



Steve Shapiro

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Annalies Corbin: [00:00:14] 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.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:36] It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system. So, for today's episode of Learning Unboxed, we are going to be having a chat with a very good and dear friend, who I've known for many years, Steve Shapiro, who is a veteran educator. Thirty-two years, in fact, which is-

Steve Shapiro: [00:01:03] I know. Makes me feel old.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:04] I'm not even sure what's the shame about that. That's absolutely awesome. And Steve has taught sixth grade through graduate school, but his main work and certainly how I came to know him has been as a high school teacher and a school reformer. And so, we are super excited to have Steve on the program today to really talk about his work. And so, Steve, welcome.

Steve Shapiro: [00:01:28] Thank you. It's great to see you, Annalies.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:29] Yeah. You as well. And I'm super excited, because this is actually the first Learning Unboxed that we have recorded since the evil COVID-19 came to the world.

Steve Shapiro: [00:01:39] Back in the world.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:39] So, this is the first one in person, and woohoo, that's super exciting, isn't it?

Steve Shapiro: [00:01:43] I'm thrilled to be here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:44] Yeah, absolutely. So, I really want to spend a big chunk of our time today talking about the way you think about this notion of school reform. Let's start with that. And I know we've got lots of stuff to talk about, but that's a loaded term for many folks. If you are a traditional teacher, it can almost feel accusatory these days, which is not fair by any stretch of the imagination, and that's really not what we mean

by that. What we're really talking about, really, has more to do with having a different type of understanding about the way kids learn, the way adults teach, and what the world actually needs from us as educators. So, what is this all about?

Steve Shapiro: [00:02:25] Well, I think if you start at the core level, the system that we have, and high school is where I've done most of my work. When I think about it, I mean, the high school system that we have, the curriculum was built in 1893, right? Committee of 10. This is almost a 130-year-old curriculum, the idea of a Carnegie unit, 1906. So, kind of the foundation, the building blocks of how we educate students in high school was designed over 100 years ago.

Steve Shapiro: [00:02:51] I mean, I don't need to tell you, but if you think about what the world was like over 100 years ago, it's not that there wasn't robotics and artificial intelligence, there weren't cars. I mean, there were no radios. And so, we have an education system that was designed in a really different time, and we have kids who are going into a world that's not only vastly different now, but it's becoming more different at an accelerating pace.

Steve Shapiro: [00:03:12] We're probably living through the kind of greatest and most rapid change of technology and of the way humans live in human history. And so, education reform to me is about thinking about, how do we prepare kids for that world that is changing so rapidly and that is so different even from the world that we grew up in? And how do we make schools responsive so that they're able to best succeed in that world?

Annalies Corbin: [00:03:35] Absolutely. And I think that that's a really critical piece here, is to say that it's not that it's broken, that we lead this program that way all the time. And I remember the very first episode, I got a lot of pushback about that. And I thought, awesome, that was the intent, because the intent is to say, look, it's not that it's broken, it's that it has become obsolete. And to your point, we're working on these systems that are in desperate need of updating and upgrading for the here, and the now, and the today. And that's the thing. It's about the moment now, it's not about the things we've done before.

Steve Shapiro: [00:04:12] Right. And for me, I think about that both in terms of content, and in terms of skills, and in terms of dispositions. And so, if you think about the way the world has changed, the kind of things kids need to know is different than it was before, the kind of skills they need, those are different, and the kind of dispositions that are going to help kids succeed are actually different. And so, in all ways, there's a chance for us to really reimagine, what does it look like to prepare kids for that world in this time?

Steve Shapiro: [00:04:41] And I think the hard thing is that we have all been trained in a system that we're familiar with, that's comfortable, and I think that the—I'm a big critic of the standards movement, but I think the standards movement has reinforced that old system and deepened it so that even teachers, as they think, well, I'd like to be more responsive to the world kids are living in, but I have to be responsive to this legislative push that's requiring me to go cover this curriculum and prepare kids for this test. And so, I feel like this is in no way a critique of teachers. I think teachers, in many ways, have their hands tied by a system that doesn't give them the freedom or the time, frankly, to thoughtfully re-examine what school can look like.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:21] Well, and it goes way beyond just the instructional sort of unit, if you will. And I do appreciate greatly you bringing up, this is not a criticism of teachers. That is not what we're talking about here.

Steve Shapiro: [00:05:32] Not at all.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:33] Not at all. And that is not the purpose of this program and I know it's not the purpose of your program. We're going to get into a little bit of the program that you do as well here in a moment. But it is really more of a conversation around recognizing that there is a system's misalignment based on everything that we're thinking about sort of in the world today, and how do we think about all of those pieces and those needs very differently?

Steve Shapiro: [00:05:59] And one of the things that really pains me when I look at it is that teachers don't have time to think about it and really engage deeply in this conversation, because they're just running from one class to the next, and the bell is ringing, you got to prepare, and then you got a grade. By the time the year's over, you're so exhausted, you need a break, deeply need a break. And then, the school year starts back up and you're right back at it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:18] And we start back with the exact same thing, is we have solved nothing and very little has changed.

Steve Shapiro: [00:06:24] So, I think we don't have a system that creates a lot of space or time for these kind of reflective, thoughtful, big picture conversations. Everybody's really got their particular job. They're dug in on it. They're trying to do their very best at it. And so, we're all doing the best of what we can do. But I sometimes say it's like the difference between improvement and innovation.

Steve Shapiro: [00:06:42] If you work in a buggy factory, you're building horse buggies, no matter how much you improve your horse buggy, you're never going to build a car. That requires innovation, but innovation requires stepping back and rethinking. But if every day, you've got a million parts to make for your buggy, when will you ever pull back and think about what a car could be?

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:00] And the answer is, absolutely, you're not going to do that. But we are in a really intriguing space, back to one of the things that you said very early on here, is the rate and pace of change today, because of technology, is something we have never seen on this scale on this planet, right?

Steve Shapiro: [00:07:21] Right.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:21] We've seen rapid innovations. We've got great historical knowledge of those moments when they've come, but the breadth and depth of that innovation is nothing that we've-

Steve Shapiro: [00:07:33] It's changing so fast that you can hear 17-year-olds say that they're like 10-year-old sibling, when I was your age, I mean, teenagers sound like old people were moving so fast.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:41] And they do. And I think that there's something to be said for that. And I also think that there is something to be said for taking a moment to pause, and whether it's politically correct or not, we're just going to put it on the table, and say, it's not, but I'm going to say it anyway, right? We have this great benefit that COVID brought to us, right? It was not easy and it's still not easy. There's a lot of suffering, and pain, and anguish going on in the world. We're still trying to crawl out from underneath this thing. But this moment provided, albeit not necessarily when we were looking for a moment to step back.

Steve Shapiro: [00:08:16] It was a disruption.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:17] It was an absolute disruption. And the crime and the shame is going to be if on the flip side of whatever that looks like from wherever you are in the world, we just retreat back to the corner we knew instead of retreating to the corner we hope for. And that's the true lift and that's the true moments, I

think, in the world of education, where true innovation can, in fact, happen. But it's on all of us to be able to get there. And I think that the bigger all of us to get there actually is the students.

Steve Shapiro: [00:08:54] Absolutely.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:54] And so, I want to spend a little bit of time digging in, because your program that you do, your podcast and your work with kids, is really, in many, many ways, and it's one of the things that I loved about the opportunity I've had to know you over the years, is around truly, truly understanding kids where they are and what they need. So, talk to us a little bit about the why or the approach that you take with that sort of mindset.

Steve Shapiro: [00:09:24] Yeah. I mean, I think back to when I was a teenager and it just drove me crazy when adults condescended to me, when adults told me, you will need to know this for some time in the future, when adults told me, oh, I know better than you. And I thought, I mean, I'm sure I respected my elders, but I was inquisitive and I was curious, and I thought that I had ideas, and I thought those ideas were at least worth engaging.

Steve Shapiro: [00:09:44] And I didn't always have to be right, but I didn't want to be told I was wrong before somebody had the conversation. And I think because I always felt that way as a kid, I've always thought and recognized that students are just young people. They have less experience, but they have the intellect, the capability, the possibility. And in fact, they have, sometimes, something we don't have, which is fresh eyes.

Steve Shapiro: [00:10:08] And so, sometimes, kids can bring something to a conversation or their ideas are even better than ours, because we're stuck with paradigms that we've already been conditioned to and we can't see beyond. And I think certainly, if you look at like the social justice movement and activism, LGBTQ, kids are so far ahead of adults in all this stuff. And so, I'm always interested in getting to kids and getting their ideas.

Steve Shapiro: [00:10:32] I mean, I wrote a blog post on my website that's kind of about this idea of like the bored teenager, and kids are like, oh, I hate school. And when the kids says, I hate school, adults often say, well, of course I hated school, too. It's like hating school is like normative. Like of course, you're a teenager. And I think, why don't we just listen to the kid and see what's not working for them in school, and maybe we need to be addressing or thinking about that?

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:52] It's a novel idea, right? Let's ask the question, why are you bored, instead of, oh, well, yeah, we have an expectation of you to be bored, which is exactly what that adult is saying with that type of response. Well, that's just part for the course. That's the way it's supposed to be. You're going to get through. We're going to move on. You're going to do something else later in life. Instead of saying, huh-

Steve Shapiro: [00:11:12] Maybe we should be rethinking this thing. And for me, it's particularly hard, because working 18 years in Mosaic, I spent so many years around kids who were lit up by school. They loved what we were doing. And you see it here at the PAST Foundation, kids were fired up. They're excited. They're talking about their work all the time. They're not talking about their grades. They're talking about the projects they're working on or they're learning. So, I know it can look different.

Steve Shapiro: [00:11:32] And so, I'm always thinking like, how do we engage kids in thinking about what school could be, what learning can look like. And I think the challenges that, sometimes, the force are fighting against isn't their teachers or their parents, but is the standards movement, kind of litany of state tests that are subjected to, the College Board. I mean, there are just all these external folks who are telling them what school

should be. And we, as teachers, oftentimes just have to be responsive to those things for all the reasons that we know.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:03] Right. We have, for many, many years now, forgotten the reason that we're on the journey, right? I think as adults, we do, in fact, get so wrapped up in the constraints, if you will, of the system itself that we forget as adults that the reality of it is we truly do have the power, the knowledge, and the experience to step back, and say, no more.

Steve Shapiro: [00:12:29] Right. It requires a little bit of rebellion on our part. I mean, Parker Palmer is one of my heroes. I love Parker Palmer, talks about the Rosa Parks moment, the moment when you say, no more, I won't stand for this any longer. And I think, for many educators, we have to have our own place where we say, no, this is not what's best for kids, I'm going to do what I think is best for kids. But oftentimes in the face of a system, that's not responsive to that, it's a risk for teachers to do that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:57] Sure. Are we at that moment?

Steve Shapiro: [00:12:58] I think for some teachers, for sure. I mean, even things like—and again, I hate to be a critic, but things like common assessments. So, you're a young teacher, you have some ideas of what you want to do, and it's like, no, every kid in all the courses across the school have to take the same test. So, you say, I have a great project idea, it's like, my kids are not going to do well on that test, so I have to teach to that test. So, suddenly, you're a little hand-tied.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:21] Yeah, you are a little bit hand-tied, but I am hopeful that we are at a different moment. Let's circle back around just a little bit and let's talk about sort of the, given what we've just been talking about, how do you convince, let's start with the kids, and then let's move to the families, and then think about the system, so how do you convince the kids that there's an alternative path to the way they think about and engage in their own learning?

Steve Shapiro: [00:13:51] That's a really interesting question, because I think one of the things that I found—At Bexley, my kids went back to Bexley, and so I lived in the community for a long time, is that many kids have really thought like, this is the system I have to play, this is what I have to do. And I think I've been disappointed sometimes that sometimes, it's hard to convince kids that they can do something that they'd rather do.

Steve Shapiro: [00:14:11] They feel like I have to do this. I just did a podcast episode with Emmy Haefner, and I called it A Letter to My Younger Self. And in this episode, Emmy looks back on the things that she thought she had to do, this is what I have to do, this is what my parents expect, this is what the community expects, this is what colleges expect, this is what everyone expects. And it's a really sad episode, but super poignant, I think, because it points out what I think a lot of kids are caught in, which is they want to be successful. They want to do well. They really are committed to being successful in the world. And the message that they've got is this is what you have to do.

Steve Shapiro: [00:14:48] And I think that sometimes we have to provide alternatives to kids within the system, because if the system says, this is what you can do, I mean, even if something like Mosaic, for many kids, it's like I have to leave the school, I'll have to go to some other place, that sounds like alternative and off. And so, I think if we don't offer alternatives for kids within the system, if we don't create options that are part of the school, kids will see those as kind of niche, and outsider, and dangerous or risky, even if the evidence shows that they're not.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:21] Right. And I think that there's a lot to be said for that. And I agree with you. I see like truth in that. I find it troubling, however, as you will probably know, right? I mean, given the fact that what we did here at PAST with The Innovation Lab was to say, enough of that thinking and let's instead create a new place where there is the shackles, if you will, that are often placed on innovation, can just be let go at the door.

Steve Shapiro: [00:15:54] And one of the things when I walk in this building and when I see, especially during the school year when things are happening, I think, more people need to come here to see this. More people need to say, oh, like it can look like that. Space can look like that. Collaboration can look like that. Students working on robotics stuff over here without being part of a class or a teacher, they're over there working on some project.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:15] That's a novel idea. And I do challenge folks when they come in the building, find the teacher, right? And depending on what's going on any given day, some days, it can be very difficult to find who you perceive to be an adult-

Steve Shapiro: [00:16:29] And you think that's a teacher, and it's like, oh, no, that's the head of a startup company that the kids are working with out of their office.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:34] Exactly. It's not anything that you think of from a traditional standpoint. So, let's continue the conversation with sort of the next big hurdle, right? So, on the one hand, if we can convince kids to let go of what you perceive, back to your student and her story, her story to her younger self, what does that conversation look like with the parents? Because oftentimes, and you even said it, she's going through her narrative, my parents' expectations were, my school's expectations were, not so much what I wanted, and hoped for, and dreamed about for myself is going to be sort of another category of conversation here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:18] So, what's the conversation with the parents and the family? Because we get a fair amount of push about that as well. Well, but my kid always gets an A. That's one of my favorite conversations. Well, we always get an A, when's the test, where's the syllabus, what are we doing on Tuesday? Who cares what we're doing on Tuesday? Why don't you ask, instead, what great thing did your kid have the chance to learn today?

Steve Shapiro: [00:17:44] So many things I could say about this. I would say, first of all, one of the things, I'll go from Mosaic to Bexley. In Mosaic, one of the things that we found was even if parents were a little skeptical at the beginning, what immediately turned parents around was that within days of kids starting the program, the kids were coming to dinner and talking about what they learned in school. It was the first time, it was like, oh, what did you do in school?

Steve Shapiro: [00:18:06] Nothing. It's like you didn't have to ask, the kids are like, oh, we had the speaker today, we do this thing, we're working on this. And so, I think when parents can see kids lit up about learning, they get it immediately. On the more macro picture, and I think in Bexley, first thing I would say is a lot of parents in Bexley already get it. I mean, that's why my position exists. I mean, there was a community, a lot of community input and a strategic plan, saying, we want this kind of opportunities for our kids.

Steve Shapiro: [00:18:29] We want our kids to have experiential learning opportunities. We want our kids to do internships. We want our kids to network and learn how to build social capital. We want our kids to partner with community organizations, and see what's out there, and break outside of the Bexley bubble. I mean, many parents in Bexley already value that, and that's why I'm here. So, in many ways, I feel fortunate to be in a community that values and supports this kind of learning for kids.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:52] But out of fairness, though, just for our listeners, because they're coming from all over the world, right? So, what Steve is talking about is a suburban community in Columbus, Ohio, called Bexley, but Bexley is a relatively privileged and affluent community that has the wherewithal. So, a high level of education of families. And I do think that that's an important distinction. It's not a limiting factor. That's not what I'm trying to suggest.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:21] But I do think in terms of being able to set the stage, it's a community that values education so much, right? And the hope, of course, is that all communities do. But we know that that's actually not the case, right? There's an equity issue tied to a lot of those components. But I do think it's important to recognize that if we can help communities turn the tide, where education is highly valued and accessible, that it makes the opportunity for more education that much easier to attain.

Steve Shapiro: [00:19:51] Yeah. But I would say it's a double-edged sword, because I worked in Reynoldsburg for the first half of my career, for 11 years, part of first third of my career. And one of the things that I found was in Reynoldsburg, we had a lot more freedom to do a lot more things with kids, because people were open to it. In Bexley, sometimes, one of the challenges is, are we victims of our own success?

Steve Shapiro: [00:20:09] We've always been good in the old system, so let's keep that going. So, there's a certain amount of tradition and history that says, we're already successful. US News and World Report says we're doing great, which is great, and we're proud of that. We're ranked number four in the state by—I mean, it's great. We're proud of that. On the other hand, we have to be careful to not say, well, we've already got it, we got this thing lit.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:28] Exactly. And I think maybe that was part of my point, is that part of it is that if you've got, if you will, a community that has a great value in that, they're going to be more inclined to support that, whereas if you have a community that is just really, really struggling to make ends meet, asking a parent to risk, I know that if my child goes through this process, they stand a chance of doing well in that test, which means that they stand a chance of graduating, which means they stand a chance of post-secondary.

Steve Shapiro: [00:20:56] Yes, or.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:58] So, right, that's a complicated conversation with the community. And that was really the reason I wanted to talk about this, is to say these are hard conversations and we've got to get to the point where we can get the community to have faith in us as educators, as innovators to say, let's try something new. And while we do that, I'm going to stand side by side with your child and with you to try this thing.

Steve Shapiro: [00:21:23] Well, one of the things that I would say, in Bexley, is we have—well, I think we have 27 AP courses and we have 700 students in the school. I mean, it's an incredible litany of AP courses we offer to kids. Many of our kids are taking four or five AP classes a year. We have many kids that graduate with more than 10 AP courses. And one of the questions I'll ask a parent or I'll ask a kid is, if you were a college admissions officer, and you saw one kid who had taken 10 AP classes, and you saw another kid who had taken eight AP classes, but had written a book, or had started a nonprofit organization, or who had built a business, which would be more interesting to you?

Steve Shapiro: [00:22:00] And if you can recognize that the one with eight who had done that thing is more interesting, and then you said, okay, imagine if one year, instead of taking two extra AP classes, you took two

study halls and you got all your work done at school or you finished school at the end of fifth period, and then you went to the internship, or you went to go work on your novel, or you go went to build your nonprofit.

Steve Shapiro: [00:22:19] I mean, think about how much time, you're talking about an-hour-and-a-half of class time, plus an hour, an-hour-and-a-half of study time. You've just created three hours a day you could commit during the course of that year to building something unbelievable, and really like individualized and recognizable to a university. And most kids will recognize and most parents will recognize that that project you take on independently will not only look better to a college, it will be more fun, it will be more engaging.

Steve Shapiro: [00:22:49] I have an interview in another podcast, with Duncan Johnson, who's one of our—just finished his junior year. He was going to school four periods a day, and then he was doing this internship with a company in San Diego that does immersive reality gaming technology. And I mean, they found his resume on Indeed, because he had done a previous internship. I mean like, who is this kid? All the other people in the internship are adults. There's just no question that any university would look at that kid, and go like, you did what?

Steve Shapiro: [00:23:16] In high school, you were doing what? So, he's doing four classes, great, he's got three APs, and the orchestra or something like that, and then he does this internship. And so, it's like it's not an either or conversation. And I think this is what I'm constantly trying to help parents think about it and kids think about it, it's not like should I do AP classes or should I do some powerful experiential learning? You should do both. And there's time to do both as long as you don't try to do too much of one or the other.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:41] Right. Exactly. Absolutely. There is that balance component of it. And I also think that helping families understand that post-secondary in the traditional sense is not for every kid. And that's okay. AP classes are not for every kid, and yet we have this sort of ethos, where we're constantly trying to push all kids to AP, all kids to IB, all kids to post-secondary. And if we do that, we're going to lose a tremendous amount of creativity and contribution from our students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:17] I also want to sort of make sure to ground our listeners. Several times, I've heard you mentioned the phrase Mosaic. And this is actually how I came to know Steve many, many years ago. And I have, in my own work, modeled many programs after elements of Mosaic, no question whatsoever. I learned from you. And that's a very, very powerful thing. So, help our listeners, tell us what Mosaic is and why it matters, because it was incredibly powerful for kids.

Steve Shapiro: [00:24:48] Yeah, very powerful. It's a humanities program for intellectually curious and highly creative juniors and seniors in high school. And we draw from 10 schools in the county. The kids come to us for half a day. They go to their regular school math, science, foreign language, music, art, something, and then they come to us to earn their language arts and social studies, their humanities credits. Completely project-based, completely transdisciplinary curriculum, all kinds of community connections, tons of guest speakers, field trips, no tests, no lectures, no tests.

Steve Shapiro: [00:25:19] It's all authentic learning. And we have served—I mean, the programs has existed for over 3 years, which is shocking, because in education, nothing lasts for 30 years, literally nothing. But the fact that it's around and it survived the standards movement when it wasn't contributing to anyone's test scores or anyone's bottom line, I think, is just testament to the fact that kids, parents, and superintendents recognize, this is profoundly impactful program for kids. And I think, so having been grounded in that, the question is, how do we take that kind of powerful learning and make it part of what happens in school, as opposed to something kids have to leave as an alternative for?

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:57] Awesome transition, Steve. Alright. So, how do we, in fact, do that? I mean, this gets us to, we've had the conversation with the kids, we've had the conversations with the families, everybody's willing to play, how do we convince my fellow teachers and my administration to do something different?

Steve Shapiro: [00:26:14] It's a big challenge, and I don't know if I have the answer to that, because I've been in the district for two years. I had about three quarters of a year, and then COVID hit, and then I had to pick up some sixth grade classes. So, I really haven't had the time yet to dig in to do that. And I mean, I do think that it's a conversation that has to happen between teachers, administrators, parents, kids.

Steve Shapiro: [00:26:36] I think it would be really powerful if we could bring people together, and say, what are some—I mean, when I think about it, I think it will be powerful to create some like enterprise zones, some innovation zones. Like let's create, let's offer some, and I'm not talking about on the outskirts of the curriculum, I'm talking about at the core of the curriculum. So, like what would it look like if we offered a government class that was governed for activists?

Steve Shapiro: [00:26:57] So, one of your options, instead of just you can take AP government or regular government, would be government for activists. It's your government credit, but it's designed to help prepare you to be a real engaged activist on issues you care about. So, what if we created a humanities class, which really rooted around community partnerships and experience?

Steve Shapiro: [00:27:17] So, it's like, okay, you're English and your social, I mean, we can design these kind of courses, but I think, again, it requires the time and the effort. And I think that COVID took so much out of us in terms of our time and energy. We were all learning how to do a thousand new things. And so, hopefully, the summer will have given us enough recharge that we can come back and maybe dig into some of those kinds of things.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:40] Maybe think about it a little bit differently.

Steve Shapiro: [00:27:43] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:43] It's really my hope that one of the things that will come from the experience that we all had with teaching and learning through COVID, right? Because the reality is there were a lot of really great things that happened.

Steve Shapiro: [00:27:53] Yes. And teachers were heroic.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:55] Oh, yes, absolutely. No question. There were a lot of really, really great things that have happened. And we just finished up wrapping up on behalf of the State of Ohio a listening tour across the state, thousands of voices being captured and gathered to say, okay, what was your experience like? In part to say, because we knew that it was hard. We knew that it was a challenge.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:22] And we knew that there were a lot of inequities that were really very, very quickly, during the pandemic, bubbled-up access, broadband, you name it, devices, social, emotional, kids with IEPs, how you manage that in a fully remote—but there were so many different things. But we knew that if we dug and we ask the right questions, that we would be able to get to those really powerful nuggets of things that didn't work well that we shouldn't let go of and that we should, in fact, find ways to incorporate into what is going to be sort of the next iteration.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:56] And one of the things I heard all the time, and made me think about the fact that you and I were going to have this conversation, is that many teachers said, I realized that those standards, which we are all still held to, because of the way all of, it's certainly in the US, our most states in the US work with our standards, that I did not have to teach them in the same way I had always taught them before. And I thought, there's the nugget, right?

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:29] It's that recognition that I can, in fact, teach government for activists and meet every single one of the standards that the state says I must, in fact, meet to have my kids prepared to do that class for whatever X, Y, or Z is going to be. And yet, I can completely turn it around and show them those same standards based on something they care about and something that I, as the teacher, want to be passionate with my kids about it. That's the power of Mosaic, because the one thing you didn't say, because I got to watch it over and over again when we all shared a building together, is the instructors, you, were as passionate about what you were teaching and the kids were experiences as the kids living in the moment.

Steve Shapiro: [00:30:16] We were learners with them.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:19] That's the key though, Steve, right?

Steve Shapiro: [00:30:21] Yeah, huge shift. Yeah. We were constantly finding new speakers and finding new project topics for kids, because we wanted to keep learning. And I don't think I could have lasted in education if I were lecturing to kids over and over again, oh, my God, I've said this a thousand times, like I already know this. And so, I guess you can always learn more and to kind of enhance, but in the end, like we were really learners along with the kids.

Steve Shapiro: [00:30:21] And that was part of the joy of it, was that for me, I was always excited about what was happening in class, because I knew that either some guest speaker or some kid was going to teach me something that day, or was going to challenge me, or we're going to have some discussion that was going to push us to think deeply. And again, I'll reference Parker Palmer again, but he said, the degree to which we focus on measurable outcomes is the degree to which we play small. I mean, the things that we can measure.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:11] That's a pretty darn powerful quote, by the way.

Steve Shapiro: [00:31:12] It was great. Parker is one of the best. I mean, the things that are easy to measure are the least important things and the things that are the most important, and complex, and challenging, they're hard to measure, they're hard to quantify. And so, I fear that sometimes, we get so caught up in this external measurement game that we lose the focus on the deep things, the important things that we want to provide for kids.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:36] Absolutely. I think there is an extreme amount of truth in that. I always like to close the program in the conversation, but I really started thinking about the, what's next? So, in Steve Shapiro's journey, what's next? What are you doing with the sort of state of space and grace you find yourself in today?

Steve Shapiro: [00:31:58] Well, I mean, right now, I'm trying to support a district in reimagining what schooling can look like, a successful district that it would be easy for us to stay the same. It would be easy for us to stay the same, because by the old metrics, we're fine. So, I think my challenge that the district brought me there to take on is to say, how can we preserve what's great? How can we hold onto what has been our brand, and what's been powerful and successful, while simultaneously growing and expanding into new fields, and giving kids new opportunities that are more aligned with this changing world?

Steve Shapiro: [00:32:34] And so, I mean, for me, systems change, like in anything, I mean, equity. Obviously, equity has been a huge push in my work. I spent a lot of time working on issues of equity, but I think the two are really interrelated. I think rethinking education, the old education system worked well for us partly because we are an upper middle class, predominantly White community that the system was designed for.

Steve Shapiro: [00:32:54] And I think one of the challenges, I mean, I came here to PAST Foundation, and I saw all these kids, the girls in the job, and the kids are already speaking with all different accents. But I saw what they were doing. And actually, for the first time, I looked, and I thought, you know what, our White kids who are going to the affluent school might not be able to beat these kids just with their Whiteness and their affluence. These kids have some experiences that an employer is going to say, you know what, your kids have higher ACT scores, but these kids have built a robot.

Steve Shapiro: [00:33:23] And so, I think part of the challenge is us in the community having a conversation that like, we can look good on paper, but even college admissions is changing, and a lot of our kids are not getting into their top colleges, because the old game of like, I have a higher SAT score, I'll get in, isn't working, and they're looking for, if you're an upper middle class White kid, what can you show me? There's a whole bunch of upper middle class White kids who have taken a bunch of AP classes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:50] What makes you so special?

Steve Shapiro: [00:33:51] What makes you special?

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:52] Truly. Different then, because I am White, privileged, upper class. What makes you so special? What's your contribution? It's interesting, and I truly appreciate your statement about what you see here, and how you would wonder or ponder how both kids, side by side, would perform. And I tell folks who come here, because I get that often, are people, as we walk around and we're having the conversations or they get to talk to kids, making comments about the sort of wow factor.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:23] And I always want to caution folks, A, about the wow factor, right? Because part of it is you have to be really mindful that kids who are engaged and passionate are, wow, right? It doesn't matter what they're learning, it's going to be a wow moment. So, understand that. It doesn't take away from it, but understand where the wow comes from. And then, the second piece that I always tell everybody as they're walking through this building is I would put the kids who are here up against any R&D team in the world.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:59] And not because these kids necessarily have the best grades, although many of them are incredible scholars, no question whatsoever, but not all of them in the traditional sense, but because they've had so many experiences that they are fearless thinkers, collaborators, and problem solvers. And it doesn't matter to them that they haven't had enough math to understand the physics of what they're proposing isn't even possible, they will still imagine that it is.

Steve Shapiro: [00:35:31] That's right. And they'll try to figure it out and they'll use resources. And I think this goes back to the skills and dispositions. I mean, there's so much conversation about failure and like the power of failure, you talk to any entrepreneur and they'll talk to you about the power of failure. That's how you learn, is you fail. And I have a great podcast interview with Olivia Weinstock, 20-year-old CEO of a company, venture capital-funded.

Steve Shapiro: [00:35:53] It's like the failures, and then figuring out how to respond to those failures. And I asked her, I said, do you have those same experiences in school? She's like, well, failure in school was just

failing. I mean, experiential learning is a place where failing is a learning experience, but I think traditional education, failing is just a failing experience. And you can retake a test or something, but that's different than iterating something, having it not work, reiterating it until you're like, let me prototype-build.

Steve Shapiro: [00:36:16] I mean, let me fail and figure out why I failed. And we know that in this changing world, that's a disposition that's huge that traditional education doesn't really support in creating opportunities for kids to try things, to fail, to figure things out, to problem-solve. And I don't mean problem-solve in the small way of like, here's a math problem, solve it, but I mean, here's a big problem in the world, how would you take it on?

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:38] What are you going to do about getting plastics to biodegrade? That's a problem that we should solve. That math problem, not so much.

Steve Shapiro: [00:36:47] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:47] Yeah, absolutely. And I do agree with you, that is the beauty of the collective conversation. So, Steve, thank you so very, very much for taking time out of your day to join us and to be part of the conversation. I truly appreciate it.

Steve Shapiro: [00:37:02] I love talking with you always, Annalies, and I'm excited for what you do here, and I'm excited for more kids to have the experiences here, and for our kids in our community to see and learn here, and also, for us to learn from you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:13] Well, likewise. And I can't wait to see what comes next in Bexley, so thanks so much. 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.