

The Incredible Secret to Equipping Your Child for a Future in the Context of a World with AI.

Meg: [00:00:00] Welcome back mums and dads. I am Meg Faure, the host of Scents by Meg Faure, and I am delighted to have you join us here this week. As you know, each week we have guests on with me most times, and sometimes it's a mum who is going through the same things that you're going through, the quagmire of early parenting with lots and lots of questions.

And sometimes I invite in an expert to come and join me. And today is just such a day. I have who I would consider an expert in the area. Play and development has come to join me. Her name is Hanneke Mackie, and I'm really delighted to have you join us, Hanneke. Welcome.

Hanneke: Thank you. Thanks for having me, Meg.

I appreciate it.

Meg: So Hanneke is a mom to one, and she is also by background, an actress, if I'm not mistaken, or at least that's background in drama. And she has used that along with her passion for early childhood development to develop the most amazing program. And we're going to explore a little bit about that today.

But Hanneke, before we jump straight in, would you mind telling us [00:01:00] a little bit about who you are, about your family? And just about your journey, what brought you to this moment in time?

Hanneke: Wow. So much to share. I'll try and be brief. Yeah, I'm a mom of Jack. That's my most important job.

Jack is four years old and he is an absolute firecracker and a force of nature in and of himself. Prior to that I have been a very hardworking entrepreneur prior to that. A lover of the arts and I was I did my degree at the University of Cape Town in theater and performance. I was mostly raised between my parents, my grandparents, a lot of my grandparents and they were both educators.

So somewhere. There's a smush or a mashup of some sorts between the arts and my love of it as a child through schooling, doing a lot of theatre and arts, and then these educators who raised me and just always loving being around little people. And then when I did my degree in theater, I think very quickly [00:02:00] afterwards, I realized that it's a very tough, difficult industry to survive in.

There are a lot of other actors. Wasn't quite sure that I wanted to do the classic kind of acting thing. And somehow together these different experiences and walks of life or what I'd been exposed to came together. And as far as I saw that the arts could be useful. When I did my degree, my final thesis was actually on Peter Durkheis and theater for social change and the way the theater allows us to think about politics and satire and mocking ourselves.

And I think in the same way, I kind of, at the time there wasn't something like. For instance, what you have today in a, an applied theater courses. This was 2005 that I graduated. And at the time it wasn't explicitly available, but what had become. My own journey to applied. Theater and applied drama and applying that to, okay, what can we do with this?

That's useful. Not just for the children who really enjoy [00:03:00] drama and theater and performing arts, but for every single child, it's really useful. It's a very useful toolkit. And because I had this theater degree, I came up to Joburg from Cape town. And very quickly I realized, okay, you know, audition after audition, this is not going to work.

So I managed to get my first job in Joburg at Crawford Santa. As a drama teacher, it was a lot of smoke and mirrors. I was faking it. I wasn't quite sure what I was doing. And I developed what I felt was my own methodology and method in really making it fun and useful for every child to use the arts as a developmental tool.

And I did that, studied from there I actually traveled, got some international experience in the same field, spent a few years in. London came back to Joburg chose to be in Joburg and to start a company that now for the last 11 years have been doing this explicitly, really taking the arts as a tool for child development.

I then managed to import myself [00:04:00] a Scottish husband back to South Africa. And we now have what I like to call this little Scottish booty, a little boy is a beautiful mix of the two of us. We all really bring our own unique little bits to this very unique, small, but happy family.

Yeah.

Meg: Well, we definitely will talk a little bit more about your business and moms, if you are wondering right at this moment, why on a parenting podcast, I've got somebody who has a background in the arts. I will tell you that a couple of weeks ago, I had the most fascinating conversation with Hanukkah around child development and what's needed for the future.

And the reality is that no matter how old your little one is right now, you should be thinking about how are you developing their. Brains and their skill sets to be able to engage in a future world. And that is exactly what Hanukkah has applied her mind to. And so that is why we're talking about this today.

If you're thinking about the future for your child in terms of their education and their place in the world, this is a very important conversation. So Hanukkah, what are the soft skills or the skills [00:05:00] or the super skills? Should we call them the children actually do need for the future? And how do you think that they learn this best?

Hanneke: Oh Meg, I love that you called super skills. Well done you. It is, it should be seen as the most important. We've given, we've tried and tested as a society and as a human race to put the sciences and all of that at the front and the most important thing all the old traditional skills we used to think was most important.

And, you know, we are starting to wake up to understand. That the core of everything that makes us human, the languages, the arts, the sciences, engineering languages, and the vast intricacies of human nature. It all depends on the ability to imagine something new, to create something new. We started to really evolve to understand this.

All education research points to this. Now I'm so excited to be a part of the world and the education community in this. Age and time that we [00:06:00] starting to really wake up to this. I've basically, I just want you that when I just mentioned the thing about the vast intricacies, I have to give a homage to Ken Robinson.

It was actually his statement about the imagination that connects us all. And Ken Robinson, I'd like all of your listeners to go and Google Ken Robinson, who was one of the first real education list. Real passionate speakers to this point that what is most important for children in their development is their ability to come up with an original idea and to trust their own ideas.

I mean, we're talking now and we're seeing what people call 21st century skills. You're hearing a lot of schools mention this and network of schools. They're talking about, oh, we're educating children for the 21st century. And there's actually a lot of studies around this. There's a lot of research around this looking and to see how much, how many of the jobs that are currently in the marketplace today will still exist when our current grade ones leave.

[00:07:00] School. Do you know that the world economic forum has just come out with that number? Do you want to know how many of the current jobs and things in our industry that will no longer exist? 65%. Wow. That's a stat. What's currently in our world will be gone, right? So 65 percent of our little ones will have to come up with new solutions, new entrepreneurial ideas, new innovations, or work in industries that will develop.

So now how do we prepare our children? We can't say, well, you know, it's always going to be a good choice to go into X, Y, Z. I don't want to say anything there to offend anyone, but you know, there used to be like good old choices that people would make. I'll push my child really hard. I'll make sure they're really excellent at math because then they could have a really great degree and a career in accounting.

But I'm sorry to say, I'm really sorry to say that AI is probably going to replace a lot of that. I'm not going to say all of it. So now what do we invest in? And if you really interrogate that question. And you really start to think, you have to think very early on about what do you expose your [00:08:00] child to from really early on to make sure they have a future when they're a young adult.

I'm sorry, but all the research points to their ability to come up with an original idea and their ability to back themselves. So that's confidence, imagination, and creativity. That's actually the most important thing. So I say with my little son, with my boy, Jack, I say, he needs digital skills, tick. The robots will take care of the race, but.

Digital skills, and then he has to like himself, be able to come up with an original idea, back himself, communicate it confidently, because that's the only thing that the robots in this AI revolution we're looking at are not going to be able to take from us. And we've got to make sure we give that to our children.

Meg: So that's incredible. , I mean, that development of confidence and of being able to create an original idea, those are going to be the two key elements and, you know, you're speaking very much, you're aligning very closely with what we say in play sense, which is our play group program where, plays skills result in creativity, [00:09:00] collaboration self regulation, executive function.

These are all the critical things that we know little ones are going to need in the future. And so it's really fascinating for us to hear you say that as well. Now, of course, we have always said we use imaginary play in our play group programs in order to develop this, you have got a different, or maybe.

Maybe it's the same, but just differently positioned kind of strategy or tool in your toolbox. And that is something that you in caps sent to me art, the arts. So do you want to share with us how the arts tie in with this creativity and confidence and how we can use the arts to develop this in our children?

Hanneke: You know, I just think that it's like this sort of this dot connection that maybe I made, but I don't think I'm the first or even the last to see the artist, this wonderful life raft in the sea of madness. If we agree..

Meg: can you just to interrupt you, can you define what the arts are? I'm sure there are lots of parents who are thinking of the arts. I mean, is this like a paintbrush and you know,

Hanneke: what are the arts? [00:10:00] Okay, brilliant. So the arts in my experience of what I do mostly, I like to talk about the innate arts. So we work with drama, dance and singing, but the arts, of course, extend past that into instrumental music as well as visual arts.

So we're talking about anything that, . It sits in the space of movement, character play, drama, self expression. I think you could extend that further. Some people would argue that it goes into cuisine and of course it goes everywhere. Art is everywhere. And it into textiles and design and Restaurateurs, they're all artists.

But it depends on the lens that you look at it. But obviously, classically, we're talking about visual arts and the expressive arts. And in my world, my toolkit I like to use is what I like to call the innate arts. In other words, the arts that are in the body and in the self that doesn't need an instrument or a tool.

But I'm going to get to that in a second. So how long is a piece of string, right? But whatever the arts are. [00:11:00] However, you understand the arts, they are definitely there as a life raft, I would say in this world of like, okay, we have now established most research confirms the children learn best through play, right?

We know this Lego foundation, white paper after white paper, the last 20 years, huge tick, especially the younger ones, but all children, experiential embodied project based that's all saying. Learn through play, right? So we know that experiential through the whole lived experience. That's the best way to learn.

And the other one, we know the research points here is embodied learning that very few children only learn well from the neck up in the traditional sense, very

academic, very cerebral. Most children want to have a visceral physical multi sensory. Yes, multi sensory, right? So, if we want to understand play and embodied learning better, then where can we look?

Where can we look? Where can we find something? Okay, are we going to get that in the realm of [00:12:00] engineering? Are we going to get that from from the world of sciences? Ah, for me, A really great toolkit that ticks all of those boxes and has a multi,, like endless library of things to use. It's the arts, you know, the arts.

I mean, if you watch a play, it's called play. We have tools like I went to drama school. I studied theater, improvisation, character play, the voice, the body. We play with all of that in order to create imaginary world. So I think that it's a filter. It's a toolkit. It's like a palette with all the colors in the paint to can.

dip into different colors. It's just useful. The arts just provide this wonderful, I can call it a dictionary. I can call it an encyclopedia. I can call it a toolkit with which to just grab the idea of embodied learning, playful learning more effectively. Because if you think of that average teacher all across South Africa in the world, without necessarily the background, the resources or the training [00:13:00] in the arts or in this.

There's, they're not necessarily an expert in playful learning or embodied learning. And it becomes hugely overwhelming. And we go, hang on a second here. Look, let's take the arts. You've got it in you. You can move. You can sing. You can play. And it can help you be a tool.

Meg: I love the way that you're positioning this and I'd like to just put it into a little bit more practical words as well for moms.

So we have different types of play. And I mean, as an occupational therapist, I studied play at university. It was, kind of core to the work that we do. Are very focused on play. Now we get two types of play. Well, two types of play that we'd like to talk about. And the one is free play, which is children just out there doing what they want to do and taking care of play themselves.

And for little children that can be more sensory exploration in a garden, for instance, for an older child, it might be imaginary play and that's free play where nobody's directed them. It's undirected. It's unguided. It's like. Go in the direction you want to go in. Then there's the piece that we call [00:14:00] guided play and guided play is very interesting and very important because it's the way in which a parent actually can come or a teacher can come alongside a

child and help to scaffold development and put them just out of sight of their comfort zone.

We call it the proximal zone of development where you can just put your toe outside of what you, where you've been playing up until now and take a little bit of a step and extend yourself. And that guided play is very important. It doesn't mean that all play needs to be guided play. It has to be time for complete free play, but a piece of play has to be guided play.

Now, what I'm absolutely loving about what you're saying is that when we are doing guided play, we have a variety of. Tools in our toolbox as parents. So an example of guided play could be for a two year old imaginary play. Cause two year olds don't have imagination yet. So if a mom goes and plays imaginary play with her two year old, she's effectively guiding them.

And actually, as you can imagine, scaffolding them up to the next level of development. But here I've got now a four year old and I want to know, Oh, what am I going to play with my four year old? Because, [00:15:00] you know, I'm tired of screen time. Then how to do imaginary play. I don't feel like setting up a sensory pond in the garden or whatever it is.

Ah, there's another tool in my toolbox, and that's the arts. And that's what I'm hearing you say, that this becomes another strategy that parents and teachers can use as they start to search and look for guided play for children.

Hanneke: Exactly that, Megan. I love how you have, explained it to me as well and understand it better.

It's exactly what we do. I think we, in our program, we're doing guided play as much as possible. And then to also leave that with the parents, or to leave suggestions. It is very overwhelming. We're all like working parents and you've got your little ones that I don't know about you, but my child is constantly, mama, I want to play.

You need to be more fun. And then you kind of think, okay, well, what else can I do?

Meg: Yeah. I'm tired. Like what am I supposed to do? And actually a lot of adults have forgotten how to play. I mean, Let's be completely frank about this. We have forgotten as a generation, how to play as adults. And so when our [00:16:00] children need to be so called entertained or played with, we are actually at a loss.

And so this gives us a loss.

Hanneke: And the thing that, you know with our work, when I say the innate arts drama. Dance and singing, take a deep breath and think about that. I'm not asking you to even have an instrument. I'm not even asking you to mix some paint because sometimes that feels like a stretch when I'm, but I could actually just move.

We could actually just move. Should we pretend to be bunnies? Well, how does a bunny hop? What do you want to be now? We just need myself and the space. And sometimes we can do that by switching on a bit of music or just pretending character play or singing our favorite song together. Movement. Music and character play for me, those are very useful tools for a parent or a teacher.

Meg: Yeah. So now I'm a mom sitting at home and I'm listening to this and I'm thinking, right, this is a great strategy, but I don't know where on earth to start. So tell me a little bit about the business that you started.

Is it called Buzz Kids? So how would BuzzKids come alongside a mother or a teacher to help her to understand how [00:17:00] to engage, with her little one?

Hanneke: Well, first of all, we have sessions all around the country in many different schools. So hopefully you can bang on your principal or teacher's school and get us. In there because we run extramurals or in school programs. So we really partner with schools. So, we're not a competitor to schools. We're just there as a value add. And obviously that's a lovely way, but we're not the only ones. There are many other organizations like Buzz.

So, the idea is to. To make sure when you look at what your child is, what's in their schedule, and even the little ones, you know, they've got the extramurals or the programs or wherever you're taking them to, they're swimming. Is it just swimming that we're doing? And maybe we will even pottery, or is there something else that we're bringing to their lives that can just help you and them think a little bit more outside the box?

Something that's exposing them quite widely. That's also what I like about our program is it's for young children. We don't know yet if they're going to be an expert necessarily in, they're going to be the expert dancer or the actress, but we're starting [00:18:00] with a drama dance and singing three in one program.

So there's quite wide exposure, to various art forms. And then we can see as they get older where they might find an expert level or a niche that they love.

But how we can help you is our website is there. We've got blogs. We actually have a podcast for children. So this one is for moms and dads to listen to, but our podcast is to pop into the car when it's all just getting a little bit ratty.

What is it called? That's wonderful. Kids with a Z past podcast. Is it B-U-Z-Z-K-I-D-Z. KZ. Okay. And we've got theme after theme. So it's basically I don't know if you remember Stewart Iman was when I was little. It's an audio story. It's a radio drama for children. Love it. Our little characters around the imaginary world and the ends on some of our material that the child can then learn and sing along to.

So we've got that to help you with. We've got our music again, Buzz Kids on any platform like [00:19:00] Spotify, Apple music. You can search Buzz. Kids with a Z and listen to our music. I honestly have made album after album of music and podcasts and stories because parents come to me and they go, we need more.

We've listened to this album to death. I need more. So, I just think it's a very important in this world of screen time that you have other creative content that's potentially not coming through. The visual stimulus, but just audio, I really believe in podcasts, but for children as well. So we've got programs, we've got tools for teachers.

So curriculum that the schools can plug into and use our curriculum because it's fully developed and it's actually been accredited now by the education Alliance of Finland. So. We know it's a really good program that schools can either plug into as an in school program after the academic day as an extramural or just any of our creative content that's out there in the world.

We're actually also developing a television show so that we can have a buzz workshop right in your living room, so that's what we're trying to do is just to get this [00:20:00] content and Especially those learning outcomes, like to help the parent connect this silly little exercise that looks like we're just being silly, but I'm trying to help you understand how that's doing some midline crossing or how that's helping with spatial

Meg: awareness.

So give me an example, if I've got a two year old, first of all, what age does your program start at?

Hanneke: Birth from babies to 13 and inside that bracket, we actually chopped that into four developmental areas. Okay.

Meg: So, just give me a super practical. I've got a two year old. I want to be able to do something with them. What would your program teach me to do? Give me an example.

Hanneke: So if we were doing a buzz workshop with a two year old, we would start with beautiful song. It's a parent and child interactive so definitely need an adult with a little one like that. We would start with a focus exercise that helps them move an imaginary frog.

From the floor to their knees, to their shoulders, to the sky. And we can show you online how to do very simple games like this. This is going to help with [00:21:00] coordination. We're also imagining. We're also vocalizing the little frog. And that's a game that we would have to teach you, but what can I just even share with you like this?

The next thing we'll do is a bit of a physical warmup, get our bodies moving through the space, so we'd. Use some of our original music or some pop music. We make sure that we cross the middle line as much as possible. So we're moving in opposite direction with the left hand potentially crossing the midline of the body into the right hemisphere, et cetera.

And we're just getting those bodies warmed up, touching off, just getting through the planes from the. Up a field down to the low field, getting those bodies warmed up getting children used to, to using the entire space. So that's something that you can teach your child right at home is to fill a space for the kids to spread out nicely.

Then we would potentially go into what we would call a buzz to buzz exercise. So that is. Tummies to tummies. So if we've got more than one child there, then they're putting their little tummies together. So there's cognition there of the body parts, but we're also now working together as a team.

We're working on listening skills. We're working on our spatial awareness, our coordination, [00:22:00] again, our core strength bum to bum, nose to nose. And so until they need to find a new partner, then we might go into a quieter part of our workshop where. We're now working on some vocal strength. It's very important to, to get those voices warmed up.

So we put a little kitties on a roller coaster and we go as we just visit physically, just show the child how the little kitty is going up and down. And that's warming the voice up. Or we're doing vocal tennis where I throw a sound at you or I bounce the sound at you and you bounce it back. So I might make any sound like ribbit, and you have to ribbit back at me.

Or I go. Oink, and you've got to bring that sound back at me. So there's mimicking that's happening there. And then we'll go into actually teaching at one of our original songs, which has lots of educational value because it depends on the theme. So we're learning about the under the sea world that we're in, et cetera

so our program is very set. Up like this, it then goes into the imaginary play, which is phenomenal that they were really asking the children to take on character [00:23:00] and to follow us along through an imaginary world. So it sounds like when I just speak about this off the cuff, it's like, Oh, what do I do?

What do I do? The internet is full of resources. Our website has some resources. The program is built to be in a school facilitator led type of program, but I'm very passionate about continuing to share with parents, the principle of playing and using what we have inside us innately as a start, not saying what we do or what I'm saying is the beginning, middle, end of it.

But as a start, think about the arts being your toolkit to develop what is most important. Or what I think is the super skill to come up with an original idea, as well as that confidence, if a child has an original idea and they can back themselves, then they might become, who knows, a far more confident heart surgeon one day.

Or they might innovate the next robot or spaceship we need to back our own ideas and we need to [00:24:00] be able to trust those ideas. I think I mentioned this to you when we met about a study that was done in 1968 with George Land, who was called on by NASA, as in the, astronauts to find they had to find a test.

To identify creative geniuses and they built a test that was successful and was wonderful. And then they thought, well, this is a very useful thing. What other subsection of community and of humanity can we test this on? So they tested it on children and 1, 645 year olds. This is 1968, 1, 645 year olds. How many of them do you think scored creative genius levels?

I don't know. Tell me. Yes. Guess make. I don't know, maybe 400, 98 percent of children, certifiably creatively genius. They then did a longitudinal study on

those same humans, but by end of primary school, only 30 percent of those children scored creatively genius by high school, it was down to [00:25:00] 12. And by adulthood, the same children, only 2 percent of them and my point here is Buzz, what we do to make a child creatively genius. Neither does any curriculum or any school, they have it in them. It comes with the factory settings, but we must Absolutely. As parents and teachers

Meg: earn it. Got it. And protected. Absolutely. Well, it's been super, super interesting.

I'm definitely, you and I both sing from the same hymn sheet. Excuse the pun when we are talking about the arts. Absolutely. But we are very much aligned on this and I think, when I look at the world as it is right now, there are a number of risk factors for this generation of children.

There are is a risk factor of AI taking over jobs in the future, which you have alluded to. But there're bigger risks as they're growing up. Things like the confidence being squashed, technology taking away their creativity if they're watching too much tech. overscheduling of children over diagnosis of conditions that actually are not conditions, they're just part and parcel.

Development. So these are the things that I think, do pose to pose a massive risk for this generation. What I'm [00:26:00] really delighted about is that programs like buzz kids and play sense exist to be able to really encourage little ones to explore their creativity and develop and to come alongside parents, to help them to know what to do.

So I'm really delighted to have been able to chat with you, Hanukkah. And I'd like to, before we just finish off, won't you tell moms how they can get hold of you or where they can find your program?

Hanneke: Oh, please. We are Buzz kids, so B-U-Z-Z-K-I-D-Z, always kids with a z.org on the internet. So buzz kids.org and we are buzz kids on Instagram and yeah, anywhere on your Spotifys.

Yeah, wherever you listen to your podcast, we have a podcast, we have original music. So, you know, find some really cool, proudly South African, modern music just to jam to, and you'll hear some educational, really good messaging also coming through on our music as BuzzKids. That's where you've got to find us, LinkedIn everywhere.

We also have a foundation that looks after [00:27:00] underserved communities and does the same good work there. And we always need. We just need people to know of us and give us any kind of support as any other growing organization. So please do support us.

Meg: Excellent. Oh, that's wonderful, Hanneke.

Well, thank you so much for a very enlightening conversation. Moms do go and look up BuzzKids and yeah, all the best Hanneke. I'm very excited to watch your journey.

Hanneke: Thank you so much. Bye bye.