

Mike:

So Nick, we ended our last episode with an invitation to the audience to answer these four questions.

1. What are you missing from your own professional development?
2. If you're white, what do you need to know about your colleague, whose an educator of color in the classroom in order to support them in their journey?
3. If you're an educator of color, what organizational supports do you need to feel empowered in this work?
4. For everyone, reimagine your PD days. What structures do you need, what supports can you advocate for, how can you communicate your needs as an individual and as a collective to ensure these opportunities are high-quality, relevant, timely, and culturally sustaining?

And we got a couple of answers:

I'm missing more training and time to process how to best support the intersection of identities and special needs

I need to deepen my learning around indigenous sovereignty and non-western philosophies on teaching

Honesty. We don't make room for people of color and their experience. And as a program leader, I need to be better at uplifting their voices and as one of you said in your earlier podcasts.. I need to be better at listening, believing, and interrupting microaggressions.

And someone said thank you for your time and thoughtfulness in delivering these napcasts.

Mike: What are your thoughts?

Nick: Wow, those are very poignant responses and some that are tricky to talk to. But the first one that stands out to me is the concept of time. It's always a hard thing to carve out time. You and I do this but we have to do things out side of our work hours and I think that's just going to be the construct of teaching for a good while until there are systems in place that really supports us to have things like professional development. There's still the DIY ethos to really carve out our time. We're in it to win it with children and society as a whole.

One of the first steps to is to think about what you're interested in as well. I'm thinking about the indigenous sovereignty piece that you mentioned before.

Reach out to people. First nations people are all over this nations. And there's going to have to be a little bit of grace as some of those first nations people are white-passing. You're going have to give them some grace and really try to glean what you can from them and learn their stories. Because some of the time they have stories from their grandmother and grandparents that have

been passed down. Just be open to listening to everyone's stories. I think that's one of the biggest keys to all of these comments. It's to find a space of compassion and openness.

Mike: Alright yall, so everyone knows that childcare is essential. We're some of the most influential people out there. Yet, we are often underpaid 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 People. Welcome back this is Episode 5! And I'm your co-host with the smoothest voice in podcast, Mike Browne and my pronouns are he and him.

Nick: And I'm Nick Terrones, pronouns are he/him, with the second smoothest voice on the podcast.

Mike: So, we started today's episode with where we left off at the end of our last one. Go check it out at www.hilltopcc.com/institute/napcast. And I want to build off of that, more specifically, build off of something you said that really stuck with me during the episode as well as things said in between. Honoring children and families. Honoring their creativity, their expertise, the realities, their abilities.

So today, I want to focus on just that. The Image of the Child. Of course, if that's alright with you.

Nick: Ooooo! It's at the heart of our school's philosophy and pedagogy-Reggio Emilia, and what I believe in as an educator. Fire away.

Mike: Perfect! Let's start with an exercise. And I want everyone, listening, or reading this transcript to just pause it and take 5 minutes to reflect on it as well.

Let's look back on when we were children and reflect on what it meant for us to experience childhood. How old were you? Where were you? Think of the smells, take in the sights, what were in your hands? Think back to your childhood. Was it a fond memory? Was it your entire childhood? For me, I have an image of being in the bingo lounge with my father. Greasy pizza on my tongue, sounds of grumpy old people losing hundreds of dollars, sticky shoes from all the beer being spilled. I didn't have the greatest of childhoods. We didn't live in a great neighborhood. We were a working class family who barely could make ends meet. I was constantly in trouble and our lights were constantly out. But those moments in the Bingo Hall with my father continuously brings me joy. It represented community. An extended family. The outpour of love. The value of hardwork. Now, the downside of this story is that we weren't playing Bingo. We were working so we could get a discount on my tuition. But it was the fact

that those adults put trust in me to carry out tasks – and if you've ever been to bingo, you know how feisty they get haha. But it was those folks having trust in me.

Now, it's your turn. Think aloud, jot down a couple of words, paint or draw an image. Whatever you do, just live in that moment for a minute.

Hold on to that thought, that feeling for the rest of this episode. That's the framework we are operating out of today.

So Nick, when I think about childhood, I think about those handful of joyful moments. So in your work with toddlers, what do you mean by the Image of the Child?

Nick: I hear you talking about two things here, which are inseparable and reciprocal, Mike. To me childhood is the result of this concept Image of the Child; the experiences we have as children because of the way adults in our life view us. And I got to call out, for better or worse, in some cases, there are children out there that mold their own childhoods. In Reggio Emilia practice, the pedagogy we use to guide us here at Hilltop, the Image of the child is what it states: how do we view children. And in turn this view or image, will influence how we treat them and curate their environments. It is a strength-based model that asserts that children come to us educators and caregivers full of potential and capability with a deep capacity to critically think and contribute as citizens. I touched on this a bit in episode two...Te Whariki.

Long time Reggio educator, Carlina Rinaldi, states “the child is a producer of culture, values, and rights, competent in learning and competent in communicating with all the hundred languages.”

Image of the Child encourages us adults to value children's thinking, and to authentically make it visible to them and others. And the hundred languages concept tells us that children have a hundred (and more) ways of expressing and communicating their learning, knowledge, and feelings. When provided the appropriate materials by the adults in their life, they can show us their complex and nuanced thinking.

I should also call out that this concept of Image of the Child requires continuous dialogue and reflection to keep this principle in mind and in our practice and play with children.

Mike: It takes a tremendous amount of reflection in this work to be able to hold this high image of the child. Reflective practice sometimes sounds fluffy but it's something that honestly makes the difference when you're trying to build children's sense of citizenship.

Man, another crucial part of this work from what I'm hearing is that you have to come with a certain amount of appreciation. An appreciation of children's multiple learning styles, of how they understand and see the world, an appreciation of their interest about a particular topic.

You partly get this through being keen observers of children's work but what other attribute or skills are needed to uphold a high image of the child?

Nick: People familiar with Reggio pedagogy, this might sound familiar! For those hearing it for the first time, some refer to these as “soft skills,” the intangibles that I think take a good amount of self-reflection and dialogue with others to begin to see them work. I’m going to put on the philosopher hat here, and pull from Loris Malaguzzi...the spearhead in Reggio Emilia’s pedagogy.

1. **Become comfortable with the unknown:** This is true right now, as we’re all in unknown, uncertain, and complex times! Schools shouldn’t reflect and function as if children are predictable, life certainly isn’t. And children show us that sitting without an answer is ok, and living in spontaneity is something to be valued.
2. **Become totally Involved and Enjoy Relationships:** When you see children at the center, Mike, what do their relationships look like? What do they do? Yeah, man! They’re playing!!! Get back to play, especially in those tough moments when you’re feeling like you’re just managing behavior, the child needs to see us as a resourceful friend. Reshape our relationship with children from authority to this, and there are palpable results that emerge.
3. **Consider each Child’s Reality:** What does development theory and science tell us about a child? What are the cultural influences the child brings with them each day as they enter school? How do the adults’ perceptions and influences clash or compliment with the child’s? We all bring to our centers pieces of our lives, we never come isolated, our experiences and elements of the world we live in come with us...everyday.
4. **Wait-action without action!:** Wu Wei---action without action or also described as effortless action, its a concept I learned practicing kung fu tied with Daoist principles. Oftentimes we educators, including the legal guardians of children, want to impart lessons or experiences to teach children, yet if we carry a strong Image of the Child we will see that the best thing we can do is nothing. This is wu wei with children. It encourages us to wait and activate children to develop the will and desire to be the authors of their own learning. This is why we need to advocate against check boxes and standardized tests, as well as cookie cutter assessments, and strive for approaches that are more holistic and honor the process of childhood and human development.

Considering these at moments when being with children can strengthen our skills of observation, to notice the nuances children present. We become keen observers able to co-research and co-construct learning with children.

Mike: So, by taking the quadrupole role of keen observers and co-constructors, co-researchers, as active participants in children’s learning, you have a better appreciation and sense of the child. It sounds like a cyclical pattern. So let’s complete the cycle. What have you learned from children over the last 14 years which supports this view that children are confident, capable, competent citizens and has made you a more effective ECE professional?

Nick: The capacities they carry with them, and the potential for those capacities to be deepened with authentic, age-appropriate experiences. Across the age spectrum I believe children are capable of achieving great depths of empathy, reflection (including of the self), resiliency, insightful observations, abilities of sitting with complexity, and many more that I can't think of right now!

They've also taught me the great value of being authentic to both the self and with others. With the children I've experienced throughout my career, many come as they are; ready to express their full selves in a way that is straightforward and real. In our exchanges together they've taught me that they can sense authenticity, especially when it's talking about complex and somewhat heavy issues that permeate our world.

But most importantly, they've reminded me of the value and importance of play! I think a lot of adults have forgot about the benefit to be silly, have fun, be unafraid, and just be recklessly joyful.

Mike: I can imagine, it might take years to truly shift your perspective to view children in this way. After all, we come from a culture which has a deficit lens on nearly everything including children, especially our Black and Brown kiddos.

I'm thinking a lot about programs who might have pre-determined or scripted curriculum and how they might be able to adopt this philosophy into their early childhood educational settings. How can centers and programs begin to co-construct an image of a child framework into their policies, interactions, philosophy, engagement, community outreach etc.

Nick: Yeah, good question, man. That's the accessibility piece right? And really what we're also talking about to a degree is a reflection of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs: If communities, oftentimes communities of color, are operating at the bottom levels of this pyramid, this particular question is kind of unfair to address with them. If there's a constant struggle to get food, water, shelter, and other stressors in environments to create a sort of pressure cooker for them, they're not going to worry about this much!

And this is where predetermined curriculums, that you mention, come into play: There's funding in using these curriculums, and are often backed at the policy making level. And from knowing other educators who use those, it can be quite daunting to steer off course from the script or to reinterpret the script. More times than not those kinds of curriculums are written by academics with a lens of achieving results, and the way they're written do not consider the communities that are implementing them.

Now as Negative-Nicky as that sounds....educators are artists, and carry with them creative ways to honor children and families that they know. Keeping this in mind, I would encourage centers and educators to:

- Shop around different pedagogies/philosophies, and see what inspires you, what jives with your values and how you imagine your time with children and families to be.
- Take a deep dive into the script you may have, and see where there may be flexibility. Sometimes someone with an academic lens is needed to help sift through all that academic hub-bub!
- Create buy-in in your community of practice. Being in a center with other educators is a community, the school is a living organism fed and sustain through shared vision. This takes time and is ever evolving. But having a basic level of buy-in is key for the tiniest bit of momentum.

- Network! These days I think we have it good to be able to partner with other schools and communities, so I'd strongly advise people who are looking for a change to reach out to schools and educators. Sometimes these small connections have significant impacts on how our teaching and thinking evolve.
- In the past several years, I have encouraged myself and teaching team to tape up pictures of ourselves as children; specifically the age group we work with--toddlers. I encourage all educators to do this with the age group they work with! Make sure it's somewhere where you're going to look everyday. The idea is to remind yourself that you were a child once too with the drive to play and explore. And really it's a great way to constantly reflect, through many situations: how would I have wanted my child-self to be treated?

Mike: I know these are encouragements and also these really sound like questions programs should be asking themselves each year before the new set of children comes in. These sounds like self-reflection questions and activities about their own childhood, about their values, about their program. And things they should be asking themselves to ensure they are sparking joy. So ask yourself listeners... are your programs sparking joy?

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

Mike: John Nimmo, a professor at Portland State University in Oregon, and a good friend of ours at Hilltop was part of a documentary called "The Voices of Children." I've seen it a couple of times. It's only maybe a 30 minute documentary. But what I got from it is that children have a right. A right to a good school — a good environment, responsive educators, right time, engaging activities. This is the right of ALL children.

When we hold a high image of the child, we honor their inalienable rights. What are children's rights?

Nick: Hmmmmm, well the first thing that pops into my head is that again, at an age appropriate level, children's rights are human rights. But let me break down like this:

- Children have a right to a good school: one that is reflective of their community and encourages them to consider other communities.
- Children have the right to quality adults: these are the people who see themselves as resource managers rather than behavior managers. Children are rich in resources of creating, thinking, feeling, etc.
- Children have the right to Imagine: their observations and thoughts about the world around them are astute and meaningful. They bring a raw and natural way of seeing the world, as well as creating worlds.

- Children have the right to autonomy: sometimes we adults get wrapped up in passing down “life skills,” and surely these skills are helpful, but usually the child lets us know when they’re ready for them. I’m thinking about sleeping, eating, and toileting in this case! In their autonomy children are exercising and experimenting with their sense of self.

Mike: So clearly, you have rights you believe all children should have. What actions are you taking in your daily routines that honors these rights?

Nick: There are three things I ask myself depending on the situation:

1. What’s really important here or in this moment? (two preverbal children slamming table example)
2. How can I say “yes and”? (children bringing up questions about anatomy, skin color, ability)
3. Balancing expectation and choice: Potty training...

Mike: How are you demonstrating to the children that we really believe these point of view are true?

Nick: I think with real talk, you know? I mean how have you seen it around the center?

Mike: Is that a question for me?

Nick: Yea.

Mike: Oh boy... haha. Definitely through play. By allowing long stretches of periods where they can play uninterrupted and can dive deep into their imagination, I see children processing, developing, growing and making important contributions to the enhancement of the human experience through this. And with the support of educators and adults by encouraging aesthetic representation of children’s ways of knowing, by intentionally introducing interactive activities in which children have the opportunity to take the lead and make it their own, by giving them autonomy and time to have ownership of the spaces they interact with are all part of how we are helping children create healthy relationships with each other, with the natural environment, with the world and how we honor their truths, their knowledge, their culture.

Mike: In what ways are you making these statements visible to others and advocating for the strong image of the child?

Nick: Through our use of documentation I really emphasize the importance of whatever it is I am capturing of a child’s play or experience. Usually this is turning something stressful into a silver lining: again with toddlers, at a certain point they’re going to protest their biological needs: like sleep and toileting! The silver lining behind this, as annoying and contentious as it is, is that they are developing a stronger sense of self. Their finding power in their ability to say “no, I will not stand for this anymore!” Now if we harness that and pair it with learning how to refine and redirect that spirit for something bigger...well then we’re talking about a citizen for change.

Mike: So we have a high image of the child. What you're saying to me sounds like you have a specific role. The role of the educator. Which, I guess we'll have to talk about in our next episode. Stay tuned.

Mike: Thank you Nick

Nick: Thank you Mike

Mike: We have one shot at childhood. We have the bills. Before the bills, excuse me. Not the Buffalo Bills. Although, Go Bills. Before the drama, before everything life throws at them. It's our duty and our honor that this child is a joyous one. Until next time yall... Take care.