

Mike: You were you able to fast forward to the time slots we can do this to English, so well done to you.

Nick: I'm Mike Browne and my pronouns are he/him and of course I'm with the very talented and handsome co-host, Nick Terrones!

Nick: thanks Mike you're handsome too! Hi everybody we're back as usual My name is Nick Terrones, pronouns are he/him and this is the fun episode!

Mike: It's so hard to change our brain to Spanish to English but it is what it is. Today we're with a friend of ours, Veronica, who I've known for a couple of years now. Veronica, say hi to the audience!

Veronica: Hi, my name is Veronica and I'm a Mexican-American ECE educator at Epiphany Early Learning Preschool in Seattle, WA. My pronouns are she/her, and I'm first generation!

Nick: Great. Let's get started. Veronica, what does it mean to be an Latinx in ECE today? I'm curious to hear what that means to you.

Veronica: It means being unapologetically myself in the classroom and that's not very different from outside of being an educator. Being a Latinx play a huge role in my eye and it shows in everything that I do in the classroom, it shows up in the stories that I share, the songs that I sing in the classroom, the way I talk about my family, pretty much everything. As someone who spends so much time building relationships with children and families I want children to know about my culture and identity so that they feel confident to explore and share more of their own, hear about others in their lives, and not to toot my own horn but I want to be a great example of a successful, smart and talented Latinx person

Nick: Yassss!! And can you speak a little bit more if you had experience working with children of color, especially since we work and play with predominantly children who are white, so, when we do work with BIPOC children, have you noticed them shying away from their identity? It sounds like you use your identity as a beacon of light with them.

Veronica: It usually tends to be sort of a beacon of light, like even this week working with kids of color, there's a child in the toddler room that had just started and my colleagues were telling me that she was shy and then she just came up to me and staring. I noticed she just kept staring at my skin and she wouldn't stop smiling at me and you could like tell that she was trying to connect and it's happened so many times in the program that as soon as they see that I am latinx, they flat out told me "you're Brown like me." So, I see that as a Beacon of Hope in like a way of connecting. I have had some experiences where some people tend to shy away and it tended to be in settings like the one I was in back home in Chicago. I was working in a bilingual classroom where most of the kids were first generation or immigrant children and we had a lot of them shy away especially if they had older siblings who were in elementary school doing things in English. They tended to be a little bit more hesitant to want

to continue speaking Spanish because they're like why should I when my big brother my big sister is doing all their stuff in English? I want to be like them! So I think sometimes that generational shift especially when you're starting to have more of a dominant culture kind of encroach into your culture that creates a little bit more of attention and a little bit more of like I should be like the dominant culture but I'm just trying to give those kids confidence and pride in who they are and how that can be something that gives them more opportunities rather than taking them away.

Nick: Yeah one of my toddler's today or this year he's got a pretty dark-skinned he's Indian American and well now he's older toddler, and one day he was like Nicky you're brown like me and then so when you shared that little bit it was giving me goosebumps cuz it reminds me of this little dude and and just sort of that moment of like he just found this connection in our physical appearances together.

Mike: When both of y'all were saying about being unapologetically you, it really hit me because that's something that we talked about before Nick and I on just how do we show up to this space, how do we give ourselves the grace to be ourselves, to be unapologetic, to use my ethnicity and identity as a source of pride and I really seen us grown in our advocacy for that and for all educators of color to be unapologetic. So, Veronica, how have you embodied your heritage in the classroom, at work, and how have you honored your identities ya know, your Midwestern, your Seattleness, how have you honored your identities and taught your colleagues and children to really embrace their own?

Veronica: Such a hard answer in such a easy answer at the same time just because it's something that I kind of grew into more after moving to Seattle because I felt like I did have to be unapologetically myself a lot more because there is a lack of my culture here. I don't have as many means to connect to my culture here so it's kind of like because I lost a little bit of myself. I lost the ability to connect to my people. And as I thought it out more, the more I was like, here I am this Mexican woman from Chicago! Like this is who I am and I want you to know more about me so I mean in the classroom that just shows up and anywhere really.

And when I grew up in Chicago I grew up in the neighborhood where it was every where, like everyone in my neighborhood was Mexican first generation or immigrants and we all spoke Spanish. I was always attached to my mom's hip because I'm the only girl and the youngest and traditionally that's where I belong but yeah it's it's just that's just a part of who I am and so I'm always just listening to music. Like music is a huge part of my life so I'm always sharing that in the classroom with people, books in Spanish, I am a huge reader so I'm always reading books in Spanish and I'll do that in the classroom. Dancing is a huge part of my life so I'm also teaching kids and I'm just just sharing a lot of like my family's traditions and even how we celebrated Christmas like I think one time a kid was like what do you do for Christmas? I told them of how I mostly just eat all the food and then there's this really old tradition on my mom side where we would put this porcelain figure of baby Jesus up and you would rock it and that's like what you would do before you would open presents or just like sharing things like that and it doesn't necessarily have to be this sort of lecture on this is what

we did. It can be a little things like for me whenever kids get hurt you know I'm checking in on them and then I'll sing this little rhyme that my mom used to sing "Sana Sana colita de Rana" and then I would tell them what it means.

Mike: So, what does it mean?

Veronica: Heal heal little toad tail, if you don't heal now, you'll heal later so that's what it is it's just it was just always like a little rhyme that made me feel better as a kid. Its just having those moments where you can just be yourself like that just comes naturally so it's not always just being like "this is what it is to be a Latinx person," it's showing tender moments like that where you can just be yourself and it should just show up and everything you do and as you all know early childhood education and building strong relationships is super important and I think in and out of the classroom one of the core foundations of having a strong relationship in building a relationship is being unapologetically yourself because if you're anything else, its going to fail.

Nick: Yeah yeah you know what I when you're when you're speaking and especially in my my grandmother's and my mom would do the same Sana Sana colita de Rana and so is it that was very nostalgic to hear and it you know I hate it when you were saying that I was thinking about the concept of intersectionality in identities and you and how you know some maybe some children of other cultures and races they may have something somewhere or saying you know being able to bring that to the table and take a look at how their family shares it this way to feel better, this is what my family says, you know what I think it just shows that even though identities are so vast and abundant and so there's just a big magnitude of how to be. There's all these obviously these common core ways of how to feel better and in a lot of that comes down to like with your speaking out on his relationship and and I think being in a relationship with one another is one of those things can really get us to really have intersectional identity. So, thank you for sharing.

Nick: And, there's this notion know of that speaking Spanish is a stigma and when I was growing up in Los Angeles in the 90s racial and cultural tension was super high and I remember not liking my mom speak in Spanish to me or wanting me for wanting me to learn Spanish but I just flat-out refused because I saw it as as the "other" and the other was positioned in this negative sense so how are you helping you know, you spoke on it a little bit ago but how are you helping to break that sort of thing and encourage families in your care to speak to their children in Spanish and what do you think programs and communities can do to encourage families to speak in their native tongue?

Veronica: it's always a huge bummer to hear That's always a huge bummer to hear like I've heard family say that they don't want to teach their kids their native language or I've heard kids say that they don't want to speak Spanish and I think it stems from the stigma and the stigma creates a fear in parents that their children might be seen as an other. It discourages families to teach their children their native language because they're afraid that their child is going to miss opportunities. I personally I can't imagine not knowing how to speak Spanish it

was my first language, my parents didn't speak English at all. I wouldn't be able to connect with my family if I didn't have my language I think passing on your language keeps you closer to your culture and heritage so I just can't imagine not speaking Spanish. I remember when I first started teaching in Chicago. I barely ever saw any teaching positions that didn't require knowing a second language especially Spanish so with family and I always would make sure that I shared my own personal experience to turn that fear into more of a positive and be like look I had these opportunities because I have Spanish, because I have a second language. So yeah I turn it around and really tells them that their children can have more opportunities because I mean they're going to. They're going to be presented dominant culture for the rest of their lives the rest and their education is probably going to be in English so it's really important that in the early years we are really setting that foundation in learning Spanish so that really puts a highlight on the opportunities by sharing my own. We both want what's best for the kids so I think that is a really good way of connecting and having that relationship and breaking that stigma and then I think that programs should encourage more families share more of their language at school so like when I am teaching just as a very basic thing like we will count in Spanish before we go inside to make sure that everyone's there and then if I know that a child's family speaks another language at home I'll invite them to share it or there's any like you know what when we go inside we count all the kids in Spanish and English how about we count can you teach yourself how to count to 20 in Vietnamese and Japanese whatever it is just it all stems from creating and sustaining strong relationships in trying to bring families to share more of their culture in the classroom.

Mike So you're a Latinx working in the predominantly white community which I can only imagine can be hard at times. I also imagine that there might be other people in your position right now so I guess where I'm going with this is do you have any advice you'd like to share with other Latinx Educators or what has personally helped you thrive? For those listening right now who are in a position of leadership can you mention some of the challenges and lacked supports you experience from your program your colleagues your community and just what would you hope they would consider moving forward when they're working with the Latinx Community or other educators of color?

Veronica: Advice I would offer to other Latinx educators? A piece of advice I would offer to other Latinx educators and all educators really is not to be afraid of potentially uncomfortable conversations with people in leadership positions. This is something that I have kind of been working on a lot because growing up I was raised to treat people in leadership with absolute respect which means just say yes or was told you do not question their authority or what they do. You just do as you're told so I have to work on that for myself because I think it is important to question and challenge leadership positions so that's... that's definitely a piece of advice that I would offer because it is hard but it's really important to be able to questioning and really have leadership be accountable and so when you're staying quiet and just deciding to remain in your discomfort it's, it's not helping anyone at all so I don't want us to have that respect I was taught to be turned into complacency. These conversations you're having are creating avenues for change and holding them accountable and ultimately creating a better relationship.

I will say that I am fortunate that I came to a program that supported me and to work in the leadership team that listens to me and is willing to have these kinds of conversations with me. I encourage people in positions of leadership to reflect on how they're holding space for by POC educators to come and discuss what is working for them and what is not. I think that what can happen is that sometimes people might have might bring something up and then like the conversation is held on later in a way that makes a person feel like they're in trouble and so that kind of creative and brave space for those conversations is important. So again it's creating a space where you can actually have a constructive conversation instead of holding thumb to what they say. When having these conversation don't just get defensive. You need to build a relationship with all your staff in really holding that space for conversation rather than making up or trying to make them feel better about what's going on

Nick: Nick: Culturally sensitive programs and policies can prevent or reduce the effects of traumatic childhood experiences, improve mental health etc. Working in both Chicago and Seattle, you've been exposed to various Latinx family values support. Can you share one or two of them and how they have shown up to promote healthy early development?

Veronica: Culturally sensitive programs and policies can reduce the effects of traumatic childhood experience improvements. A lot of mental health issues can stem from suppressing part of who you are and knowing how much my cultural identity is such an integral part of identity I feel like if you didn't have a culturally-sensitive program and policies then that would lead to the oppression of your identity and so that can create trauma so when you have culturally sensitive programs in your school's it's it's really going to help children and I mean I can just think of an experience that I had a couple of years ago when I had taken a year off to work at tiny trees preschool and then wind up coming back to Epiphany. That year I went to go visit a friend at Epiphany on my off day and I just went around all the classrooms and just visited everyone and said hi and I remember coming into my former classroom and there was a child who I didn't know. I had never met them and one of my co-workers was like this is Veronica and she speak Spanish and his first language with Spanish and he did not stop talking to me. We were speaking in Spanish the entire time and like at one point all the kids and all the classrooms were outside and he would always come find me it was just like seeing this storm clouds lift from him and he was being able to fully express who he is. Like that was such a clear indicator in just like a clear illustration of seeing how much it means to be able to express your full identity and that includes your culture, your language everything so it I think it is really important to have that so that you're not suppressing and then creating this trauma and really again as we talked about before so many of our experience stem from a child so if you're able to have culturally sensitive programs and policies from the get-go from when they are kids, they are so young then it can only get better as they grow so that's why it's so important to really have these not just an early childhood but throughout schools, workplaces, everywhere to really really let people be unapologetically themselves.

Mike: Early this morning I was reading up on Army specialist Vanessa down in Texas in the sexual harassment she as well as other womxn face in the military, in the workplace. But first, rest in power to her. I'm sending peace and tranquility to her and her family.

Thinking about how sexualize the media, have you seen that or notice the effects of it with the children that you work with because young womxn identities are shaped in part by the messages they are receiving through media, through society, and what it means to be a femme identifying person. So, yeah just knowing you as an advocate, as a trailblazer as a bad... I can't say that word on air. How are you working and how can you disrupt society's message that over sexualizes you as a Latinx educator, your community and the young children you're working with?

Veronica: Wow no but I absolutely have had experiences with that! First off like beyond the obvious over sexualizing of women there's also the component of when you're a kid you just want to be grown up and so when in the media women are hyper-sexualized all the time that's their standard of like what it means to be grown up then being hyper-sexualized becomes a part of that this is what I need to be. I mean I have nieces that I just sometimes like they have an Instagram and I just want to yell at them like take that picture down but I also see it from really early on you know there's like I shared that example in spanish of kids going around the table saying that they wanted blue and not brown eyes. You know that's how society defines standards of beauty. So I think having conversations about what it means to be beautiful just having you know confidence in yourself and who you are. Yeah it's a lot just to really help promote confidence in oneself and try to break that that misconception of you need to be hyper-sexualized to be desired and to be an adult because I mean there for another example I remember there was just a child once in my classroom who had really really short hair and wanted it to be super super long and I would always see her staring at herself in the mirror and just kind of like be saying words to herself and I would try to listen to what she was saying so finally I just had a conversation with her and was like you know I see you looking at yourself a lot in the mirror and I was just wondering like what are you thinking and I just went with her to the mirrors and said I see myself with big brown eyes, brown hair like. What do you think? She kept saying I have short hair but I want long hair so there was always a but that was attached to it which to me demonstrated that there was sort of a lack of confidence and again there's these outside influences so I think at the root of it, it's having a discussion about what these outside influencers are and to really help children and adults alike to stop looking at the outside and really look at the inside. I think everyone has had struggles with this so you know this is a part of growing up is that you know you're always kind of seeking outside validation and just trying to learn more about having inner validation and what feet what means to you. I think it has to be having this conversation so that again you're kind of influencing people to look within rather than outside.

Nick: So, Mike knows that I'm a big Cornel West fan who is one of the greatest black philosophers in in America, in the United States and in one of his books have been reading he's particularly talking about Black identity and in America and one of the things I thought of as you were talking was his idea of racial reasoning and I think we can apply the same

concept. What you're saying is you know we're human beings and even young human being exposed to these ideas of how to be. So even within ourselves we're being told I'm not like this and I am this. I'm not this, I'm that. Its kind of sad you know. Other than embracing us and in a lot of the times the institutions that we're surrounded are often pulling our true identities away from us. And when really we need to be the purveyors and the sort of people that are conserving our own identities and in a lot of that is wrapped into our our heritage and our cultural experiences and yet there's a dominant culture that again tries to take this away from us. I'll bring it to this other level of young children being sexualized or or you know this idea of what it means to be a feminine person and it is important to call out so I think that way people know how do identify and you know hopefully when they're listening to this they will strike a chord within them and start questioning these things that are manipulating their identities

Veronica: I really hope so because I mean just walking down the street today I like I always see teenagers when like I was a total dork when I was a teenager, why are you wearing like what you would call a shirt I guess barely there? And I'm not trying to shame someone but it looks like there's clearly this perception of like wanting to be this idea of what it means to be grown and what it means to be a woman. You don't need to do so you can just be yourself

Nick: I mean being an adult is already going to be confident for all our young whiskers going to be pretty complicated listen to all our young listeners like she don't need to add other layers a, wait till you have to fill out 401K forms

Veronica: I remember always telling my dad when I was younger that I can't wait to grow up and he would always say, you wont be saying that when it happens and now i'm like dang. He was right. I could do without being an adult for a little bit.

Mike: That question talked about the over sexualisation of femme identify individuals in this world, so, like now I'm interested in hearing the opposite of that. What about male identifying children and the concept of machismo. I don't mean to stereotype the entire population but since I have yall here, I wanted to hear your thoughts on how you are dismantling and breaking that down, and just your overall analysis of machismo and how that may or may not have played a role in your development.

Veronica: If I may go first I think it absolutely played a role in my development my dad is super like old school machismo mentality and I grew up with two older brothers so I was always reading comic books fighting with them playing video games didn't like wearing dresses which is funny cuz that's the opposite now but growing up with all those ideas and I don't know like I still sometimes try to figure out like how it came to be but I feel like I was always fighting what it meant to be a girl and still to this day like I am a boxer I will spar people, I've given people concussions and I remember when I told my dad that I started boxing and he kind of like made jokes about it that were clearly telling me that he was disapproving of it and yeah I am so I know that I'm always fighting those and I'm always kind of pushing children to push the boundaries like I remember a couple of years ago I had this

moment where kids were drawing self portraits. I mean, really look in the mirror and look at the shape of lips. They aren't aligned like you are seeing a lot of children's books where the women identifying characters are like having red lipstick and blush and pink eyelashes and in the male drawn characters tend to have like lines as lips and then just like nothing and all I noticed that in a lot of children's drawings to draw self-portraits a lot of the boys were just drawing line and girls would draw like circular shapes for their lips and so then I like I took them in for the second round was just like well do you have a thin lips and then he was like no and drew his lips that we saw them. And then there was a boy he was sitting next to and he said why did you draw yourself with girl lip? I was like excuse me?! What makes you think they're grown ups and he's like well they're round! I told him to look in the mirror what do you look like? It's important to break those barriers and have conversations and disrupt what society says what it means to be a girl. Also just exposing children to various things. Like I said I've had conversations with like male dancers and just really trying to break those like pre-scripted things like this is what boys do, this is what girls do and remind them that they can do whatever they want.

Nick: Yeah. Exactly everything you said is right in line is everything I believe in everything that I do it with my toddlers. And I think even just the fact that I'm a toddler teacher and it is an act of gender-role defiance in of itself and you know I love especially now during the summer time when we walk around the city and I'm taking a toddler's for a walk through Fremont or whatever I always love to look into people's cars and their faces are either in complete horror or they have these really like all that's cute and endearing kind of thing and then also I'm very very prevy to the fact that they do like a triple take when they see me with with the kids and or if I'm like cuddling two little white girls and holding them and what not and I think just the act itself is is something that kind of disrupt people's perception of of these gendered the gendered roles that we are pigeon hole into.

I was taught like a man has his place and a woman has her place and the place where the woman is is below and needs to say yes to the man. What you were saying earlier about the authority figure was taught in that way to me and when I look back at it and I see how I was taught that with my parental figures how my patriarchal figure was... like man that was man always had to be the breadwinner but I always have to do this and always do that because this is the man's role and I think and I've generally just by nature and pretty defiant person so it just kind of resonated with me that like I didn't I didn't want to just to go find a job that was going to make me a good amount of money so I can be the breadwinner I wanted to do something that was going to be conducive in helpful ways, that contributed to the greater good and and I think also I'm naturally a caretaker and so you know I try to emphasize that to children and adults that these aren't just genderize things these are human things that we all have capacities for and we just allow these socially constructed concepts to rule who we are and if you ask me the greatest amount of freedom is to be constructive and just do whatever the hell you want and so hearing you speak to that kind of the role of the fierce educator with young children it resonated with me and with that fact just have conversations with kids and and really just normalizing that a lot of these genderize things are just that



Mike: I got 10 more minutes left. I keep hearing you to speak and I'm like damn, so many more questions I want to ask. This one isn't so much of a question but just something I'm throwing out there and maybe you can have thoughts on it.

But you two identify as Mexican and I'm thinking about how we can learn from our own indigenous roots and ancestors and the anti-blackness we all have and within the Latinx Community. I imagine you often find it or are struggling to find the language to explain that you can be both as a child. Both Latinx and Black. So I guess can you think back on your childhood and just bring to light some of the ways your behaviors have promoted anti-blackness within your community. My mind goes straight to terms like *pelo malo* because you have curly or coily or even the phrase *mejorando la raza*, which I'll let you two explain. But yeah, thoughts?

Veronica: Yeah absolutely I can share two things like just that come to the very top which is I feel like this is pretty wide in the Latinx culture not necessarily just Mexican culture but there's like this tricky relationship with nicknames and like pet names one of one of my like nicknames growing up with Prieta was just means dark and so like that was definitely like that's that's worth a lot in like colorism. That's one example but the other one that comes always to the top of my mind was an experience that I had with my dad when I think I was like I couldn't have been older than 10 and my dad and I were just chilling and watching TV and then like looking at old pictures and then he just like turns to me and says would you ever marry a Black man and I said yeah of course if I love him also I am 7 or 10 and why am I thinking about marriage but that's besides the point I was just like yeah of course if I love this person of course I would marry them and my dad turned and said - are you not thinking of your future children like what would that would mean for them to the Black and I pushed back against that with him. I've just always push kind of the boundaries within my family of anti-Blackness within our family and within the culture and really trying to undo all of that like I know right now one of my family members who just turned like 16 has a Black boyfriend and a lot of like my cousins were disapproving and I just asked them why and so we kept having that conversation because it's still there, anti-Blackness. It's rooted in our culture and I think it's so important that you know I think that comes with mentality especially right now with everything that's going on with Black lives matter. There's always the why should they have this like, what about me dialogue and like this isn't about you and also to better things for you we need to make sure that Black lives matter because our lives aren't going to matter if Black lives don't matter all right and you know it

Nick: Racism wasn't brought by you know Backwater dumb people this is a very intelligent and intentional concept and and it's very it's a very strategic move to pit one group of people against another. You're basically bringing people over to your side to the pit Indigenous Mexican people against Black people. This is probably one of the greatest moves of white supremacy. It helps them furthers the concept of anti-Blackness. Mike, I'm glad you brought up the *mejorando la raza* you know which means improve the race and what the hell does that sound like?!. And when we know that lots of Nazis after World War II went to Latin America right. They didn't go to Africa they went to Latin America and so a lot of white supremacist

word and concepts permeated within our Latinx culture and you know I wonder if down the line that our people will be like, we're more Black than white and it'll draw us closer together. And yeah just real briefly as a kid myself I grew up you know like I'll have to say I'm very ashamed of it but like I said I think about it I grew up very racist. In my elementary school we were literally at recess time we would have Black kids vs. Latino kids and we would line up and fight. I think this was us responding to what we are seeing in 90s Los Angeles and so it was very much like an us vs them culture. And in retrospect, you start growing up and having more experiences and then start thinking like a damn what did I do what did I participate in?

Mike: thank you. And what I hope people got from this is that we are trying to raise proud Black and Latinx children. And that we all come in different shapes and sizes. Whether you're afro-latinx, afro-cubano, we are proud and beautiful multiracial people. Veronica thank you, Nick thank you. Thank you for indulging in this conversation and recording this on a Saturday. I appreciate you giving up your Saturday evening. Great to hear from you and I look forward to our next conversations.