

music

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 People. I'm your co-host, Nick Terrones, pronouns he/him and I'm joined by my colleague, Mike Browne whose pronouns are he/him.

Mike: For as long as I've known you and worked together, I don't really know the story of how you got to ECE. I mean, I've heard snippets of it, but never the whole story. Let's take it back 16 years ago, you're a strapping young man and you're entering your sophomore year of college. What were some of the defining moments that made you want to go into ECE? And then, what made you decide on Hilltop?

Nick: I started off as an elementary Ed major and part of that of course work was to take human development courses and early childhood courses and I was just blown away by the fact that people were taking preschool so seriously.

For decades and maybe a hundred plus years prior to this, people were actually turning this into a science into a social science and that really just kind of blew my mind cuz I've always been fascinated by people and why we do things and what leads us to why and why are we the way we are and you know a lot of that is because of our childhood and our experiences early experiences.

And I haven't really thought about this until recently but I have a family member who was physically abused in preschool and I feel like I kind of saw some of the results of the effects of that and so I think subconsciously I had it also in my mind that I wanted to work in early childhood so that any kid comes through my care is going to have a more just experience.

And we were shown one of these videos in college that Hilltop used to produce in one of my courses and they're still available email institute@hilltopcc.org to inquire. We watched a video about emergent curriculum in action and it was memorable. A lot of people think of the idea of emergent curriculum as a free for all kind of thing, but at it's core its really a very structured, very intentional framework of working and playing with children.

Watching a video and seeing the passion and the attention that the educators in it had, and Sarah Felstiner was featured in it whose still at Hilltop and Ann Pelo, an alumni of Hilltop, that all really resonated with me and I thought to myself, hey! I got some ideas and I want to implement that at a workplace like that. So, I just happen to apply and you know as we know it's early childhood education there's always a job open unfortunately due to high turn over, and even though Hilltop has done really well in having low turnover, there was an opening spot for me and so I took it.

Mike: During your time at Hilltop, you've spent, what? 3 years in the preschool classroom, and then the last decade in the toddlers? What about the Toddler classroom drew you there and kept you there?

Nick: You know when we first kicked off at Hilltop a toddler program it was a little like Lord of the Flies. I remember peaking in one day and just seeing some of the educators just sort of sitting there with this daunted look in their face while kids were running around ripping off their diapers and running around naked. That being said, we do want kids to be kids and what kids want and what all human want are some formal structure.

At that point, I started to feel like working with 3-5 year olds was becoming a little monotonous to me and I knew nothing about toddlers really outside of my own family and I wanted to see how I could help shape the toddler program using our Reggio background and idea of emergent curriculum.

There was a ton of room for experimenting and refinding as we go, so after my first year in the toddler program, I felt like I had learned more than my first two years of college. It was really neat experience just being on the ground having hands on experience and just really finding that space of wow I'm learning to challenge myself, to learn more about myself, and my personally. It was all kinds of growth coming at me from multiple directions.

Mike: I know you've done some coaching with other programs looking to build out or start a toddler program. So what are some of the things you tell them or advise them?

Nick: Childhood isn't linear you know some days some things work and sometimes they don't and that's okay and just like all human beings, toddlers don't want to be fixed. They want to be heard, they want to be acknowledged, they want to be validated and sometimes that means they got to just be in their emotions. I would also put the perspective that toddlers are also torn. Their first year of their life, they're pretty reliant on people doing things for them and relying on your wisdom and now they and they spent that first year year-and-a-half of observing, they're now ready to put things into action. So, what we see as impulsivity is really actually them trying to figure out how the world works and without you. Every behavior has a need, it's not just random and really just that I would implore educators to think of toddlers as being really capable and they can do more than meets the eye.

Mike: You've went through a ton of growth during your time here. We try to focus it all on the positive, but let's be honest, sometimes you have hard and disappointing times. Talk to me about some of the tough periods you've had here and how did you grow from it, and pushed through it?

Nick: Don't ever play on a tough times at the educator need a lot of things that come up or are the times they are being in a relationship with other people because that's good core of our work it in early childhood is relationship that must be reminded of like when it was these relationships were in conflict of opinion or values and approaches to early childhood education I also like to think of this career is much like being in a parenting Dynamic specially at Hilltop but we're usually in ultimately we all want the same thing you know to be authentic respectful fun and loving experience for the people were serving children and we all have different ways of getting there but all we seem to always be saying the same thing just from sometimes you know Valley conflicts are at the core of it I think that that's okay too we have to pay for admin or whatever you want to call it need to be aware those Dynamics and like really strive for balance of trying to help teens work it out but then also just make adjustments as needed relationships are arranged marriage right like sometimes it's just forced to go on longer than it maybe I was kind of in a situation like that before would you say how do I draw a shirt or do we have that trust where you can come to us and like in again when were in relationship with one another and relationships are authentic and genuine making sure that you do have an authentic relationship with the people you're leading or do you know the program your guiding the temperature of a room and might complain about one another and are our feelings are generally going to be for on our sleeves I feel like and so I think it's that approach asking and and assuring educators I'm really really balancing it out as like a lot like that's a point that is cut the cord I guess because I think sometimes if it goes on too long in animosity where do you say hello but I like that any of this split this is a small example of a while ago maybe 6 years ago or so like really stupid silly but I own it very strong and tight one particular co-teacher to staying too long at a certain point there was time for her to just like being reconfigured they had brought up the idea what preschool is the auto and asking me what we do really well at Hilltop what we're doing for is making this cock of preschool against that traditional grain and your classrooms have like a living room kind of fuel or activity fright overstimulate colors it doesn't feel commercialize like other environments might not the time or the idea of a thought were coming in rub me the wrong way but really our relationship By Appointment should Phil Dunphy's like annoyances of with one another and I was just you know I totally shocked and down it was not like call flexible about this help and you know of course there are many times when I think to myself like oh I wish I could just be with that person for another like we can show them how I have grown in phone up to my mistakes or whatever like through my actions or or even just in words him I really feel like people don't change you just become more where I'm at now and we kind of talked offline a little bit about this but you know another sort of difficulty I've encountered name damn encounter currently within our organization and it isn't just change per se but I guess change without the apparent reason or drastic change that semen is neglecting history and tradition about how Hilltop culture is eventually everyone who is in Hilltop making that culture and participating in the school I totally believe that doesn't just exist in a vacuum to

be filled up with whoever's there but also comes from somewhere in general we think about culture culture has its roots and it has tradition that should be relied on built on Delta Pond innovated with rather than just order you know pushed to the side with like out with the old in with the new sort of approach you know so I think that's why we do try to innovate ourselves and change ourselves would you also need to figure out how do we still honor what was people came before you and you know when I tell you I'm thinking about that with the lens or like indigenous thinking one of the most fascinating. Open right now height open Evernote right to me because all of these different and new things in new leadership I just got promoted so there's a lot of different you applied new energy you like yes and really just trying to figure out how do we this is why I has been has gotten to the point in January and Halloween and there's another question of life some of us are especially as Old Timers are like yeah and it's hard to sometimes just like I have words ready to explain that there's a saying of like it's hard to understand hard to explain from the inside looking out and so I'm not saying that but the way it should be what you said

Mike: Imagine you could go back in time and leave a message for 21 year old Nick. What would you tell yourself?

Nick

I'll tell myself like sometimes in the past and even currently working on it my passion has made me like two reactive and it and I think it gets so blinding to people that overall message and feeling is lost it's been hard for me to slow down because my passion ramps me up and I end up steamrolling other people's ideas and feelings and is kept me close to other potential I'd also tell myself to you no find that capacity to say yes more than you know and just truck keep striving for balance and then twenty-one-year-old Nick I'd say you know don't party as much

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: So, there's a reason we called this episode, "My Growth, My Evolution" because we're taking the time to talk about how you've grown over the years and the next cycle of evolution you're about to dive into. You've been making the rounds and slowly telling people, I guess its time for our listeners to hear about the exciting news you'd like to share.

Nick: And breaking hearts also. So, after 14 years of being at Hilltop, my home, I'm leaving. I'm flying the nest and I am going to take on a role as director for Daybreak star preschool just up the street from Hilltop in Magnolia here in Seattle stil. It's a school, the only school in

Seattle that has an indigenous peoples based curriculum and approach. They're a smaller school and from what I gathered they're ready to make steps into growing their program and you know they felt like I could be a person who could support them in that move. So, yeah everybody I'm I'm leaving the classroom for a role behind a desk. I feel like I'm going to like gain weight because I'm so used to just like having this human jungle gym with toddlers.

Mike: So what was the most difficult part of making this decision?

Nick: I think I told you Mike and I've been telling everybody the best way I feel about it is that it's feels like you're preparing for a long trip away from home and you know you're going to have a feeling of homesickness that's the most difficult part of making this decision. I'm leaving my comfortability and especially since we've been talking about all this change at Hilltop. I've only come to learn that the only constant in life is change and you better off going with the flow of change then you are swimming against those waters. I think a little bit of the fear is like, am I ready for this? It's intimidating when you look at a job description or any application and there's something at the top of their list of desired attributes that you don't have as it was in my case. It was a master degree for me. But I like to think after 14 years of publishing and of video making or whatever and like just give me the damn Masters. I've done enough work. But those are the two things that made this difficult - was leaving my comfort zone and and wondering very briefly if I was ready for it.

Mike: Why now? What makes you ready for this change, this growth? How did you know or decided that you were socially, emotionally, and mentally ready for it?

Nick: You and I talked offline a bunch and you helped me process it a lot so I appreciate that and you know why not is what you kind of presented to me. You also asked, when was the last time I was interviewed and asked me to give it a shot.

I thought a lot about that and thought, I could keep growing in this one capacity and keep trying to carve out things for myself as an educator or I can think of it as like you know what you have done, and try to carve out a new path using the foundations that I've learned here.

I've been telling lots of people that there's always going to be reasons to say no to something but what happens if you say yes? I also been telling people like there's two ways that this can go about this and that only time will tell me how I will fair. Time is the wisest of counselors.

I believe in myself and want to put all the all my faith in myself and I think I'm going to do a really good job.

When I was telling people the news, I don't think anybody was going to say you shouldn't accept the job or that you're going to do a horrible job but maybe they were thinking that. I'm a kind of person that drives off of trying to prove people wrong. But also what was interesting, especially in this time of Covid is that we're masked up and have to look each other in the eyes and you could see their expression. Their eyes lit up with sadness and also

with joy and feeling of pride in me. So it was a really interesting social moment when I was telling people.

With all the changes coming to Hilltop, I was part of the group saying we need to talk about it and pushing back for a sense of understanding of why we are growing and changing, and just when I bought into the change, I am moving on and it's sad that I want to be part of the growth in this capacity, but I can't wait to work with you in a new capacity to maintain and sustain a good bridge between the two schools and really build each other up for mutual growth.

What is making me emotionally and mentally making me ready is the fact that I'm not going into this empty handed. I have 14 years of experience and a wealth of knowledge and connections in relationships and fortunately I have not burned any bridges haha. I feel like I'm not going into the empty handed and I have all this community behind me so, yeah I feel oddly comforting and confident to just do me to know

Mike: I want you to put on different caps to answer this question. You can thank Nurdy for this tactic right here. But I bet there's a couple of saboteurs on your shoulder telling you that you're not ready. Think about your interactions with families. Your interactions with your co-workers. Your interactions with admin over the years. Your interactions with the community. What have you learned or gleaned from each of them that has prepared you for this next step in your journey?

Nick: I would say for families - What I learned from families is that their experiences and stories that have all shapes who they are individually and as a family unit and all that brings different perspectives and perspectives you know about how to raise children, what teaching and education should and be, and generally just how to live in the world. So really just I think honoring that there are other perspectives than my own.

For co-workers - flexibility communication and persistence are things that I've learned a lot of that like being in a teaching team is about holding a balance of all of us. We all have different ways of approaching teaching and learning various ways of viewing children in childhood but ultimately we're all there for children and like I mentioned before I've learned that it's a tightrope walk when balancing how much to be flexible and being mindful and not totally sacrificing oneself just to keep the peace. Sometimes you have to have conflict to be able to grow and understand.

For admin - I would say balance and a balance of innovation, transparency and communication. Just knowing that there are some things educators need to know and then there's other things that they don't. They sometimes just need to worry about about the classroom and ultimately you're not a leader or you're not administration if you don't have the educators. Educators aren't anything if they don't have families and children.

For community - early childhood education should be viewed as a reflection of your community needs and what their needs will be.

Mike: So, before we went to break, I asked you, imagine you could go back and leave a message for 21 year old Nick. So, I'm going to ask you to imagine again. Imagine if 2020 Nick could meet 2030 Nick. What would 2020 Nick say to 2030 Nick and what would 2030 Nick advise be to 2020 Nick.

Nick: I would hope 2030 Nick would actually and maybe just listen with repose and kind of just let me give myself a stern look like, like seeing right through me kind of look, like the kind of look your grandma I would give.

For the advice 2030 Nick would give 2020 Nick, I would ask him "did you find ways to say yes to people? Did you find ways to be flexible and also stay true to your values and were you amicably able to disagree with people in a way that made them feel respected?"

I think the advice would be to keep growing into keep holding the capacity of others by honoring different perspectives and then also maintaining to, like I said, my values. Values of building relationships and bettering humanity.

Mike: So what you don't know is this part. I'm going to turn and address the audience right now.

Over his time here at Hilltop, Nick has been a fierce supporter of racial justice in and out the classroom. While there is no great way to say "thank you Nick" for the countless hours of service he have given us over the years, one way in which we would like to honor him is to set up a one-time, honorary scholarship in his honor.

Nick identifies as Indigenous and Latinx, and this scholarship would specifically go to a family who identifies as such, something near and dear to his heart. Given the times we live in, we understand if it's not in your means at this moment to support a special scholarship in honor of Nick, but if you have the opportunity and resources to contribute, we would be most grateful for your thoughtfulness. You can donate by visiting www.hilltopcc.com/nick.

Nick: Aww man I'm speechless. This is ... this is amazing. Thank you. I had no idea.

Mike: We appreciate you and hopefully will keep your legacy going moving forward.

Nick: Thank you.

Mike: Alright yall, stay tuned for our next Napcast. Until then, make sure you donate at www.hilltopcc.com/nick

Nick: Yes, donate!

