

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.

Welcome to Napcast, a podcast produced by Hilltop Children's Center in Seattle, Washington, on the traditional lands of the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish Tribe. You already know who it is... or not. Its only our 2nd episode! My name is Mike Browne, pronouns are he/him

Nick: And I'm Nick Terrones, pronouns are he/him

We appreciate yall coming back for episode two and the feedback we already been getting. It's great to hear words of affirmation and also to hear challenges to our own thoughts. So keep the comments a'coming!

Mike: Like we said in episode one, one of our values at Hilltop is learning in relationship with others and being able to challenge one another, sitting in discomfort

keep an open heart and mind is how we grow and unite as a profession. So I appreciate yall sending us love, the questions, the thoughts and expanding our minds as we expand yours.

Alright, last episode was 35 mins and I promised that these napcasts are 25-30 mins long, so let's see if we can get closer this time around but no promises, Nick and I always have a ton to say! Let's start the timer now and get into today's episode.

So today, we want to dive into our authentic selves, what it looks like, how do we give ourselves permission to show up to work and be us, like all of us, 100% of us as two males of color with tats and dreads, looking like a whole snack ... can we say that? That aint weird? Okay aiiight haha. But showing up to work with all of our identities, our vulnerabilities.

Mike: So Nick, let's keep it a buck, let's keep it 100 percent real. It's a scary world for us out here. My skin is black, my dreads are long, I have a build from playing college ball, I'm perceived as a threat everywhere I go. You're Mexican-Native-American. You're battling two stereotypes on the daily. Our people are constantly under a microscope, so with so much of our time spent under that, how does or has that affect your interactions with others and your ability to get things done or simply exist within the childcare space?

Nick: It's definitely a mixed bag wherever I go and with whoever I meet. In the Mexican-American community I have learned that I am something called a pocho. There are varying definitions to this and how it's used to describe individuals, and the one I embrace the most is that a pocho is an individual who has both Mexican and American heritage. Often, pochos lack fluency in Spanish (although some of us are working in that), and pochos can carry a sense of pride of being able to navigate both cultures with some ease. Like a lot of other people, we too illustrate and exemplify the reality of the United States: this country is made up of all kinds of people brown, black, and every shade in between, who actually make this country great.

For individuals listening to this, the term code switching may come to mind. In the linguistic sense, it is the ability to alternate between one or more languages in a conversation. In the human development

sense, I like to think of it as the ability to adapt to cultural situations. Children do this between home and school.

So to answer your question: I feel like I am always code switching. For most of my life, I was never Mexican enough for some, and wasn't white enough for others. And many times I fell into this racially-ambiguous category. In my interactions with people, especially white people, I've had to read what they're reading of me! And in the past, when I was younger, I think I would adapt and act to their expectations. For my ece experience, I have all this going on, ANND being a man working with young children and all the stereotypes that carries. All in all, at times I feel like I always have something to prove and disprove.

Mike: This question and hearing your answer just brings up so much emotions in me because I'm right there with ya. Trying to figure out a space where I can keep it real and then trying to figure out how to operate in this field is emotionally draining... and that's usually before 9am even hits. And then I have to start my day. That has such a profound affect on how I show up, the amount of crap I can or I'm willing to put up with during a day. I constantly find myself in these odd spaces where I have to decide... alright Mike, am I going to debate this topic and be defined as the angry Black male, or the super sensitive one in the group, or am I going to have to hold back, and pick another battle for another day. Being in a space where you're under a microscope daily doesn't just affect your job, it affects your mentals, your psyche and the toughest thing I have done is try to explain that to co-workers. Which Is why I'm so appreciative of just hearing that from you. Like, I know we know that about each other, but hearing our similar struggles is why Napcast was born, it was why we have a bond, its why I call you my brotha. And if it wasn't COVID19 right now, I'd give you a hug in solidarity, so instead, I'll just give you a nod from across the room haha.

Mike: Unlike a ton of spaces we operate in together, this one, as in us right here together is special. I can, literally and metaphorically, let my hair down. It's such a liberating feeling. To just be vulnerable. So I'm going to ask you to lean into that right here with this next question despite the fact that many of our friends, family, colleagues, partners are listening to this. Day in, day out, which part of you do you leave at the door in order to survive? I know you probably need a second to think about that, so I'll answer my own question first:

I personally have to leave so much of myself at the door.

We work tirelessly as educators, admin, and various stakeholders to create a space where preschoolers can develop a sense of self and so we can address the needs of diverse learners and families. I mean it's goal number one as described in Anti-Bias Education. And.. that same energy is not spent on the environments we adults live in. We might lose that Zoom sponsorship we talked bout in the last episode haha, but our industry is anti-black.

The disconnect is crazy when it comes to how we try to ensure our children of color are thriving and flourishing in schools, albeit, we aren't great at that either.

Yet, we still perpetuate, although that's not my personal lived experience, physical violence against Blacks.

Blacks are still on the receiving end of linguistic oppression. Symbolic harm. And of course, systemic and cultural racism.

I'm so aware of how any deviation of grammar and pronunciation will land and although English has many different forms, I leave that at the door. And part of my Afro-Caribbean lingo at the door.

I'm in tuned with the problematic construction of the role of Black males. I have to water down my personality to not sound angry, argumentative, loud, emotional etc.

So throwing it back to you Nick, which part of you do you leave at the door in order to survive?

Nick: There were many ideas racing through my brain as you we're talking, Mike. But the last bit really resonates with me. Specifically, the idea of pride. I think the concept of pride is a double edge sword, and mostly right now I am speaking to the positive side of it. I too have tended to become emotional, argumentative, maybe sounded angry and loud, all of that, when I have felt proud about my work and ideas within that work. So I too, have had to find ways to water it down. I think this is especially true when you're the only man, and a man of color, in a room or at a table of all white women. You can feel totally outnumbered and, frankly, ganged up on-whether it's intentional or not.

Another thing that comes to mind, and you briefly mentioned it last napcast, is the idea of work-life balance. Like a lot of people of color, and males in particular, I was told to work hard and put in more effort than the next person--this is how we could be successful. You know, 'hard work pays off.' And it has carried me fine, so it feels insulting when someone is more or less breathing down your neck to "find work-life balance," or questioning the effort being put in after work hours. Historically, people of color have had to work harder, so now I have to consider leaving that at the door? I can go on and on about that!

Mike: You're a man of values, beliefs, and truths. And you live a life that's a genuine reflection of them. So, when there's kids crying, your coworker and you disagree, you had a spat with your family, and the day is just dragging on, how do you reconnect with your authentic self? Can you give us a glimpse into how you check back in with yourself to make sure you're still there?

Nick: This can certainly be hard in the moment, but definitely worth the practice: As soon as I'm feeling discomfort or unwanted feelings, there's usually a physical manifestation to go with it. If I can, I name it out loud: My stomach is feeling warm and there's a buzz to it, and it doesn't feel good. Or My palms are feeling sweaty and my chest is starting to sweat, I'm feeling like a immediately sat in a hot tub. Then I might just name the emotion: I'm frustrated, embarrassed, whatever. Then I call out to myself, what my part in feeling a particular way may be: I call these the saboteurs, which I picked up from a book called Positive Intelligence. I'll tell myself: oh hey, its the stickler who came to this conversation, yeah I see you there. Don't think there's space for you right now, maybe another time, but now's not your turn. Or my biggest saboteur in the past was self-righteousness. And I go through the same process of exposing them as the frauds that they are. That's the idea is to put a spotlight on these saboteurs when they enter the stage, so to speak, because they thrive in darkness.

Mike: Hmm, something that struck me while listening to you, is your intentionality. You're not just checking in with your emotions, but checking into your mental, physical, and spiritual portion of who you are. What did Marshawn Lynch say – take care of yalls mentals, take care of yall chickens.

Nick: Haha, yeah, that man has a way with words! And what I love about what he says is that it's always succinct and very thought provoking! Have everything in order to move forward is what I hear from that.

Mike: Moving forward, I think its dope that you have this willingness, this ability, to connect your passion, your purpose, your true self to the children's learning and help them to see beyond their own classrooms, connecting with the bigger picture. But death metal? Like, how? Why? You're pretty into the death metal music so Help me wrap my mind around the connection between death metal, toddlers, and yourself and why you decided to bring this part of your identity into the classroom?

Nick: Hahaha! Earlier this year I had a dad notice one of my many metal band shirts and asked what the obscure writing had said. Usually metal bands have some weird, scrawled out way of presenting their

name and they're generally unreadable, so it becomes more of a logo. I told him who it was, and only new that because I had bought the shirt at a show of theirs. The father then inquired what kind of metal it was, to which I said they kind of incorporate different genres of metal, but they're mostly death metal. I briefly took him down a road of the different kinds of heavy metal, and eventually said death metal was my favorite. He laughed and said, "I'm so glad and love that you're a toddler teacher."

Both metal music and toddlerhood are similar in nature: raw, real, honest, an unabashed way of being, and there consists a harmonious sense of structured chaos. Oh, and they're both at their best when loud! It's the kind of music I love to listen to, play, and watch live, anyone who knows me knows that it's an integral part of my being. Children are going to have all their life to be drenched in the monotony of mainstream top 40 music, so why not get them headbanging for a small portion of their life! New experiences right? It's a another small avenue to challenge and disrupt the norm.

I know in ece we often say child centered, but really we're all in the classroom community together, we're all classroom citizens. As I encourage and expect children and their families to bring in aspects of themselves and their lives into the school, as a form of authentic representation, I should do this too, all educators should. I think that this reflects that relationships are reciprocal and we learn in that reciprocity.

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.com](http://www.hilltopcc.com)

Mike: Alright, so Nick, we are a Reggio-inspired program and view learning as an active process. What does that mean and how are you able to explore reflexive, authentic inquiry as a teacher-researcher alongside the children?

Nick: Play. I feel like the best kind of research and exploration, with anything, is to immerse yourself in it. I think a lot of adults have forgotten how to play, but I have been falling back to just playing to gain insights from children.

A lot of the time that means getting right down on the floor and doing what the children do! Of course you have to not worry about what you're wearing, children certainly don't! Authentic inquiry requires authentic participation, and that might yield authentic insights or results.

Mike: We could do a whole segment on this next question, so let's folks a little taste with your answer, but I wanted to get your quick thoughts on how you set up your family-school-community collaboration? You cultivate this atmosphere of shared responsibilities for primary decisions and accountability for outcomes for your kiddos and their families, and seeing that almost makes me wish I was about 25 years younger again to be able to be in your class. How are you able to achieve this year in year out with 15 new families each time?

Nick: Can you elaborate a bit more, Mike?

Mike: yeah of course, I'm looking and wondering about how you co-create this small classroom community that seems to balance your values, your families identities and each year you are able to have this culture that is inviting, warm, authentic, and grounded in action and accountability on all parts, not

just the parents pointing the finger at you and saying “why doesn’t my child know how to spell their name” or the child looking at the parents and saying “I should have been potty trained months ago”

Ahhh, ok I hear you on that, my brother. Honestly, it's leading with values and always falling back on that. With those heavy, mostly unwanted feelings, when I'm feeling stuck, I try and slow down and see if what's happening actually aligns with my values. And not just my values, but the values my team and I have collectively conjured up. At the beginning of each year we make these values known with the new families that are entering the class, we share our lens of how we want our time to be together for the year.

The last couple of years we have been inspired by the New Zealand Ministry of Education's curriculum Te Whariki based in the idea of Mana or Empowerment. It asserts that children are already coming into the classroom (and world, really) competent and with their own understandings of the world and how it works. So it's up to us educators, curators of this classroom environment, to reflect that in our practices.

As you know, you walk into my classroom and you see these concepts and questions:

Well Being: Can I trust you?

Belonging: Do you know me?

Contribution: Is this place fair for us?

Communication: Do you hear me?

Exploration: Do you let me fly?

Mike: Hmm. That hits home. It also reminds me of this book I recently read by Dale Carnegie titled “How to Stop Worrying and Start Living.” It’s a collection of stories and advice to calm nerves and be in the moment. One of the stories was about how one woman in the 1900s was illstricken with grief because she never fit in and tried to emulate others. It wasn’t until her mother-in-law told her that the one thing she told her kids growing up was to just be themselves. And from that day on, she changed her outlook in life and went on to be successful.

Simple advice. Yet, we grow old, and make life so complicated. Can you break it down for us. I mean, you see kids imitating each other. They sometimes want to be like others...so how do you get children to be their authentic self. What messages are you sending them to reinforce this? Which questions do you pose? How are you supporting families to do the same at home?

Nick: Oh! That is a huuuuge question, Mike! As a toddler teacher, and sharing from that perspective it is important to understand that young children are looking to us, at every moment, for information on how to be in some situations. I also firmly believe they are constructing their understandings of particular individuals they meet based on adult responses. This person is this way, that person is that way, and this is how they are in whatever the situation is.

Children pick up on how adults treat other children and can adjust their behaviors accordingly, and so it's not surprising to expect other young children to latch on to the idea of how someone "is" and "how they should be treated". A great and somewhat unfortunate example of this is young boys having the majority of their teachers being female. 6 of 100 children in the US will have a male preschool teacher. 95.5% of caregivers are women. We already know that boys tend to get treated significantly different: more likely to be expelled or receive a heavier punishment of sorts, more likely to be diagnosed, and labeled with unjust titles.

I think acknowledging that children are just in process, as we all are, and they are at the beginning of it. So I suppose it's about addressing human needs and trying hard to avoid societal constructs: avoiding telling boys not to cry, not just calling girls sweet names but also boys too, it's really about counteracting

certain constructs that pigeon hole the human experience, which I think allows a person's authentic sense of self to flourish.

Mike: Thank you Nick.

Nick: Thank you Mike.