own right are interested in seeing things advance. How does the role of being a woman in that environment play into your calculus of how you have to talk to folks?

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:08] Yeah. That's a really intriguing question, Rich. Leave it to you. Toss that one out there. I think a couple of things. The first one is getting to the point of recognizing that when those conversations are taking place in the world of education, which is a sort of funny thing, right? So, I came to this

sort of from the back side, if you will, right? I started out as a research scientist, but I grew up in an environment surrounded by teachers. Both my parents were school teachers, aunts and uncles were school teachers.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:42] They were everywhere, right? And so, I spent a ton of time, and the running joke in the family is by force, of being in the midst of the design and development of what makes great teachers great thought leaders in that sort of space. And the reason I start with that is because when you have those conversations with these policymakers or these powerhouse folks, even in industry, most CEOs that I may go talk to and ask for funding, they're usually men as well, White men most of the time.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:17] And part of it is the recognition that those folks lend credence to you, because you're female, because you're talking about education. The majority of educators are women. We have this sort of backend notion that that is still women's work. And if you recognize the person sitting across from you maybe more than happy to hear all about the innovations. To your point, they want you to succeed, somewhere in the back of that mind, because we've all grown up in this environment.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:46] And you have to start by recognizing where people come from. And with the recognition of where someone comes from, you can have a better understanding of where they sit right now, and the way they want to engage and have conversations with you. So, when I'm wearing my educator hat, I'm perceived, because I'm a woman, in many ways, that I must have some knowledge because that's my background baggage, my cultural baggage, that whoever I'm talking to, and it can be an entire panel of folks, are going to have.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:13] The flipside of that is when I have the same conversation and I'm talking about STEM, even in an educational landscape, I have to remember and remind myself at some point in that conversation to be credible, having that piece of conversation. I have to make sure that my listener knows I'm also a research scientist. And when I don't connect those dots for folks, you can sort of see people struggle in that conversation. And I think it takes a little bit more effort to get everybody on the same page. But half the battle for me has been, quite frankly, being able to set the table for the conversation we're going to have with all the accoutrement that I need at that table so that all participants can engage in the meal we're about to have.

Rich Rosen: [00:17:58] Sure. And that's part of your cultural anthropology background, and your study of human nature, kind of study of cultures that helps you with that, and not everyone has that. And so, I wanted to get a sense of, sometimes, as any of us approach an education reform agenda, it comes from a brute force perspective. This is broken, must be fixed, must be fixed now. And that's a tough place to start a conversation. Let's talk about your conversations that you have had over the last 100 episodes or so. There's a couple of things in the scenes of them that I thought or in the meta things, I guess, that I wanted to ask you about.

Rich Rosen: [00:18:46] So, the first is that in almost every one, when you ask them the story of, so how did this come to be, it generally has some elements of passion, person that's really steeped in something that they want to get done, and a large amount of luck. And the luck part is not their own luck, but that they met somebody. It's generally a, I was doing this, have no idea this have anything to do with that, saw this person, this person showed me this, and then away I went. So, that's what I see when I'm listening to them. Is that a true depiction of what's actually going on in these conversations and what you've been learning?

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:38] Yeah. That's an interesting observation. And I hadn't really thought about it that way, but I think that you're correct. And I would say that for me, if I were to sort of drill down and look at all those 99 conversations that have happened thus far, I would say that one of the commonalities is that when

you start digging into the origin stories, the passion pops up. But the other thing that almost always pops up is somebody will make reference to somebody that helps them get there.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:07] So, I think mentorship cannot be underscored. And I think that that's really, really critically important, especially when you're talking about evolving gender opportunities, that mentorship is really, really key. I mean, it's certainly part of my own story and success. But I think that in almost every single one of the episodes, you'll find that folks learned how to lean on others, right? Yeah.

Rich Rosen: [00:20:33] So, the second thing that is embedded in your stories is just the sheer wide variety of things that are there. And I think the message that one can take away from that is that there is virtually no environment that does not have a learning element in it, if you look for it, right? And it's not only that you can learn about STEM from music, or you can learn about entrepreneurship from this, or whatever, but it's more a matter of people who got ultra creative, these are things they already had.

Rich Rosen: [00:21:18] And so, I want you to talk a little bit about kind of your own message of, at times where the world is in little more open and people could come visit like a PAST, they could go to Metro, they could go to High Tech High out west, they can go to wonderful places, and these incredible things are going on, and then walk away being very intimidating about them, by saying, I didn't have one of those. And then, you see someone talk about a program with virtually no resources and they get incredible results. And so, I wonder how you set up the message for basically encouraging everybody that they've already got what they need to succeed.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:05] Right. I mean, I think-

Rich Rosen: [00:22:07] If that indeed is the message, by the way, if that indeed is-

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:09] It is.

Rich Rosen: [00:22:10] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:10] Yeah. And I think that part of it is, and I say this always in the intro to the program, is we've had, and very fortunately in the PAST Innovation Lab, and we've built that, and I say we, the board was so integral to making the decision, do we make this investment and build this thing? Right? And so, what is that thing? And the purpose of that thing was to show people what we had been talking about, what you, and I, and the world, and the experience that we've seen is that, to your point, not every place has X, Y, or Z, but there's great innovation happening everywhere all the time.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:44] And yet, people would come to this amazing place, and I would hear at some point in the course of the tour, the conversation, invariably, I would hear it every single time, well, such and such is broken, education is broken, or this, or that, or we can't, we don't have the resources, or our kids can't, or they won't, or take your pick, right? And the premise of Learning Unboxed was to say, that's really not true, right? These are case studies of the amazing things that are, in fact, happening.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:15] And they're happening with a variety of resources. They're happening on a shoestring. They're happening with very limited people and places in play, and yet that's still one of those components that we don't have any difficulty reaching in and grabbing great examples. And so, I think that part of it is just helping folks get comfortable in recognizing that no matter where you are, you've got entities, organizations, innovators in your ecosystem, you just have to be brave enough to tap into them to say, hey, I

want to do a thing and I'm not an expert in that thing, and that's okay, and yet it will make a difference in the lives of kids.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:57] And that's the other thing that I see that's really common in every single one of these stories. And you tapped onto it. By the time we get to the point we're doing an episode of Learning Unboxed, these folks are incredibly invested, right? Because they're so passionate. And almost every single one of those stories, they will also talk about that it took a lot of work to get there, and yet that work wasn't a scary thing to do. It started out maybe scary for some folks, but the reality, there was joy in the journey. And the outcomes are phenomenal, right?

Rich Rosen: [00:24:27] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:27] They're phenomenal. Yeah.

Rich Rosen: [00:24:28] So, how do you feel that good ideas can spread? And if you think about the ecosystem of an educational environment, we've got innovators like the ones that you talk to. We've got passionate advocates, and mentors, and so on. Let's talk about if there's a pivotal role of some class of individuals inside of the ecosystem, who hold the keys to being able to go from these great ideas, and these affiliations of wonderful folks and great results, what's missing and what message? What's missing? Who are the people that need to be in that missing seat or seats? And what do you want them to do?

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:26] Yeah. That's an interesting question. I think a really powerful one as well. And so, I don't even want to stop and think about this one, and then I'm going to credit you actually, Rich, to teaching me this. I think one of the single most important aspects in all of this is recognizing that there is incredible power in building networks, right? And through those networks, this notion of public/private partnerships that come to bear on whatever it is that you're talking about that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:55] And then, the third piece that I would add to that. So, network, public/private partnership is the individual actors that are most missing from these endeavors that I've looked at and thought about or had the opportunity to rub up against, is we fail, I think. We fail to recognize the incredible value and insight that is available into our groups of newly retired people. And here's the reason I say that, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:27] And education is a great space to think about that, because we will often say, hey, we've been doing X, Y, or Z for the last 20 years, last 50 years, right? This is how we've always done it. This is how we've always trained folks. This is how we've always assumed the meaning of school. This is what the set of outcomes are. This is the order in which you should take your classes, right? And yet, none of that translates, in most cases, to any type of real world experience that's going to come after you've left that initial ecosystem, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:56] And yet, within these transitional points, you've got these masses of humanity with an entire career worth of understanding and of experience. And it goes beyond mentorship. And really, in my mind, it keys into the fact that if we were to let go of what we think teaching and learning should look like, and we embrace the opportunity to teach and learn, then suddenly, in my mind, that is a game changer.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:24] And you've got people, a whole host of people from a variety of backgrounds, and life, and places who all you have to do is ask or show them, hey, there's that value in this thing that you know that, suddenly, they can tap into. And they are often a game changer, because they come with a completely different set of experiences around helping evaluate the quality of the questions you're trying to answer or the outcomes you're trying to sort of get at. And I think that that is an untapped resource.

Rich Rosen: [00:27:58] Yeah. And in that vein, how would you advocate, not just for yourself, as I've seen you do this very well, but how would you advocate to help others make this case? Education is a very evidence-based profession, more so than pretty much any other one in terms of the adherence it has to evidence and how long it takes that evidence to occur, which means that you can look at something. You and your colleagues at PAST can look at something, and you can say, look, we don't even have to measure this, we know that works, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:33] Mm-hmm.

Rich Rosen: [00:28:33] You just have to sit here for a day and watch, and you'll know that whatever is going on, it works. And then, someone will say, but how do you measure that? Right? Because if we want to go from 100 people doing this over a summer to 60 million students across the country, not everybody has the same recognition of quality and so on, nor the same resiliency to take something that doesn't look like it's working and quickly kind of make an adjustment, so that children, and kids, and young adults are still learning. So, how do you tell or convince someone that there's a new kind of evidence, and it's not the kind of evidence that we historically think about in education and that we need to be turning our heads towards that?

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:25] Yeah. That's a hard one, right? Because to your point, education is driven, quite frankly, by the data that shows positive growth or impacts, right? So, we think pre, post, or things, standardized testing, take your pick. It doesn't make any difference. And all of those things are needed and necessary. So, there's no reason to say, hey, we need to get rid of those. But I think that the question in my mind really becomes a scale, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:54] How do you convince community that if we let go of those things that we traditionally measure and we ask the community to instead think about the way, the passion, the engagement, the inspiration, just the want and will to be the learner in these new or reimaged sort of environments, that if we can instead measure that the kid wants to go to school every single day? Right? I can't talk to you right now, mom or dad, right? I got to go.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:28] The bus is here, because today, we're going to be mapping cicadas, and we're going to use that really cool app that was on television last night, that the news reporters were talking about. We're going to help those scientists at the University of such and such with their data. We've got to get to that point. But to your point, that's a really tough space to be, because it asks folks to be willing to allow for the wobble. And we do talk about that a lot at PAST.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:58] We say, look, any time you're going to transition to a completely different way of thinking about whatever. And it can be about your product design. It can be about teaching and learning. It can be about anything else. There's a moment where failure, you're living failure, right? You're experiencing it. It's not working the way you think it should or you're not sure you're getting the results that you have, right? And you have to be willing to plow through that moment, that moment of uncertainty and unknown to get onto the other side.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:28] And for me, that moment comes every time I have the opportunity to watch a kid, a student, a teacher, or even an industry partner who's participating stand up, and tell the world what they know or what they just experienced, and you would never ask these questions again. But to your point, I think it's hard, because how do you do that at scale when what we've always known says, if I can't pass this test, I'm not going to be ready for the next thing? And what we're telling you is the test is important, it's a milestone for us, it's a guidepost, but it's not the thing that really matters. That's hard.

Rich Rosen: [00:32:13] So, let me ask you to react to a couple of sort of Rorschach-style questions.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:21] You're getting me in trouble for sure, aren't you, Rosen?

Rich Rosen: [00:32:24] Yeah. No, I promise I won't. The first one is, which are you more aligned with, kids know better what they need or adults know better what kids need?

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:34] Kids always, I'll always, just kids. Yeah.

Rich Rosen: [00:32:37] Okay. And then, the second one is education is broken and will not change or education is broken and it will be replaced by something else, as opposed to reform?

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:56] If I have to choose between those two, and those are the only two choices you'd give me, Rosen, I'm going to choose the second one. But I would say that education is not broken. It's just obsolete in its current iteration. It actually did everything it was supposed to be as it was designed. We're just living in a system that hasn't iterated, and quite frankly, hasn't iterated in a long enough time that we're to the point that the system has to have a complete overhaul, redesign, reengineer. It's not broken. It's just not what we need anymore.

Rich Rosen: [00:33:28] Right. So, as product engineers would say, the system's perfectly designed to do what it does, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:34] Yeah.

Rich Rosen: [00:33:34] It's just that no one's asking for the features that the product does any longer or it needs other features that they don't have.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:42] Yeah.

Rich Rosen: [00:33:43] So, let's talk about your guests over the last year and what you've learned from them. So, just in any way you want to think about the arc of the first 100 and what those conversations were like, what do you take away from those? What kinds of things should we know about what's going on in your head as you did interview one or one?

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:09] Yeah. I think that the thing that stands out to me the most outside of the pieces we've already talked about, the passion, and all of the journey components is in every single case, there was a stressor that showed up in whatever the ecosystem that that particular episode or the individuals I'm interviewing, we were there to talk about. There was a stressor that came to bear that became so unmanageable or so, I've got to get out of this, I don't want to do it this way, that there was there was something that pushed folks to think very, very differently, or to apply, or to build, or to imagine.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:50] And it's that stressor point, I think, that is there's so much opportunity to learn from that moment. And so, for example, as we all know, because we've just been living in the midst of this global pandemic, everybody involved in school, once the decision was made that we don't just stay at home and take a pause, thinking this thing will go away really quickly, but no, this is a long haul sort of opportunity for us, and so we have to somehow get back to whatever it is that we do. And whether it's a company, a school, a program, the National Park Service, take your pick. Everybody found themselves in that moment.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:24] And that stressor was, I can't survive, I can't continue to do the thing I do or that I'm supposed to be doing unless I make some kind of radical shift in the way I think about getting to whatever that is. So, that might be delivery and virtual instruction in a school setting, or think about all the different companies that no longer had customers that could walk into a storefront, or we can't even deliver stuff in the same way. Think about all the restaurants, and in every single time, I think it was that stressor in my mind that I think is the greatest. And even prior to the pandemic, every single story, there was a stressor there.

Rich Rosen: [00:36:05] Right. What's interesting to me, Annalies, about that, and I wanted to ask about COVID, but not to dominate our conversation, but to your point about each of these individual innovations that you've talked about with some of your guests, it had some nucleated points. Something happened. And either was like, we can't do it like that anymore, I must change, or some event pushed them to action.

Rich Rosen: [00:36:38] When COVID first occurred, and then it became apparent that everybody was going to get sent home, in the very beginning, you could argue that was one of the biggest educational stressors on the planet for a while. And you and your colleagues, and we all were in conversations about, in the early days, I remember people saying, this could be the best thing that's ever happened, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:02] Right.

Rich Rosen: [00:37:02] Because it's going to draw some awareness to, it's going to release the sort of the soft underbelly of what goes on in education. We're going to see what happens when we relax testing for a while, because we don't have the logistics to do it, all kinds of things like that. But this notion of this could be our moment, right? Because everybody's sort of looking at the same thing. Then, you fast forward 50 weeks or so in which, now, people had family members die, and fear of various things going on, losing their jobs, the whole meltdown of all things that took place.

Rich Rosen: [00:37:43] And it went from, this could be one of the best things that could happen to when the heck are we going to get people back into school, because they need to go back to school? And arguably, they do, they need to get back to some routine that works for them. But I'm curious, as a person that studies culture and has been down the road you've been, what's your sense of why it went that way? Why did we, as a world, as an educational community, as a subculture in that, go from being so excited in an odd kind of way of, this is our moment, let's innovate into this as much as we can, let's lean into this, and other things, to going back to what looks like a receding back into the old ways?

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:31] Yeah. I think that part of that is when something is new, I think that humanity has a tendency to embrace opportunity to innovate. It's not so scary yet, right? That's part of it. So, some of it is just this broad sort of fear factor. There's a lot of unknown, but I don't even know enough to be afraid of the unknown, right? And so, the mindset is I'm willing to see sort of what happens and to think a little bit differently.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:01] But I think that as time goes on, and certainly, in the conversations that I've had, it was really interesting, because if you look at the interviews I did in the early, so let's say a month, six weeks after the pandemic really hits, people are still very optimistic about the opportunity to be different and to come out on the other side, having used this as a mechanism to make some change I've always been thinking about, right? But I think as time goes on, people get weary.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:32] We are all collectively, as a planet, everybody is exhausted. There's been the highs and lows of this in every way you can imagine. It's different every place around the world, but to your point, there are these consistent things. And I think that when we get tired and when we just feel overwhelmed,

because of the tiredness of the entire thing that's happening around us, we have a natural tendency to fall back on the thing that we know, even if we know that's not what we should be falling back to.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:05] It's just human nature. And I think that the biggest push, if we were going to push folks to do anything, it's to say, let's stop talking about, I want to get back to normal, right? First and foremost, at least in education, I would argue, normal was not working well for all participants, right? There were great inequities that are going on in the world, because of the system we just talked about, right? The flipside of that, though, is there's some comfort in some of the normality.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:37] So, if part of the normality is I want to get as many kids back physically in schools as possible, great embrace to that, and step back, and let go of, but then we have to teach all the same content in the same way with the same participants, right? The opportunity isn't about not having kids in school, if having kids in school is deemed socially, emotionally, all these other things, uber important, the opportunity is, okay, then we can actually redesign, right? And I do think that that's some of it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:41:07] I think part of it is just the fear and weariness of it, because you can see that in the episodes if you tracked through them, right? Early on, people were very optimistic, and then you get in the middle, the folks, ah, we think this is going to happen. And then, the ones right now, as we're getting ready, we're a full year in, and we're talking about, are we even going to be able to put kids back in school in the Fall of 2021? Right. And lots of folks think that we will, but there's still a wariness and a weariness in those conversations.

Rich Rosen: [00:41:36] Right. I think there's another aspect, too, that was different about moving into the lockdown and this is our moment that belies, that it wasn't teed up in a way that you could actually do all that, and that is that we also separated the caring adults from the students, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:00] Mm-hmm.

Rich Rosen: [00:42:00] The point that even if you knew what you wanted to try to do, there were physical, logistical issues that made it so that the thing you would have liked to have tried to do and that you were probably ready to do would have been different. So, I think that makes a lot of sense as well. So, we're winding up on our time, so I'm going to close out my session portion, and then I'm going to let you have the last word since you let me have the first words. So, first, I want to thank you for letting the roles be reversed, so someone could have a chance to learn more about who is behind Learning Unboxed and the leadership of the PAST.

Rich Rosen: [00:42:51] I want to say on behalf of a whole community of folks that have worked with PAST in every different capacity, including being very intimately involved as a board member and a board chair, that the work you do is relevant, the work you, yourself, do as a leader in this field makes a difference. And we all thank you for that. So, much appreciated. So, let me let you kind of close out with any final words about kind of what the next 100 episodes will look like or anything else that you want to point us towards in the future.

Annalies Corbin: [00:43:27] Well, thank you very much, Rich, both for your time and for your very kind words. And obviously, the support and the mentorship over the years has been incredibly meaningful to me. And I guess one of the things that I would sort of close with as it relates to sort of the journey of PAST, certainly, the first 20 years and some of the things that I've learned through doing Learning Unboxed, these first 100 episodes, has really sort of tied to, there is so much to learn, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:43:59] And the irony, maybe or maybe not, depends on your point of view, for me is when we first started PAST and we were just really kind of experimenting with what this thing was going to be. And over time, it's morphed. We're getting ready to launch PAST 4.0 over the course of time. But for better or worse, in that early moment, one of the things that we said is that we wanted this institution, this organization to link learning to life.

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:24] And I think that as we've gone down the journey, that is a piece that has remained steady no matter what else has been happening with us, but people who have come and gone, the board members that have come and gone, the community partners that have come and gone, which happens in the life cycle of every single organization, is that linking learning to life. And the thing that for me that I have gotten, which has been a real pleasure through doing these episodes of Learning Unboxed, because I didn't really know what we were going to get when we started it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:52] I remember talking about that with the board, hey, should we do this thing? Should we invest in crafting this idea? And one of those pieces for me has really, truly been that there are so many ways to do and to do really, really well, and that idea that one size does not fit all, and we've always talked about it. And just for every single week for me, it is reiterated in the conversations that I get to have with these amazing people that are doing amazing things that may or may not be the way that I would imagine that they could or should be done, and yet they're brilliant.

Annalies Corbin: [00:45:30] And that, for me, has been a very, very rewarding personal and professional growth opportunity. Because I started in this whole journey as an anthropologist and archaeologist, I've no idea what I'm doing most days, right? And I think that from the standpoint of what's going to happen next with Learning Unboxed, certainly, is to explore more of that, especially as we come out of this entire global event that we've all—this crazy experiment one way or another that we've been participating in is to really reach in and grab those pieces that I think that we can learn some pretty powerful lessons, and examples, and inspiration from. So, that's where I'd love to see it go. So, yeah,

Rich Rosen: [00:46:16] Well, let's make it go there.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:17] Absolutely.

Rich Rosen: [00:46:17] So, thanks so much for letting me be part of this conversation.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:20] Yeah. Thank you for joining us today. Appreciate it.

Rich Rosen: [00:46:23] Okay. Take care.

Annalies Corbin: [00:46:26] 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.