

Mike: Community.

It's filled with children as the protagonists. The collaborators.

It's filled with educators as researchers, nurturers, advocates.

But what about the caretaker? How do we view parents and guardians as partners? Community members as one of the most important pieces that completes our tiny but mighty community?

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. I'm your co-host, Mike Browne, pronouns he/him and I'm joined by my colleague, Nick Terrones whose pronouns are he/him as well and this is Episode 7, The Role of the Family.

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.

Nick: Ya know Mike, I'm trying to rack my brain and think about if I have heard something like this or not. I have heard about, and we talked about, the role of the educator and image of the child and how they influence each other. And for this concept, I see that it too is shaped by how we educators view families: what is our image of the family? How we shape our image of families is how we are going to expect and/or anticipate their roles in our school communities.

My family comes to mind first, and the roles they've played throughout my life. And then obviously, the families that I have at school or have had come to mind. And as I am thinking about this idea of Role of the Family I'm thinking about the many experiences I have had during my time as an educator. With that these words come to mind: The Role of the Family is...

- to advocate
- to collaborate
- guide and advise

Mike: There's a myriad of ways that the collaboration between caretaker, child, and educator can be seen. I'm particularly interested in how you communicate and share with caretakers the challenge and responsibilities of educating their children as a community?

Nick: And for this you're equivalenting caretaker with family members.

Mike: Absolutely, because there's a large spectrum of people who take care of children and for me that means guardian, grandparents, parents, because sometimes it can be the whole village to raise a child.

Nic: As with the children, I aim to cultivate and foster a rapport with families. And not just a rapport but an actual relationship that shifts from at first being built on blind trust, to an actual trust, and that trust is mutual. For the age group I work with, toddlers, I have learned that at the beginning of the year families still see their child under an infant lens--especially if it's their first and only child. No matter what age of the child, they will always be their family's baby---my moms reminds me of this always! Even though I'm 36 years old, my mom still calls me Nicholas!

I have to go in knowing and being open to the fact that the families of the children in my care might have a different idea of how to be with that child, so I'm always reminding myself two things:

1. what's more important in a particular situation (my idea or theirs);
2. what I do know is that what we all want is what's best for the child's needs and experiences.

These reminders play on each other and do not have a particular order. As caretakers of children, both family and educator, we know that there are going to be inherent challenges we both face, and I like to remind families that what works at school may not always translate back at home and the silver lining behind that is the child is becoming more sophisticated at code switching: applying behaviors to social contexts. I also like to emphasize to families, and it's a good reminder for myself, that childhood is not linear—it ebbs and flows, it has its zigs and zags. When families find out how long I've been working with toddlers, I do notice that they are more readily able to give me their blind trust. And we have made it a consistent practice to make our values and approaches transparent, as well as make time to always communicate: from the beginning of the year before we know them, straight through to when the child is ready for their next educational adventure. As with any relationship, communication is the underlying value that makes or breaks a relationship.

Mike: It is well known that one of the best investments parents can make in a child's life is investing in high-quality early childhood education.

And the realities for many is that education has been traumatic, education has fallen short and failed to protect our BIPOC – Black, Indigenous People of Color – families.

How can schools become a space of healing and high-trust so that families, specifically BIPOC families can play a bigger role?

Nick: Educators need to proactively ask their families what they can do for and with them?

Mike: How can I best support you?

Nick: Exactly. What are their needs? And I think this is especially true for black families, doing something small like this can help dismantle systematic antiblack forms of education. We need to try and set up our class and school environments that adjust and adapt to the families and not set an expectation of where families of color are adapting to our learning cultures.

Mike: And I want to throw in Anti-Asian messaging in education, just by being in covid right now, and a lot of people are looking at our Asian community right now and partly due to the rhetoric happening from certain elected officials in office right now, they are causing more hurt and harm to them.

Nick: Yeah, thanks for throwing that out there. Because when children are hearing messages like that everywhere including outside of school, it's all just being reinforced.

I also feel schools need to have a transparent trajectory of their mission, vision and values that makes it clear where they are with their practice and pedagogy, where they wish to go, and how they could use the help and guidance of families they are in partnership with. It would be great practice if this was revisited every couple to a few years with families; a sort of assessment of the relevancy of values and practices.

Mike: And I like how you're always saying and reframing it as with families, in partnership with families, as oppose to the words to or for families because growing up, it always people doing something for the child, as if they were incapable. So I appreciate how you frame that for us.

Nick: Education is a partnership and when we see it as a partnership, we can be more invested in our communication and find that compromise at times. And I think lastly, what comes to mind is that we educators need to be more proactive about advocating for childcare as a whole: writing to our legislators, participating in council meetings, thing so that nature. And when we do this, we need to seriously rope families in too! And we need to especially pull in families of color, and be strategic about how we can support them being able to take a day off, offset some expenses, etc.

Nick: I want to go back and talk about in order to best support BIPOC families, we need to understand and acknowledge that these families are bringing a sense of trauma with them. A historical one. And we need to be ready to speak on that. Can you speak on anything like that Mike? I know I'm throwing you on the spot.

Mike: Uhh yeah, haha. There are always certain things that we need to continue to grapple with. I often think about the traumatic experience of police brutality in my life. And how I've experienced that. And granted, I was beaten, but I remember walking down the street one day, to get to the DMV, and I was minding my own business when a police car stopped me, laid me down on my stomach, superman style, patted me down, and then cuffed me. It was a little experience of that or even the time growing up where we experienced homelessness that I think about a lot. Something, once again, I don't like to share often. But that's part of my family experience. So just trying to grapple with those early experiences has created toxic stress with my family, especially when we have to think about money. Or whenever one of us loses a job. These are the little experiences that I can't leave that the door and things I bring with me everywhere I go. These are things that aren't necessarily known or asked on your enrollment sheet. So. this is why it's so important that when we are working with families, you dig deeper in a respectful way, because it's so much more to find out about them than what's on a piece of paper.

Nick: And just because acknowledging families of color bring historical trauma, doesn't mean we want to be coddled. Or want to be coddled. And I was just listening again to Cornel West this morning, and he said "for all these 400 years, that we've been here, we've only preached love now. And look at us now." He was speaking about the Black community. And I found so much power in that. So for my white educators, I would hope you would keep that in mind. Families and children of color might be bringing historical trauma but they don't need you to hold their hand.

Mike: So is there anything off the top of your head that you are imagining or anything?

Nick: Ya know, just off the top of my head I'm imagining this: What if there was a more concerted effort to specifically recruit people of color into education? What if there were resources that made it possible for people of color to see themselves as a direct impact in their communities?

Mike: That funny you mentioned that. A couple of days, I was thinking if I had magic wand and could wave it to create or change a federal child care policies or funding stream? I would wave it straight to a teacher prep program. This industry is nearly 96% white and female identifying. I imagine having a child one day. A Black child that will most likely, statistically speaking,, will have a white educator. And in the years I've spent in this industry, I have yet to find one white educator that I would entrust my kid with. So if I'm waving that magic wand, let's provide free college tuition to people of color who wants to go into early childhood education or related fields such as social work. Even if in 10 years, the program is a failure in diversifying the field, you still have a beautiful outcome in that more immigrants, refugee, communities or color understand the importance of childcare, of free play, of less screen time, of human and child development. Idk about you but I like the idea of having a more informed society that recognize, validates, and values children.

Mike: In episode 5, we talked about the image of the child and how this view informs our classroom tactics. It's that perspective that has influenced what we talked about in episode 6 and the role of the educator, please go check that out by visiting www.hilltopcc.com/institute/napcast.

So, how does the image of the child impact the role of the families and the community?

Nick: Well to a degree, children are reflections of their families, their home lives, and the communities they come from. Children do not enter our schools, our care, simply empty ready to be filled with lessons and skills. They bring with them their families, communities, synthesized knowledge of their experiences already had, they come with a drive to make more connections. In my younger teaching days it was easy for me to merely assume that a child is a certain way because of the way their family treated them, and to a degree that may be true but it does not make up the whole story of the child and family.

Child developmental theorist, Urie Bronfenbrenner explains this with his Ecological Systems Theory: Imagine a multilayered sphere. In the middle of that sphere is the child, and their micro-systems: the child's family, religious institution, neighbors, peers, immediate and direct impacts ; surrounding that system is the meso-system: those are the systems that have a reciprocal relationship with the micro-systems and are larger variances of the child's family, school, religious institutions, etc. Beyond the meso-system is the Exo-system: extended families, government agencies, school board, mass media, family member's workplaces. And then beyond that! Is the Macro-system: which could be thought of the attitudes and ideologies of the culture in which the child is situated.

Considering all this, I think then, encourages us to really see that the Image of the Child is a casserole of factors, and like any good casserole...there's lots of layers!

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: I think a lot of the time, we try to run before we can crawl. What I mean by that is that we try to do all these grand family engagement strategies without doing a great job at having caretakers understand the importance of what the educators and children are actually doing at school. It's especially tough when you come from a culture like mine where adults expect to see worksheets and mathematical equations. How do you provide families insight into what we are doing as a play-based center so they can view education in a different way and be stewards of that at home?

Nick: Yeah I hear that, Mike! The narrative of education is rooted in tangible outcomes and we know that's not how children learn best. And they have their place, in 3rd grade. And in fact it's something that I have learned that I need to be able to speak to beyond just the families I have in class. I've had a lot of people ask, "what do or can you teach a toddler?" Essentially, what can anyone under 5 years old learn?! And it's kind of a valid question given the fact that ECE, for a long time, hasn't been viewed on the same playing field as other educational structures. Fortunately though, there have been many developmental theorists, research-educators, and new technologies that give us substantial reasoning behind the importance of play.

When I write a story or a piece of documentation about the child, toddlers in my case, kicking a ball for example, something kind of trivial to adults, yeah? I'll think about the many possible connections that this

actually supports. We can name out a lot of obvious things this over-looked activity supports, but consider this: the ability to watch your foot connect with the ball to propel it forward, and then watch where the ball goes uses eye-tracking muscles! Know what eye-tracking supports??? Reading! Specifically, being able to track words along a line when reading! Play supports early literacy.

Generally, I justify play as a human need, it's something we're wired to do there's know way around it. Play is simply doing, experimenting, physically manifesting the wonders and curiosity of the mind and soul. The majority of people who play an instrument didn't just sit down and read music theory, becoming acquainted with reading notes and scales! There's the need to do! When children play they are learning about the nuances of their culture, the world, the people around them. Effective learning should be fun, and the natural drive to play encourages that.

Mike: I keep going back to my homiegirl, Ijuma Jordan, who states all the time that play is an equity issue. If we aren't giving Black and Brown children to engage in play which strengthens their eye tracking ability, those are ways we are perpetuating inequities and inequalities within the system. And we don't even realize it.

Nick: Yeah, and now that you mentioned it, I wonder how we can create more play in our curriculum that goes beyond ECE. How can we have more play in 3rd grade.

Mike: I promise you that she doesn't sponsor us but she does have a tremendous website filled with blogs and other supports so yall can go check it out by visiting ijumaajordan.com

Anyways, We strive to create a culture where families are interconnected, the relationships formed are reciprocal, caretakers are not just activated but that they feel supported to engage in this work, at pickup, at drop off, and when they are home.

For many of us, this role is different. Our parents might not have been involved in our learning growing up, so what we are doing is essentially trying to break that cycle. We need to make a big impression on parents, amaze them, convince them that what we are doing is something extremely important for their children and for themselves. With that in mind, how do you support caretakers to take these principles from school and apply them in their daily interactions in their homes?

Nick: I saw a video once that did this for families in developing communities around the world, some here in the United States-mostly on reservations. The aim was to watch a family be with their child and then link the science back to what they did naturally. One clip stood out in particular where a young mother gave her maybe 1.5 year old a tub of soapy water and a sponge, and dishes that were manageable or the child to handle were in it. The child dumped and filled plastic cups, dropped utensils in and marvel at why some floated back up and others did not, figured out the properties of a sponge, all this stuff. In her language, a child developmental specialist explained how this was all great for the child in that they were experimenting with volume, weight, quantity, math essentially. And this kind of play supported that at an age appropriate level. The mother simply remarked with laughter, "I was just trying to keep them busy and get my dishes done!" But the point here is to help families see the science and purpose of children's play.

Mike: The common challenge faced in our industry is bringing about a change in the ways early childhood is viewed within our communities. That involves increasing knowledge of the importance of the first 2,000 days of life from a brain science perspective and deemphasizing academic learning in early childhood programs. And when I say academic learning, I mean worksheets, I mean standardized testing.

We need big structural changes. We also need soldiers on the ground. Any insights on how families, educators, youth advocates, and the community at large can act as a tool for change?

Nick: Well, I've said it before: we need more actual educators, especially educators of color from the classrooms at the seats of policy and standard making. Also, and most importantly, there needs to be a transparent, flexibility in scripted curricula. And they need to be as easily read, meaning they don't need to be a size of an encyclopedia! I also think policy makers should actually listen to and model their expectations off of programs that are making play and project based learning work in their communities. Chicago Commons comes to mind.

I think schools should really strive for strong relationships with families so, in partnership, we can exercise grassroots walkouts that may impact the economy, and show higher-ups the effects of our field, its importance, and why we deserve lasting investment. Everyone out there listening, check out this video called "A day without childcare." That'll show you up something.

Mike: Nick, as always it's so great to be able to pick your brain. Hopefully, we're giving listeners and readers some food for thought. If you have a comment, a rebuttal, a thought, or you have a male educator, or an educator of color who has a story to tell, reach out to institute@hilltopcc.org and we'll get them on. 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.