

Educator 1: The role of the educator is to advocate  
Educator 2: The role of the educator is to research  
Educator 3: The role of the educator is to orchestrate  
Educator 4: The role of the educator is to co-construct  
Educator 5: The role of the educator is to learn  
Educator : The role of the educator is to observe and document

*Mike: We are part of an ongoing story of men and women, ideals intact, who realize that history can be changed, and that it is changed starting with the future of children. - Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the schools of Reggio Emilia*

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. And this is Episode 6, The Role of the Educator.

As always, I'm joined by my brotha. Nick Terrones. Nicky, what-it-do?

Nick: What's going on Mike. Glad to be back at work, recording, playing, just being able to find a groove and reestablish a rhythm to this COVID life! Hi all, my name is Nick Terrones, pronouns are he/him.

Mike: Might seem like déjà vu, but much like Ep 5, we are going to start off ep 6 where we left off. Spoiler alert, Ep 7 might start the same. If you haven't listened to Ep4 or 5 yet, hit that pause button, visit us at our website [www.hilltopcc.com/institute/napcast](http://www.hilltopcc.com/institute/napcast) and listen to those so you get the full picture, this is a three part mini session, as we will be referencing portions of that in this episode.

So, we talked about the image of the child in our last episode, episode 5, and now I want to shift to the roles we play as educators.

As you heard, we started off today's napcast asking various educators from the region what they believe their role is as an educator. I want to hear your thoughts on that same question. So Nick, what is your role as an educator?

Nick: The role of an educator is going to be different for everyone in practice and play with children. And I think it's safe to say that overtime these roles change, a sort of ebb and flow with the times in which you live in, the communities you interact with, and information you gain or lose. And this concept of Role of the Educator is heavily Influenced by the Image of the Child you carry. So, like Mike said, if this is your first-time hearing Image of the Child-go back and check out Episode 5!

For me though I see my role as an educator as:

1. Someone who is tasked with engaging and expanding experiences for children. To address children's wonderments about the world in a way that encourages them to see themselves as thinkers and citizens who can influence the world as they grow.

2. My role as a male identifying educator is to represent to children, families, and society as a whole the importance of male involvement in young children's lives. And that has its own avenues to break down:
  - for children they're going to come across, know, and interact with males in their life so why not give them positive models at the earliest of ages?
  - for families its kind of tied into the societal component, but specifically my role is to model balance of caregiving, to meet the needs of children who *do* need “male energy,”-- -boys. And lately I have found that more and more fathers have been dropping off or picking up depending on what shift I'm in; for them there seems to be a familiarity that brings out a feeling of belonging and similarity: the concepts behind what we call representation.
  - For society, well it's about deconstructing unnecessary and ridiculous gender roles. And really, letting people know that this profession is crucial to the develop of citizenship
3. As a male of color who is an educator, that role, for me, is multi faceted and layered! Again it's about representation, but representing my culture, people's language, and history. And this role is also about deconstructing stigmas, and reconstructing the narrative about people who like me for children and families, as well as people who look similar to me.

Mike: I'm glad you scaffolded in your identities from educator, to male educator, to male educator of color. Noticing and recognizing how each of those influence your pedagogy and how you interact with children and society is critical. White people have to do the same and realize that white is a race too and your centrality of whiteness, just like your citizenship, your religion, and not just western dominated religion but all beliefs even atheism, all affect how you respond to certain situations. Powerful stuff and great self-awareness man. Sounds like I'm finally rubbing off of ya! Haha.

We have traditionally viewed teachers in this culture as simply practitioners implementing a curriculum designed by some expert we probably never heard of. Many of our teacher-prep programs are still teaching through this lens. Many of our policies and curriculum in the workplace are viewing teaching through this lens.

So, my mind immediately went to the educators and programs out there listening right now who might sort of believe in this perspective or are intrigued by this idea of the image of the child and role of the educator but they are ultimately operating within the confines of a system that believes that they are simply practitioners.

What changes do you think needs to occur in their thinking or perhaps even their teaching philosophy that will shift how they view their role as an educator? Which, of course, will lead to a greater image of the child – once again, check out episode 5, if you are not familiar by what we mean by image of the child.

Nick: Hahah! Great re-replug Mike! Definitely showing your marketing skills. But it's an important call out and honestly, I think starting there with the Image of the Child will help inform what role educators like to envision themselves in. And one important thing I'd like to call out that you brought up, Mike: in early childhood I feel that there's more of a stigma that educators are not even practitioners, but instead service providers or glorified babysitters. I mean doctors and dentists, along with other MDs are considered practitioners in society, but early childhood folks barely garner a fraction of that recognition.

In terms of paradigm shifts-changing up thinking- educators got to want it! I think it was Ghandi who said be the change you want to see. I believe this to be true for adults who are looking for a change of pace in practice. I've called this out before, I know that a lot of curriculum scripts and big 'ol manuals for certain state curricula can be really daunting for educators, and seem like there isn't any way but to follow a script, but from the one's I've looked through for our state at least there is flexibility to meld philosophies

and practices together! I'd also like to encourage everyone to find or establish a cohort of like-minded people: use this as a chance to practice reflection, share ideas, inspire one another. I know I always find a sense of strength and rejuvenation in thinking with others as well as being challenged.

Mike: It won't fall into your lap, you have to go out there and search for them. But its out there. I started by joining NAEYC and checking into their different groups. But for me that was too big, so I joined the board of WAEYC, the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children, the state version of NAEYC and it felt homier. And through my outreach and advocacy there, I've really latched onto other communities of practices and likeminded folks from across the state.

Thinking back to the beginning of this episode. You and others viewed the role of educators as co-creator, researchers, documenters, and advocates among many. I'm curious about those and would love for you to dive deeper into that for us.

What do you mean when you say educators are co-constructors?

Nick: Learning is a reciprocal process, and I know for myself, children teach me a lot! The analogy I've heard many times is that the learning process is like playing a ball game: the child throws the ball, the adult catches it, and then sends it back in. But the adult could bounce it, roll it, lob it, really anything that is different from the way the ball was originally tossed. In this process children and adults are co-constructing the game together. So, when thinking about co-constructing we are embracing the idea that we adults are open and ready to learn from the child, we acknowledge that the child has something to contribute, the learning process is an even playing field and not so much a top-down approach. A lot of time, education takes the approach that children are an empty vessel, and let me fill it up with knowledge rather than let me see what's already inside this vessel and let me expand it.

Mike: When you said "children" teaches you. Especially after a day like today, they have taught me how much I value a glass of wine. They were a lot today! Haha. So, what do you mean when you say educators are researchers?

Nick: I believe when we authentically and consistently consider ourselves, the educator, a researcher we are allowing ourselves to open up that reciprocity in learning. Being a researcher, or a teacher-researcher, means to show up ready to inquire more than to "teach." And I firmly believe that learning takes place in these moments of inquiry for both the child and adult. Children are researching all the time through their play and observations, and we can do the same as their educators! So really to me, in ECE, being a researcher is being a participant to uncover possibilities in a child's learning.

Mike: We'll be right back..

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: What do you mean when you say educators are documenters?

Nick: Researchers usually record their findings in some way. When I think about the key word of reserachers, I think about anthropologists and others who does deep digging into humanities and I think education especially ECE is right there. And so they record their findings in some way and in their process of reflection and analyzation, it can guides us as educators in figuring out where to go next.

Mike: I mean, it guides us on where to go next with our napcasts.

Nick: Exactly. We have to research a little bit and document it. That's what we're doing. Documenting this. And in early childhood education, documentation is a form of curriculum: we create a story of children's play and observations, we make meaning of their experiences, we explore possibilities to expand those experiences and thinking that took place, and most importantly we share it back with the children and families. I believe reflecting back these usually-taken-for-granted everyday moments communicates a sense of value to children: that they are valued as a person with ideas and meaningful contributions to offer.

Mike: Hmm, so the last questions I have for you is what do you mean when you say educators are advocates?

Nick: We spent a little bit of time touching upon this in Ep2 called La Revolución. We spend copious amounts of time with society's future citizens, and what we see and experience in our separate yet connected worlds or societies is reflected through what our experiences with children are. We are going to see unjust disparities for children in communities that are not invested in, and we're going to witness children living lives that we consider a right for everyone-child and adult. So, it's the task of the educator to call this out and champion for the rights of children and families. We should embrace the idea of being allies for the people we serve, to make sure the institution we are working in is one that isn't simply perpetuating systems of inequity.

Mike: The road to knowledge is always under construction. It's why we have, so to speak, adopted a constructivist approach to teaching. I like to think that we are in the business of creating "lifelong learners" though an activity centered, play-based, nurturing program.

I imagine that takes quite a bit of negotiations with children. With the role of the educator in mind, how is power and control shared in your learning environment?

Nick: The biggest thing that comes up as a toddler teacher is the ideas of controlled chaos. And yes there are a lot of things that chaotic and there's a sense of beauty in the random things in the quote unquote uncontrolled happening. And I believe that everyone who enters my classroom-toddlers to adults-has something unique to offer the environment. The environment is not just the materials that are available, but it's also the sensory and emotional environment. We all have wells of knowledge that are to be tapped into and reflected in the environment, and with that in mind I experiment and research with what I have experienced to be successful for toddlers and see how that jives with the children. From their play or lack thereof, and sometimes they just tell me, I can then pivot and adjust. Or sometimes they'll say "is that it" so I have to pivot from that and adjust as well. When doing this I try to make sure the classroom environment is responsive to their needs and communicates a sense of YES.

Mike: In our last episode we made the connection between children's rights and the image of the child. We basically came to the conclusion that to have one, you need the other. They are inextricably linked.

When I think about your role as an educator, I think about how you show up in the classroom. But it doesn't talk about the image of the educator. So, my last question to you is... what do educators deserve?

Nick: Ahhh, that's a powerful question and I think the answer will be different from everywhere. What I'm hearing is Rights of the Educators. The first thing that pops into my brain is that educators deserved to be respected, taken seriously, and trusted. Educators also deserve to be at the table of policy and standard making-like real educators who are working in the classrooms, who know their communities.

Educators deserve to be heard and seen movers and shakers for the health of community and society as a whole.

Mike: So we talked about image of the child in ep5 and role of the educator in today's episode. So I guess the only thing that's left is examine how community and family partnership plays into this. That'll be episode 7.

Mike: Thank you Nick.

Nick: Thank you Mike.

Mike: We have one shot at being kiddos. Before the bills, before the drama, before responsibilities. Let's make sure we give them a joyous one. Until next time y'all take care.