

Mike: Can you imagine? It's the middle of COVID-19, people are suffering, the job market is crashing, consistency and a sense of stability seems like a thing of the past and then you get a call 3 weeks before the start of the new school year

Hey, that person says. We're building something amazing over here. And I want you on my team.

What do you do? Do you leave your current place of work. Ya know the place where you know the people, you know where the coffee pot is at, the place that grounds you amidst all this hecticness. Or do you venture off into the unknown...

For 3 out of the 5 people you'll hear in this episode and the final two you'll hear in the next one, we'll be checking in with them, why they came to Hilltop. How their feeling. How they are adjusting. What gifts and spirits do they bring with them. And for the last person, Paty, who has been here for a handful of years, we check in with her to see how is it like welcoming new faces, new families, new colleagues, new children, in a brand new school year.

**\*cues 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 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.

**\*cues music\***

Mike: Amandaaaa! How are you? We been working together for a couple of weeks. Introduce yourself to our audience!

Amanda: Hi yall, my name is Amanda, my pronouns are she/her. I'm new to Hilltop. Been in the field for a little bit. Excited to be here and honored to be on the Napcast.

Mike: Amanda, so not only were Nick's co-teacher but you're coming over from a program that served primarily children of color, and even more so, you're a Black mother yourself. Your child, Zuri is not enrolled at any preschool. But imagine she was for us. Black girls undergo an unique educational experience. How would you support her in navigating preschool and what structures or considerations would you demand from her preschool and the educators with your child to ensure you, her, and the school can be successful?

Amanda: I am consistently thinking about the future and what I am going to do when it is time for Zuri to attend preschool. I think as a black woman the world already expects so much of us. We're expected to be stronger at times when we shouldn't have to be. As a black woman the

odds are already stacked against my daughter and that from an early age, I want my daughter to learn how to be organized. A lot of people really take for granted how important it is to be organized and this skill is not just something that everyone is born with. I feel this is a big skill that many African American children are not learning. I had a teacher that would give us assignments sheet with specific due dates throughout the quarter. On the due date my teacher would check that I did the assignment and then hand it back to me. Nothing was graded until we turned in the whole book let of assignment later in the quarter. Many of my fellow classmates were failing because they kept losing assignments.

I also expect there to be a clear daily routine. Having a daily routine will and being organized go hand in hand in my opinion. I never had a daily routine growing up, I grew up in a single parent household where my mother had to get up get 3 kids ready and then herself. We were late to school almost every day. I'm going to put these things in place for Zuri at an early age so that she can get use to what will be expected of her

I have been doing some research and one article I really enjoyed reading is called "UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN GIRLS. A Call to Action for Educational Equity". in a recent study of African American girls in New York City, the girls who had a strong racial identity — e.g., those who described themselves as "strongly in touch with their racial heritage" or "Afrocentric" — were more likely than others to say that they were happy on a typical day, to indicate a serious commitment to their schoolwork, to get good grades, and to express a desire to go to college. They were also more likely to believe that they would ultimately achieve their goals (64 percent versus 21 percent) and to have healthy relationships. Evidence also suggests that positive messages and support from parents and other important adults, as well as peers, can support the development of positive race and gender identities and mitigate some of the effects of racism.

I am going to make sure that I do my part at home to make sure that Zuri has a strong racial identity, she can follow a daily routine and has some sense of organization. I am going to make sure I'm very involved and actively talking to teachers and other educators. I am also going to make sure that she attends a school where they're students and staff member who come from similar backgrounds. I want her to grow up seeing people like herself who are in a position of power. Growing up I think I had one African American female teacher.

Mike: Powerful stuff. Thank you Amanda.

Amanda: Thank you Mike.

Mike: Hi Paty. You're not new to Hilltop but we wanted to get you on anyways. But first, who are you?

Paty: Hi everyone, my name is Paty, pronouns are she/her and I'm a preschool educator at Hilltop. I'm from Brazil. I've been here for about 3 years.

Mike: How have you grown as an educator by working with different people?

Paty: The way I see it, it's that I had some overdue growth and that happened very quickly. Such it's the pace of working in a pandemic, we must think on our feet and that means also making things work on the go with a new colleague. I was put in a position of taking more leadership in the classroom and in my relationships with children and families. I had to consider how my voice was impacting others in the classroom, that means having a voice or lacking having one. By being a person of color, am I also making space for my new colleague of color to have a voice? By getting retriggered by events, am I able to be there emotionally for my colleague? I've been learning to understand that the expectations of a "fair exchange" can look different to different people. And I am very vocal about that now. I am trying to anticipate other's needs and my needs, but not in that way that I will be stressing about it. If my colleague is from a dominant culture, I've been expressing how that can look like in the classroom and how the space one occupies differs. It's hard work! But I've been feeling more solid and grounded in my work than before, all these challenges have helped me some overdue growth that has had to happen.

Mike: What's challenging right now about the way we have moved as an organization through COVID?

Paty: Hilltop has really embraced the concept of resilience and flexibility during covid times, I've always thought if there was one organization that could pull it off being safe and whole through tough times would be Hilltop. The way I see the challenges is about building a fair and equitable work culture during a big transition and during tough times. How do you do it? It's really easy to slip into excuses "we can't do that because of covid" mentality. But Hilltop as an organization has been on top of that and is trying to don't fall into this trap. Building a fair, equitable work culture can look in different ways. During covid times, what is also challenging is that way we relate to each other has changed. We are still learning in relationships, but that has changed. It's different, we don't see each other that often, or can't be there for each other emotionally. Some people are going through a lot of painful things right now, covid has brought new and old triggering emotions and traumas. I think for an organization it's to find its heart and expand it to the rest of its staff. Some people are feeling a little disjointed, so where can you bring a little of this heart back to them? So, you are stronger together.

Mike: How have you taken care of yourself during all these changes?

Paty: I think 2 of the things I've been focusing is on community care and having uninterrupted time to just process my stuff. I like to think of self-care as going beyond the "take a bath", "read a book" ideas. You know, they are all great, and they are helpful. I love taking a bath, and I love reading books! And what is really meaningful is to have community support and providing support too. For example, even in during covid times, it's healing for me to see some of my friends that I consider family and hang out in their backyard for 1 hour or so. To still hold ceremonies and indigenous rituals with people I care and love. To cook and order some yummy food for each other, to watch my friend's dogs because she was having a mental breakdown, and she was there for me when I needed too. To make an art piece and write from the heart and deliver to a friend, things like that. Taking care of and letting being taking care of your community.

Mike: Thank you Paty

Mike: Hi Jen. Glad you're on this Napcast. Let the listeners know who you are!

Jen: Hi everyone, my name is Jen, pronouns are she/her and I'm a toddler educator at Hilltop. This is my first job ever! I'm Mexican-American and I originally call Chicago home.

Mike: You in a new school. New children. New faces. New area of Seattle. You walk in day one, you don't know a face here. The first thing you hear is me talking about white supremacy, white culture, and how that operates at Hilltop. How that needs to change, has to change, will change. Were you like ah damn. What did I get myself into?

Jen : Yes. Definitely. It was a little intimidating yet very empowering at the same time. When I made my decision to join the Hilltop team, I thought "This place is a perfect opportunity to grow not only professionally, but also personally", as I have my own biases to work on. Granted, that could be applicable to any new setting. Although, I knew that Hilltop would be different because of its location and the learning approach that takes place here through emergent curriculum. I wondered about what faculty and families would look like, if there would be anyone who looked like me, or anyone that I could truly relate to. What I didn't know, was the movement that was taken place here and what I actually signed up for. I believe that for many of us, we dream about making a change. I firmly believe that if we want to make a change, we have to be part of that change. So, it turns out I have a lot more in common with my faculty members than what I had anticipated and that is a little more comforting but it still leaves me with the question of "now what?". We are all aware that change is needed, and I think that's partially why we all ended up here at Hilltop. But simply stating it or claiming that we want change won't make it happen. Being proactive does. And I believe that begins with bringing our authentic selves to the classrooms as well as self-reflection.

Mike: So you're in an unique position. You're in school getting your degree, and you're working full time as an educator. I want to talk theory and practice with you. Most teacher prep curriculums are representative of this field. Meaning, it was mostly developed by and currently still taught by white identifying femme folks. And the reason I bring that up is because your class is quite diverse. A lot of these things we are being taught in university is through a white framework. So, what are some of the theories you're learning in class about being with children that you see playing out with your toddlers that you're like "yup, they got it right. That is absolutely correct" and what are some theories and strategies you are learning that you're like "nope, doesn't quite translate from theory into practice with children of color"

Jen : Well, first and foremost, we must take into consideration the child as an individual, their experiences, and if their needs are being met before trying to apply any theories. By needs I mean asking questions such as do they have food, shelter, clothing? Are their parents going through a divorce? Is it a single parent household? We can't just expect parents to want to share these things up front. In my experience as a parent, I've unfortunately encountered some educators who make many assumptions about my son and I instead of asking questions. Environment can impact a child's personality tremendously. So, before anything we need to make sure we are understanding the circumstances of each child because not everyone's dynamics are the same.

Mike: We'll be right back.

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.

Mike: Mmm or Ahhh or ah-ha. You probably heard that a lot in the first part of this napcast. That's because, I was learning and listening and feeling all the emotions, all the challenges, all the growth, and triumphs my BIPOC colleagues had to endure in order to be here today.

Did you have those moments too? Did you find yourself rewinding 15 seconds to let those words hit you again. Or thought, ahhh, yes, my colleague has had those similar experiences. Or perhaps you're sitting there now and you're thinking. Hmm, I never had the opportunity to chat with my colleagues on a level like that.

There's a saying. You don't know what you know until you know. And since these napcasts are meant to elevate our levels of consciousness around topics – regardless if you agree with us or not – I want to take a moment to reflect and try to concretize what we just heard.

And what I'm reflecting on right now, is that ... well.. I talk a lot. I didn't realize I had so much audio, and that I eventually had to break this episode up into two episodes!

But what did we learn from our three educators – Amanda, Paty, and Jen.

Well, since I have the mic and since you're clearly still listening. I think that means, you want to hear my takeaways. So here it goes. What did I learn.

I learned that schools need BIPOC educators now more than ever. But it's more than just numerical diversity which we all fall into the trap of wanting. "We want to serve more BIPOC families and children." "We want to hire more BIPOC educators." See with that mindset, seeking numerical diversity is a form of tokenization. So what happens if we just have a slight shift in perspective. What can we unlock? See, what you listened to was "we need more BIPOC educators" but what you didn't hear is that we need BIPOC voices to be part of the fabric of our systems.

We need to be asking ourselves, our colleagues and leadership team, why is it that we don't have any BIPOC members in our space. What are we doing that pushes them away. And when we are blessed to be in relationship with them, how are we not creating affirming spaces for them so they can share their experiences with us freely?

And I'm saying we, but maybe I should be saying I? Because there's work we all need to do as individuals and as a collective. So, do I constantly interrupt them when they're speaking. Do I downplay their opinions. Do I use my positionality of power, both the power I hold and the informal, relationship power in my organization to drown their ideas out.

Do they try and bring part of their culture into the classroom and I reject it. Do I say "oh that's an interesting idea" and then never sincerely follow up or explore on it. Do I start little fires everywhere and manipulate my words and throw them under the bus? When situations arises, do I ever pause and think "hmm, I wonder if this situation makes them comfortable" or am I quick to try and make it so I get to feel comfortable all the time.

Nick and I say it all the time – there's not a lot of difference between toddlers and adults.

We just have more experience in saying the words "mine" and "no" in more complex and subtle ways.

It makes me wonder, are we modeling this behavior for our children? It's no wonder, as I do my outreach or internal work, that I hear it all the time when we're welcoming new people in our classroom or learning space, "this is my classroom" or "you're joining my team"

Rather than seeing it as an opportunity to co-create this space together, to define our team values as oppose to telling me to abide to the ones you decided before me, to retool our culture to ensure we are all having a positive and equitable teaching experience.

What you heard were three strong womxn of color. But still, deep down inside of each of them, there's a level of fear. An emotion that we aren't afforded to show, because for too long, people have tried to exploit it.

Last week I had a disagreement with a colleague and this fear was racing through my mind. It was like "okay mike, you're upset and don't forget, enter the room first, keep a distance, don't point, keep your back to the wall so that it doesn't appear that I'm boxing my white colleagues in, keep my voice and tone at a certain level or decibel because it could be misconstrued as violent or aggressive. These are fears that when we enter these spaces, we will never be able to feel that sense of belonging that many other people talk about. A fear to even take about this on the airwaves. Look, I know these Napcasts are supposed to be interviews, or whatever, but check it out, for too many of us, they are healing sessions.

Healing. Hahaha. What an odd concept to think of. I mean, I barely know them. Yet, somehow I've never felt more connected to ECE than ever before. Doesn't that just sound weird to you? 40 hours a week I work. Well, it might be a little bit more. Don't tell HR that, but in that 40 hour a week, only 40 minutes out of that is where I can feel comfortable. And it's not because we're all People of color. I see you Karen, over there rolling your eyes thinking that. But newsflash, The Black, the Brazilian, the Indigenous, and the Latinx and more specifically the Mexican experiences are very different from each other. But for those 40 minutes, I didn't feel alone in this field of ECE anymore. How many of your BIPOC colleagues feel comfortable in "your" space. What feels "normal" to you, I'm using bunny ears around normal. And that's probably not

even a word that can be used in 2020. But what feels normal to you and how you intentionally disrupt a culture in which for once, you don't feel comfortable. Not just when you're talking about race. But from how you construct meetings, to ways you engage each other, maybe it's something even more simple ya know, maybe it's the way you set up a leaving party for each other. A tiny shift in perspective can lead to tectonic shift in culture.

Which speaks volumes to how organizations needs to do more to implement a system of support. We're trying to center BIPOC educators, what we not tryna do is have them shoulder all the work.

As Nick and I said in Episode 1, we want to help educators and early learning professionals of color to feel like they belong while at the same time providing a different lens for all of us to engage in this work. And 14 episodes later, we feel like with these Napcasts, we're doing just that. But listening to a podcast is only a part of it. If you're about this social justice movement, like really down for the cause, we need to break from the mindset, of what about me and my feelings and my comfort to how can we move in this work together. And when you put action to your words and get resistance, because you most certainly will, how will you show up? Do you have the mental fortitude to stand strong?

If you had the conversation, I had the other day where someone asked – “must everything be looked at through the lens of privilege and race?” first of all.... Uhh... Yes. But will you be okay to have these tough conversations, even if you don't know the right words, or will you decide “meh, I just want to have a nice Sunday meal together and not fight.”

Nick, I, Amanda, Paty, Jen just now and Theresa and Alfonso who you'll hear in part 2, and all the other voices we have on, we have to share our experiences of racism, hardships and successes with all of you so that they can have an understanding of what it is like to be a voice of color in ECE. Sometimes we'll give you some concrete steps and other times, you'll have to indulge in the journey of reflection, research, and self-actualization in order to build up systems of social-emotional-and psychological supports.

So, in closing, you can't help that you were born white. But you can unlearn how your ways are toxic, abusive, dehumanizing through ongoing knowledge, action, and empathy that is meant to uproot, dismantle, and to heal.

The sense of urgency you're feeling right now to implement the solutions can't be prioritized centering the voices of those who are being hurt the most. We're no longer seeking band-aid solutions, we're seeking the vaccine to our troubles.

This is a journey. A journey that Jen said, requires patience and understanding. A journey towards creating long-lasting change in your community. And this journey will last, your entire life.