



## 124. Me and My City with Kaisa Koistinen

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:00:00] And that's why I love the ninth grader, that concept, because it's so globally oriented. We're part of the big picture.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:00:10] 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:** [00:00:45] So, today on our episode of Learning Unboxed, we are actually on the road again. And so, today, we're going all the way to Finland to have a really exciting conversation with Kaisa Koistinen about an innovative education program in Finland. It's all about Me & MyCity. So, Kaisa, welcome to the program.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:01:08] Thank you very much. It's great to be here.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:01:11] So, first and foremost, share with our listeners who come to us from all over the world a little bit about this idea of a program that we're going to call Me & MyCity, but you actually have a full Finnish language title for this program. Tell us in really sort of high level, what's the purpose of this program?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:01:33] Okay. Yes. In Finland, we call this Yrityskylä. That's Finnish. So, we decided today that we can talk about Me & MyCity, which represents, of course, in English, a bit to what we're doing of the background slightly that we realized 10 years ago when we started a bit over 10 years ago that many individuals lack basic capabilities to manage their own finances. And that led, of course, to a lot of problems, and personal problems, and so on.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:02:05] So, it's not just a question of an individual issue, but it's also a question in a society. Sure. And then, it was thought that, how should this financial education be done? And then, it started mostly on this financial education idea. And then, it was realized that if you want to reach younger generations and bigger groups, like entire cohorts of younger generations, you can do it through school or with the school, I would say.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:02:37] Of course, Finnish schools and teachers are very independent and so on, so you can't really say that, oh, we'll come to the school and teach this, but think about it a bit more widely. But this was the idea when it started. And then, it became kind of a bigger, bigger thing that we thought that, okay, we should be teaching about economy, working life, and society. So then, we created a learning concept, which

kind of teaches about all these issues, where the children, we have it for sixth graders and ninth graders in Finland. So, they'd be 11, 12 years old, or then 14, 15 years of age.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:03:22] So, the perfect age to really sort of start digging in with kiddos about financial issues, financial responsibilities, a whole host of financial literacies. So, one of the things that I was really fascinated about when the team brought your programs sort of to my attention was the fact that it's not that you just created a program, you created a sense of place tied to the program. So, share with our listeners just a little bit about the way the physical structure of this idea of Me & MyCity ties back into the learning that's possible for the students who are participating in it, because that, to me, is one of the really innovative components of this. You don't see that all the time.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:04:04] Yeah. If I give the whole concept, then that sense is that. And also, it relates to the Finnish society in that sense here, that education is very highly valued, and teachers are very respected, and they're very highly educated. So, in our concept, we have learning material already in school, so they have 10 lessons in school. And as what I said earlier, our teachers are so educated, so they work with us in a way that they teach first the issues of these matters like economy, working life and society at school.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:04:42] And then, also, the teachers visit our learning environment in advance. So, we work together with the school all the time. And then, we kind of wear the bridge to the business life and kind of the society thing that they could teach it, but they don't have the means, maybe, in schools. And the world moves also quickly, so we can do it in a very flexible way that we have always something new that is needed. So, when the children are in school, they have all this beforehand, and they have assignments beforehand and in school already.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:05:17] If I take an example from working life, already in school, they apply for a job, which then they work in or they have the profession, let's say, an interior designer. So, during the lessons in school, they already say, oh, I'd like to choose, I like to be this interior designer, and they apply for the job. And then, the teacher or someone else in the school, it can be an outsider sometimes, comes and interviews the child, and says, oh, you'd like to be like the interior designer, why would you be the best interior designer?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:05:51] So, it's actually kind of a long process. And then, we have actually over 20, but we have several around the country here in Finland, these learning environments. And then, in these learning environments we have, we have companies and they're kind of—we can have, let's say, 20 different companies from the region, and the children work in these real-life companies.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:06:24] So, these companies are permanently embedded in these locations or they kind of swap out, and come and go, or this is where they work.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:06:32] No, the companies are based, it could be based in Helsinki, and then we have the learning environment in which they have kind of, I don't know, a cottage kind of, but they have a place, but it's a real-life company. But the people from the real-life company, they don't work in this learning environment, but it's a society run by these students from school. So, once they come in, the students, and if a student is, let's say, a boy, would be an interior designer, he comes and works in this real-life company, and the children are the ones who run the society all day long.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:07:14] And then, these different companies that the children work in a profession, let's say, this interior designer, and the other companies, the other 19 companies, they have tasks so that they're linked to each other. So, from another company, they come, and say, okay, our Company B would need an

interior designer, and then the interior designer goes and works for the other company as well. So, we have scripted. You could say it's kind of a role play.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:07:46] So, they work in the profession, but they also work as consumers. So, during that one day, when they're in their learning environment, they have free time. So, if there's another student who runs, is a hairdresser, during their free time, they can go to the hairdresser. And I think that they get a salary when they work, so they can pay with the salary to the hairdresser, that, now, with my free time, I would like to cut my hair or do braids, whatever they do to their hair.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:08:18] And then, they have a task also to be in this profession, and then consumer and the citizen. So then, they have free time, where they go as a citizen to vote. So, they understand there's also part of the society that you're not only working during those hours of the day in the learning environment, but you have different roles. So, they're all linked together.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:08:49] Yeah. And the kids only come for one day to that experience or is it multiple days? Okay. So, one day.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:08:57] They come for one day. So, let's say that we have a contract with the City of Helsinki, so all the sixth graders from Helsinki come and all the sixth graders from school have had these learning material in school, their teachers have taught them, and they're one day in the learning environment. And the idea, of course, it would be lovely. They often say that, oh, can we come back?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:09:22] Yeah. I would imagine, they're like, oh, my gosh, this is awesome, right?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:09:26] Yeah. So, it's really great. But the thing is often that it's a question of interest and motivation that once they realize that, oh, but I could do it, I was the CEO, or I was the banker, or I was the interior designer, I was the doctor. And the things, when they run it just themselves, that the teachers are with them during the day. They have, of course, the responsibility of the children, but they don't run it.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:09:57] And my staff work there so that if the children have some questions or so, they get the support. But we never kind of give the answers to them. And the children often say that, oh, it was so hard, people don't do what I tell them to do, and they have to have meetings with the team. And so, they have to go to the bank, and get a loan, and things like this. So, they're often very surprised at, oh, this is so hard.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:10:24] Yeah. They have no idea what real life really looks like. I'm super, super curious then. So, this is happening in multiple locations around Finland at this point, right? And so, the other thing is that it's intriguing to me that as the schools sort of work through this process then, and the students then come and have this daylong experience, what's sort of the carry back into the sort of day-to-day experience of the student when they get back into their regular sort of school experience?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:10:56] Because I would assume that there's multiple touchpoints tied to this, whether it's a teacher just reminding them, well, remember when we did X, Y, or Z, or remember when you experienced this or that, because I'm really curious sort of about some of the implications or the outcomes that you and your team are seeing now after several years of doing this and it's growing in popularity, the kids love it. But when you step back from it a little bit, what are you seeing as those sort of positive impacts that are coming from this program?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:11:30] Well, I could say as we've cooperated with a university here in Finland, and they studied that, yeah, they realized that in that study that the level of knowledge in questions of economics did

raise. So, they compared to the glasses who hadn't visited me at my city and that you could show a difference. And we work with a professor with that same professor all the time. And it's great, because he's totally outsider, so it's very objective.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:12:02] Yeah, exactly. And then, we also have a concept for ninth graders. And he studied also that it's more on game-based that—well, first, if I talk about the sixth graders, the younger one, the 12 years old, that it's often that if we think about teachers, teachers say that, oh, but the kids, they're so different in this kind of a learning environment, where they learn by doing, and their level of interest, they want to come so much, they're so motivated, it's outside of the school, not in the same environment.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:12:40] So, they're already motivated. And then, the level of interest arises, and then they say that they see a different side of the children. But sometimes, the children who are in the classroom, they're very different. And then, they come, and it can show that maybe some students who have problems in a normal classroom are very different. They have a profession they love, they want to show everyone, I'm going to be good at this. And then, of course, then on individual level, they gave us a very high grade, the children. We always ask for the feedback.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:13:16] And we also have the thing that they might have in the same company they work. There might be like four children in the same company. And they might be children from different schools. So, these introverts sometimes, even the children might say that, oh, but I learned how to interact with people I've never met, I had to be their boss, and I still manage. So, for the confidence, the self-esteem, and their self-confidence, I would say, that it increases their level. And sometimes, they're very excited and hesitant also. Sometimes, you have a couch that you can lie down if it works for you.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:14:00] A stress break.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:14:02] But when they then manage the whole day, it's very busy and so on. They're like, oh, this is great, I did it. So, I think for me and for my team, that's often the best part of it, that we see children that are a bit shy. They might have slightly some problems or challenges in school, and then the end of this experience, they're really like, I could do it, I'm so proud for myself.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:14:30] Yeah. We see similar things. So, the Innovation Lab at Past does a lot of similar types of ideas of programs. Not exactly like this, obviously, but we also see that same sort of thing, that when you take kids out of their more traditional setting, and you plopp them down into something that is a very applied, very sort of self-directed that we do see kids who struggle in a traditional setting excel there. And we also see the converse, which I assume that you see as well, kids who are really, really great in a traditional setting in a classroom, that's the way that they like to learn, and you put them in a space with fewer boundaries, right?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:14:30] Yeah.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:15:10] You know that they're the ones that are struggling, and maybe the kids who are typically are classroom strugglers are the ones who are leading. And that's good for everybody to see that not everybody learns and does the same way. So, we've experienced that very much as well. So, I can absolutely sort of echo what you're seeing and experiencing. So, how does then the sixth grade experience then translate into that ninth grade experience, because they're not the same? So, share with us a little bit about the sort of the ninth grade program.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:15:44] Yeah, they're not actually at all in that sense the same, but for the ninth graders, we have created kind of a global world that we also have a material in school, and then in school, they're put in teams. And the idea is that the teams produce and sell products to global markets. And then, the teams work as company's executives that you can be the marketing director or their CEO, and then they come into a learning environment as well, they come to outside of the school, and then it's a game that they play that also in that learning environment, we've renewed them actually just in a year or so.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:16:34] I'm not sure I know the word in English, but it looks a bit like a game room. And then, they sit there in teams of, let's say, four or five, and they all have this one task. And then, they try to sell these products to global markets and they have to go from this small teams of, let's say, have four of these teams, and they have to go and negotiate as well. And then, we have my staff members who are there, and they go negotiate, and they have kind of a—and then if it goes very well, they have to negotiate maybe in English as well.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:17:11] So then, they have to use the language and so on. So, it's different from the sixth graders, but they compete against each other, and then for winning, it requires that they have a profit, and then reputation, so they have to think of all these different kind of issues, and they have tablets, and the game, how they play it. And then, in the wall, we have this kind of screens so they can see all the time how it goes, the profit and the reputation, and how it's all working.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:17:43] And then, in the middle of the games, our staff also shows how it's going, and who's winning, and so on. And in this game, they learn all about these concepts about economy and so on in global markets. But something that's very interesting in this is that if you think of students who are 14 or 15, they're more teenagers. And maybe the attitude to school is quite different than from someone who's 12.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:18:14] Right. Definitely.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:18:16] Just generalizing, of course, a lot.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:18:17] No, definitely so.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:18:18] Yeah. You can see them, if you go in the morning when I go to the learning environments, if I go to these ninth graders, I can see they have their hoodies, and they're like, oh, what's this again? And then, when the game starts, you can see, really, they're like, oh, we want to win. And the interest, it just shows so well and the thing is often what they realize, is that they realize that we can only win if we work as a team, and the reputation, and so on.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:18:52] So, they understand. And that's the feedback we often get from teachers that, okay, this is game-based, it's really interesting and great, but still, they understand that they have to work as a team and that they have a chance to win. And often, the teachers say that they might talk about this issue, the same issues about global markets and economics at school. But after this game, they're so interested, and motivated, and they're like, oh, why did we win? Why did we lose?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:19:23] That they start talking about this. And then, in schools, still, they talk about it as some of our teachers want to come early in the year, so that if they have this game-based experience in the beginning of the year, so it's easier to teach the students, because they're so interested in this issue, so they're, oh, can we come, kind of in September? Because we want it to be easier to teach, because everyone's so motivated.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:19:48] Right. Yeah. Well, you gave those kids context, and that's part of it, right? And I do think that that is one of the things that is certainly about sort of the human nature of the life of a teenager, right? And it seems to be, it doesn't matter where you're talking about in the world, almost any place, there are some of those sort of interpersonal, if you will, or developmental universals.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:20:11] And I think that teenagers crave, what does this have to do with me? Right? And I'm making a leap here, but I'm guessing based on the way that you've described the program and our own experience at PAST Foundation of building, and designing, and implementing similar kinds of concepts that the student, as you help those kiddos see themselves in whatever it happens to be, and certainly, if you can gamify it, we know that teenagers love that, right? And so, you've given them an anchor that makes it less about school and more about themselves.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:20:50] And that's the nature of being a teenager, right? So, that's an intriguing way to sort of think about it. I'm curious, though, as the teachers sort of watch and experience the impact of those ninth graders as they come back, right? And so, as they tried to then tie back to it repeatedly throughout the rest of the year, are they successfully able to continue elements or aspects of the game experience throughout their own sort of teaching or experience? I'm curious about the feedback that you're getting several weeks and months later from the program.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:21:30] Well, we've tried also, I talked about it with the professor I work with, and we even try to make a research of how it would show after years to come, but that was so complicated, because you can't get the identity issues or whatever. It depends a lot on the teacher, that some of the teachers are very interested. They see this is a very important issue and they kind of link it to the everyday things, and they clip newspapers, and they say, oh, well, you had this experience in Me & MyCity, and they connected.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:22:09] And then, there are, of course, I think, teachers who teach in a more traditional way and maybe use this in that sense, but I can't tell in detail, because then, they're so independent in schools that we don't, that much, follow them. But we have also other things for the ninth graders, even in the Finnish school system and in society that are kind of that we have looked for the whole year. Okay. Then, the ninth graders have two weeks. They go and experience working life outside of school. So, there are different kind of points in the whole year that they get these issues of, for example, working life.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:22:57] Right. By design, the Finnish system says. you will go and have this two-week experience. I love that. I wish more places around the world would make that sort of a standard part of the programming. One of the other things that I saw in digging through the literature about the program prior to our conversation is some of the evolution that the program has made over time. So, I want to talk just a little bit about that, because you've been running this program for a number of years now and you have made changes to it. So, talk to us a little bit about some of the changes that you've made, or the why, or the advancements, or the add-ons to the program that you're doing now.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:23:36] We have so many kind of advancements. I don't know how you call it, because when we discussed with schools and kind of the officials who make a decision that we will come as part of this program, they always want it kind of from us that we have something new. Well, one example about what we're doing this year is that we're adding kind of things for entrepreneurship, that earlier, we have it so that in the learning environment, for the sixth graders, we have a hub which has entrepreneurs from kind of—it could be a single entrepreneur, I have a cake company.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:24:26] And there are several of these small in this hub, and now, we are creating it even so that if you work as a doctor in the learning environment, you can work as a doctor the day, but then you can

have your own kind of a company in addition to that. So, in the learning environment, you understand even more of entrepreneurship, although you would be hired as a doctor in the company.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:24:56] So, we're adding issues that when we discuss with schools, or teachers, or pedagogical experts, they say, okay, this is something that we should be adding. So then, we do all these kind of special things or the game-based that, oh, now, there are some more modern ways of present saving or banking. Earlier, we had a bank card, but like for the students, so they have a bank card, and they go to the bank, and so on, but they say, oh, of course, now, we have it in online.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:25:34] So, in the learning environment, of course, we have it online as well. So, we created a very good online system. So, they have their tablets, and they have the salary there, and they can use it online. So, we have, all the time, things that we make differently or develop. And then, of course, this year, because of COVID, we had some problems or challenges in that sense that some schools, they had difficulties in coming to the learning environments.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:26:08] They had maybe rules that they have to stay in the school's location. Of course, some students were studying from home. But then, we didn't have that much that they had to be at home, but they had to stay in the school's location. So then, we created a version that they can use if they have to stay in the location, how our staff could support it from distance and how maybe we had won some of our corporate partners that they said they could do the job interviews from distance.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:26:44] So, from our bank partner, they did the job interview. So, they're the children, and they're online in teams. And then, our corporate partner interviewed the children that way. And that's very interesting, because they have never met these people, that they interviewed the children. So, we're creating kind of—this COVID has been really a challenge for the past year, how to make this work.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:27:11] Yeah. I think for so many different educational environments, they've been wrestling, and that's one of the things that almost every one of these episodes right now, we're talking about, okay, well, then what did it look like? How did you modify or what was the iteration during this global pandemic? And in some places, we're still really deep into the pandemic, right? In other places, it's opened back up again. And so, this sort of ebb and flow, and it is definitely one of the things that everybody that listens to the program is really curious about. I'm also very curious about the, am I correct that you also created a mobile version of this program that now travels? Is that correct? Or, did I understand that correctly?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:27:52] Well, I think if you read about it, I think that was in relation into the COVID situation.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:28:00] Okay.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:28:00] Yeah. And then, I just remember one of these you are asking about the development, how we create new things, that we have one foundation that are very keen, that we have art in the learning environment, and they were providing us funds that we could that we could buy these, how do you call these? Added reality or-

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:28:27] Augmented reality, yeah.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:28:27] Yeah. So that we have those also in the learning environment, and children can create art by themselves, and you can move, so on, just to give another example. So, the things that we think

that maybe not all students can experience in their personal life. So, we have this possibility to give it to all children, because all of the sixth graders come from the region.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:28:56] Right. That's absolutely remarkable. So, as you sort of think about what happens with this program next, not to put you on the spot, but I'm really curious about how your team thinks about this notion of innovation, right? And the things that you, as a team, sort of are thinking about that you see on the horizon or there's some aspect of the world of work, and community, and citizenship that is a necessary, or opportunity maybe is a better way to put it, an opportunity for your team to create programming to influence and impact the lives of these students. So, what are some of the sorts of things that your team is thinking about as it relates to the program of the future?

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:29:43] First, I know this is not the innovation part you're asking for, but first, one of our main thing is that we want geographically, because we haven't reached 100% of the sixth graders. So, that's been a huge effort for us that we have to go around the country, also saying why this should be done everywhere, and every child should be able to reach it. And then, to the part of the innovation, the world is going so fast, so we're, all the time, discussing what would be the next.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:30:20] And of course, all this digital world, what it's going to—what is meaning to us, how the whole technology is integrated into our learning concept, because in the ninth grade, it's totally game-based. and the whole thing is. So, I have team members who were constantly kind of thinking, and as we're speaking, we have three weeks of time to think we're applying more funds for next year.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:30:50] So, one of the things we were like thinking was that, how we can bring this business life and entrepreneurship, working life issues even more to school so that the learning material wouldn't be only kind of material that is then it's connected so much to how the teacher will teach us and so on. How we could bring even more, so it's not this experience, the strong experience, not only in the day when they come to the learning environment, how we can do it in school, and how we could get it so that the children already in school think that, oh, I'm working for this company in this profession.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:31:36] And then, how the material could be very innovative, and how we could bring also all these kind of different regional aspects, maybe in the learning environment or in the school day-to-day life. Maybe, can we do it with this virtual reality and bring different business life even more alive so that the real life—so that it wouldn't be so far away from the real life, they're going to face then, and they graduate, or so on.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:32:08] So, they would have as much as we can give, working as a bridge between the school and the other parts of the society. So, now, we're really thinking of how we can develop the material and the working in school, how we can help teachers in this thing. So, we're creating this a lot nowadays. But the technology, that's of course an issue for everyone.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:32:33] Yeah, it absolutely is. And it's driving so many things, and certainly, sort of on a global scale, the world, as we understand it, has shifted fairly radically. And so, it is nice to be able to see that there are teams all over the world, this is happening, that are thinking really innovatively about the positive impacts of some of this rate and pace of change, and how we can utilize it. And I think that it's really interesting to me because this notion of citizenship, that is something that I am seeing.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:33:05] And I would say the last 24 months in particular, I mean, granted, it's a conversation that's been going on for a period of time, but I do think that there may be something tied to the pandemic that is escalating, and maybe that's not the correct way to think about it, but that is bringing to the forefront this idea of citizenship, and being a global citizen, and understanding that I, as a student, in Finland,

I'm not living in a global vacuum, that there's a big, broader world there. And what I'm doing in Finland, or what I'm doing in the US, or what I'm doing in Brazil, or take your pick, has global implications. And that is going to be a fairly radical change just from the sort of teaching, learning, and work of the future sort of perspective.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:33:55] Yeah, that's very important in Finland that we don't isolate ourselves, and we have a very strong or long background in saying that languages are very important. We can manage with Finnish around or Swedish that are two languages, you have to know languages, we have to work globally. And that's why I love the ninth-grader, the concept, because it's so globally oriented. We're part of the big picture.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:34:21] Yeah, very, very important. Kaisa, thank you so very, very much for spending time with us today sharing your program. I'm absolutely grateful for the time that you've been able to give us today, and just to share the journey of what's happening with Me & MyCity. So, thank you so much.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:34:42] Thank you and welcome to visit us.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:34:44] Oh, I would love to come and see the program live and in person, so I might take you up on that. Absolutely. Be careful what you offer. Thank you so much.

**Kaisa Koistinen:** [00:34:55] Thanks, bye.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:34:58] 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.