

Mike: Alright yall, so everyone knows that childcare is essential. We're some of the most influential people out there. Yet, we are often under paid and overworked. So how can you work full-time, have hobbies, show your friends and family love, self-care, and also fine tune your skills and grow more in-depth? That's where we come in. These napcasts, 25, 30 minute segments are designed to help you learn on the go, hear another perspective, spark debate, agree incessantly, and honestly, remind you that you're not alone. We live in a complex world, so allow us to challenge your perspective. So, are your headphones in? Did you turn the volume up? Alright now. Let's get it.

Mike: Welcome to Napcast, a podcast produced by Hilltop Children's Center in Seattle. My name is Mike Browne (he/him) and I'm with my brotha from another mother Nick Terrones (he/him). Before we jump into today's topic, we wanted to share a little bit of background info on who we are and how we got this started.

Up here in Seattle, on the traditional grounds of the Duwamish People, the first people of Seattle, we are a Reggio-inspired preschool serving about 120 kiddos from 2 to 5 and we have an afterschool program. We also double as a professional development institute, tackling issues of race and equity and shedding light on how we can dismantle systems of oppressions in our early education system.

At Hilltop one of our core values is learning in relationship with others. And that often translate into these in person visits, workshops, conferences, gatherings, dialogues. But being up here in the Pacific Northwest also means that access is a barrier for the majority of you all listening right now. So we wanted to find a way to topple that and have these extended version of conversations where you can listen in no matter where you are. Thus, a podcast was born.

And we wanted to do something a bit different. We know that this industry is mostly filled with white identifying womxn. And if you go to a conference, most of the presenters are just that. So one day when my boy Nick looked at me and said, "yo, what if we put this together and give a platform and voice to communities of color." I said "bet, let's do it." And the rest is history...

So like I said, my name is Mike Browne, he/him, Afro-Caribbean Black, dreads all the way down to my back, heterosexual male. If you had to boil it down to one title, I'm the Community Engagement Manager at Hilltop but in reality, because you know how it is at a nonprofit, you have to be able to do a 10,000 different things, I'm handling everything from Community Engagement, Partnership, Grants, Professional Development, Anti-racism initiatives and the list goes on and on and on

Nick: Hi yall and like Mike said I'm Nick Terrones and I'm an Los Angeles raised Mexican-Native-American, sprinkled in with a few other ethnicities. I am proudly mestizo. I'm an educator working with toddlers and been at it for over a decade, coming up on my 13th year working with toddlers specifically and I've had the opportunity to travel abroad doing presentation and other speaking engagements as well as some publications.

Another thing we wanted to acknowledge is that there are not a ton of people of color in childcare and certainly not a ton of males in it either. And if that's a surprise to you then where have you been?! So, we wanted to give a different perspective from what you've probably been used to hearing and also let young

Black, Indigenous, People of Color know that we are out here. We do exist. We are thriving. And we are with you in solidarity. And we hope we can inspire you to make Early Childhood Education a career opportunity for you.

So that's where we are at right now. We will be tackling a topic and bringing our perspective, and our lived experience to life. So let's get it start Mike.

Mike: Right on, alright. So Nick, this one is an easy topic to jump straight into. Its on all of our minds, it's on all of our tvs, and that's COVID19. It's having a drastic effect on our ability as educators to interact and support the children, families, and communities we serve. It's also testing the resolve of our physical and mental health. So let's start there with your own self-care. Tell me, how you've been coping with the physical distancing order?

Nick: Actually, it has been OK for me. Most of my social-energy is generally spent with children and their families, and while I am not with them physically these days, we've been finding ways to stay connected. That's been true with work colleagues, too. I think this situation as I reflect upon it, is reminding us about the importance of relationships and the value of connectedness. And also, I know for myself this is true, this situation is an opportunity for us to access our creative sides: which in turn inspires and influences critical thinking, self-reflection, and hopefully, self-worth.

Mike: Hmm, self-care, self-worth... For me, coming from the east coast, where it's not a 9 to 5. It's more like a 8 to 6. I really struggle with that when I first moved out here. The concept of work-life balance was foreign. So when my boss told me to go home and it was 3pm, I didn't really know what to do! So in terms of self-care and self-worth, what does that look like for you?

Nick: Make sure you are taking care of yourself first. You have to have a little bit of selfishness to be able to care for your child or your children.

Mike: Not just an educator out here, you're a philosopher too!

Nick: Haha, but for me it's so important. But getting back to your question of how it looks like, self-care is giving me ample time to tackle writing projects – such as blogs for Hilltop's website, the book I'm writing with Margie Carter and Ann Pelo, writing articles for exchange magazine, and keeping contact with emails and writing letters to friends I have abroad and within the nation. I'm also reading the many books I have stacked up, and playing music and creating it as a creative outlook. I've also had to be creative and diligent at making sure I find and maintain a routine for these things to be fruitful.

Mike: Awesome man. I have a ton of books myself I've been meaning to catch up on but it always just seems to turn into being a coaster for my drinks!

It actually sounds like you're more busy than ever before haha. But you mentioned something I really want to touch on something you just mentioned about how COVID is reminding you of the value of connectedness. Tell me more about that. It sounds like you're viewing COVID19 as a shared experience that we can use to connect us all?

Nick: Absolutely. It's a time for shared experience and a time for us to heal. And one of those books I've been reading during this time, is one by Toni Morrison. And I've latched on to this Toni Morrison quote: "This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we speak, we do language, we create essentially. That is how civilizations heal."

When you look at the course of human history, during times of distress, catastrophe, and uncertainty, it is the creative minds that provide us the sustenance to heal through the process. I truly believe that educators fall into the creative-mind category as well: for being an effective and impactful educator requires one to pivot and rebound in the face of adversity and uncertainty, to remain steadfast in trying to synthesize information to help others, especially young children, make meaning and understanding.

And that's what I mean about value of connectedness. It's a time to align, find meaning, put our community first, begin with our strengths, and build a bridge of understanding.

Mike: Powerful, especially leading with community first and beginning with our strengths.

So, you mentioned that routines are important for your own mental health. Routines are equally essential in giving children a sense of security and stability, especially during these times. With many families facing the new challenges of balancing work life, children staying home, and other commitments, what are some ideas or thoughts on creating routines you'd like to share out?

Nick: Children are going to notice the new ways of operating in society, and at their level, society is home and school. They are keen observers in these places, and notice differences in their lives: not going to school, not going out to parks, maybe being told no to accompanying a family member to the store, people wearing masks, etc. What has been helpful for families in my classroom is to emulate the classroom schedule as much as possible. Having some sort of rhythm to the day gives everyone both the children and the families a sense of grounding, stability, and expectation; a sense of know how. Like "I know what to do in this situation/at this time," and for adults it can empower them with an idea and feeling of control amidst a situation where that may seem to be lacking.

Mike:

I think we are all struggling to a certain degree, that feeling of control, or lack of. Ya know, I have two degrees, I'm pushing 29, I was going to say 30 but I have a couple of more years and even I don't fully understand the magnitude of COVID. I can only imagine how it looks to a child. Hilltop shut down for two weeks before reopening for essential workers with children in our community. So for those who are either opened, opening up soon, or for the parents at home, how would you decide what's the appropriate amount of information to give young children, especially toddlers about why we're staying home? Why some are wearing masks? Why life has suddenly seemed to be put on pause? Not just for COVID but for other future pandemics?

Nick:

First step is to distill big information down to an age appropriate way of receiving it. Taking big concepts and making it easily digestible, relating it to similar experiences they might have had seem to help children. And when you do this, you've got to really accept that young children, even toddlers, have the capacity to understand, they want to know.

Mike: That's very Reggio and strength based thought process right there. That children are competent, capable, citizens.

Nick: Absolutely! Starting with that orientation should always be your first step.

You also want to be OK with telling the truth, and yes, it is hard to tell the truth during these kinds of things because we do not want to scare children. That's what the facts are for.

For example, I might tell my toddlers in the classroom because, they are keen observers in their own little societies: You probably notice we're not going to school right? Having lots of stay home days. I haven't been able to hold you, to hug you, to throw you around, to wrestle, to be in the same space with you. Maybe you're hearing about germs a lot more too. Well, there's this germ that right now, we do not have medicine for. But scientists and doctors are working on making some medicine to fight that germ.

When there's no medicine for a germ, it is easy for it to move to lots of people when they are in spaces together. Where do you see lots of people sometimes? (This is where I would pause and allow the children to answer with their own ideas, and then follow up with other communal spaces such as the synagogue, temple, community centers, library, the pool, etc.).

So if there are no people in the same space it is hard for the germ to move fast, and it will die. And as you know, when we wash hands we can kill the germs too. This is why a lot of people are wearing masks too, so that the germ does not get into their body. And this is why you might hear a grown up always say "catch your sneeze or cough!" Wearing a mask and catching sneezes and coughs slow down germs from going everywhere.

Mike: It's funny because when you said soup, my first thought was about chicken wings, and if my mom was here, fried rice, fish, or maybe fungi.

For adults, like myself, I'm not in the classroom daily so it might seem like a daunting task to describe germs and viruses to young children. Are there key points that I could drive home during this convo?

Nick: So I would say the key points here for children are: They probably already know that there are these things called germs, and side note, for you adults out there, please call them germs. Don't sugar coat it. We need to call it for what it is. And remind them that this is why we grown ups are telling them to wash their hands. These things can make you sick. They know that at times they need to take medicine to feel better when sick. And they are seeing and knowing that they are not leaving home because of some sickness going around. What they need is a 'why.' That's where the heavier facts of why we're staying

home, why some people are wearing masks, come into play. And when you're describing this, please remind them and follow up by telling them that it is my job to keep them safe, to provide some security.

Secondly, use what we know of a child's development and experience as a strength. Speaking from an early childhood perspective, children are generally moving through an egocentric point of view: where most of their thinking centers around themselves. Knowing this we can frame our conversations about COVID around the fact that we're all doing this to keep each other safe. They are not the only ones not going to school. Everyone is missing out. This stage of development can be looked at as a blessing because in reality these young humans are trying to put together what their feelings mean in relationship to other people. They want to know what this experience means for them, they want to know why. Mostly, this stage of development-egocentrism- is a mechanism for self-preservation: the child wants to know they are safe and secure. That they'll continue to be cared for.

Mike: We'll be right back..

Commercial: Hilltop Children's Center is a high quality preschool, afterschool program, and professional development institute of early learning and inquiry serving the Seattle community since 1971. Together, we are working with the next generation of inventors, leaders, thinkers, artists, and social activists. For more information on our professional development and community outreach including workshops, presentations, blogs, coaching and consulting, and of course, this napcast, please visit [www.hilltopcc.org](http://www.hilltopcc.org)

Mike: Nick, it seems to me that from what you just describe, taking big information and distilling it down, being responsive and providing answers to the questions children ask, that there might be a conflict between what many adults may believe is best practice. I saw it in my house growing up, grandma always thought she had to have all the answers for me.

Mom. Well.. mom's favorite words, or at least it was to me, since I was the more inquisitive person in the family was "I don't know." I mean, mom used to always follow that with a "leave me alone boy" but that could just be a caribbean thing haha. Is there a balance? Can you have both?

Nick: I hear ya, Mike! Many times in my childhood there was a lot of "because I said so," and "do as you're told." And now, being an educator with young children, I see where that comes from! But what has really helped me enjoy the "why's" and "how comes" and general questioning/curious nature from children, is simply letting go. Specifically letting go that I have to know answers to everything. I think that can easily become a folly of an educator: the need to know to be able to teach, can actually be a fault.

Being ok with not knowing, admitting, to your child or children you care for, that adults do not have the answers all the time, and modeling uncertainty is as valuable as modeling assuredness. I believe this shows children that it's ok to sit with uncertainty, that it's ok to remain curious for some time. Of course, this is about finding a balance as well.

Again, reminding yourself where the child is developmentally will, I believe, help keep you-the adult-grounded to be the best model you can be for them. The child always needs reassurance of what you

can/will do for them . When it is obvious children in my care are scared about something or a situation brings them anxiety, I remind them, “it is my job to keep you safe. I love and care for you. I will keep you safe.” Sometimes this may need an explanation of how, but not always. And in many cases I’ve come across, it’s usually the adult’s anxiety that the child draws from and for the adult it is more than ok to ‘fake it till you make it.’

Mike: I want to switch gears just a little bit here. And zoom out just for a moment. So much of our society is polarized. You’re either on one side or the other. As a provider, you either opened or you closed due to COVID. Regardless of what you decided, I can’t stress enough to each and every provider out there that You made the RIGHT decision.

Whether you are still providing care or not providing care, you made the best decision in a time of crisis where there was little guidance. You contributed to the greater good if you are practicing social distancing and staying home. You contributed to the greater good if you are caring for children of essential workers.

Here at Hilltop, we have decided to provide care for our families at Hilltop and in the community who are essential workers. For those families who are at home, what are ways you’re keeping preschool alive for them?

Nick: With my families and children we’ve been utilizing all the communication platforms technology has to offer! Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, Google Drive, have all helped us stay connected. My teaching team and I have been uploading videos of us reading books, singing songs, playing instruments, playing games we would play at circle time, and even showing them aspects of our personal lives like our homes. We’ve also been sending out daily emails, usually with some sort of activity and some play ideas. It’s also quite entertaining to have an all class Zoom meeting with 10-12 two year olds!

Mike: Zoom is a lifesaver for many. But it doesn’t beat face to face interactions for sure. Its definitely good to see you, it’s been a while since we been in the same room. When Hilltop decided to open up for essential care, we made the decision to allow those who weren’t comfortable coming in to stay home and do offsite work, you being one of them. And to allow x amount of staff come in and work on site, which includes me. We know that there is no right decision when it comes to this. So I’d love to hear more about how you came to that decision of working offsite? For me it was easy, I’m single, I live alone, my circle of contact is very small. How about you?

Nick: Well, it was a pretty easy decision on my end because I live with a family member who falls into the people at risk category. At first we thought maybe there would be some flexibility, but that faded fast, and I do not want to put them at risk unnecessarily. Had this happened a year or two ago, I’d be in a similar situation as you.

As time goes on though, we’ll continue to assess and reassess the risk level and determine when would be an appropriate time for me to return back to the classroom.

Mike: We're potentially in this for the long haul. I can only imagine how easy it is for folks out there including ourselves to lose touch with each other. What supports are you receiving that have been helpful to stay in touch with onsite staff, with your team as they work from home, with admin etc.

Nick: As for meetings, especially meetings with my team, Zoom has been very helpful. Quite frankly I think Zoom is keeping a lot of things afloat these days! Technology has been definitely the anchor in all of this. It is allowing me to connect with my different communities; like the World Forum Foundation. Being able to stay connected with those folks in real-time has been another layer of support. We're keeping each other motivated and inspired to push our agenda forward. Which is striving for a gender balanced workforce in ece.

Mike: Thank you Nick.

Nick: Thank you Mike.