

Briefly introduce the topic of the podcasts, but be specific in identifying the perspectives of each podcast.

What I'll be discussing today is Episode 562: Parts 1 and 2 of the podcast "This American Life." The episode is called "The Problem We All Live With." Now this particular episode of the podcast is super interesting, and focuses on education and integration. Yes, integration, as in, desegregation. We get to hear from Nikole Hannah-Jones as she explains how a district in Missouri accidentally created a program that made desegregation a reality for about 1,000 students.

You may be saying, "Well, isn't desegregation, like, a thing, already?"

Well, like, no.

The reality is, our schools today are still absolutely segregated. Here's a quote from Nikole Hannah-Jones: *"In the St. Louis area, nearly one in two black children attend schools in districts that performed so poorly the state has stripped them of full accreditation. Only 1 in 25 white children are in a district like that. That's one in two black kids, 1 in 25 white kids."*

Part One of the episode digs into the facts and timeline of the downfall of Normandy School District, which is the school district Michael Brown graduated from a mere three weeks before he was murdered, as well as the stories of a student called Mah'ria and her mother, Nedra, and another student named Rihanna as they transfer to their new school, Francis Howell, which by the way, is about 85% white. Now, Francis Howell is located about 30 miles away. Normandy chose Francis Howell as the school their students would go to if they choose to transfer simply because Normandy wanted to make it inconvenient for students to leave their the Normandy district. That's messed up.

Now, Normandy School District has not just recently tripped, or slipped up. They've been on probation with the state for 15 years. That means that entire classes of kids have started in Kindergarten and risen through high school and beyond receiving a sub par education. Excuse me, I should say, black kids are receiving a sub par education. And it's completely unjust and unconstitutional.

The episode really gets into how some of the harsh realities that the systems that were supposed to be providing education to these students were actually doing their best to keep their students trapped in an environment where they were receiving an unfair, unjust education. And what white parents were doing as well- using scare tactics to keep these black students out of their schools.

Actual quotes generated from a sea of about 3,000 white parents who were fighting to keep black students out of Francis Howell can be seen on the slide now.

The reasons that these parents were so angry were pathetic and frankly, quite racist. I would like to remind you that the transfer law that allowed Normandy students to leave and attend Francis Howell was created in 2013.

2013.

A mere 5 years ago, white parents were saying these things about black students in Missouri.

Nikole Hannah-Jones reminds us that “your ZIP code is the anchor that traps you.” And all Normandy students want is to escape. They want a better education, the one they deserve, the one they are legally obligated to have.

Now, after fighting to get their education at Francis Howell, the students get a glimmer of hope. Things are going well for them, for the most part, as students and teachers want them to be there and support them.

But only one year later, their hope is torn down before them.

Part two of the series dives into how Normandy School District, greedy for students to stay in their district, create an entirely new, “NON-ACCREDITED” school district, called the Normandy Schools Collaborative, which gives them a different accreditation from their previously determined “UNACCREDITED” school district. This means that the transfer law that allowed students to leave Normandy, is now pulling them back in, to essentially the same district as before.

Francis Howell quickly jumps on this with encouragement from white parents, who, despite all that they said would happen, did not experience any violence or threats of violence from the union of the school districts. Francis Howell decides that students must return to Normandy or find another school, because they are not welcome back there.

Nedra Martin describes the move sadly as, *“A herd of cattle being herded back to where they came from.”*

Normandy parents, livid, decide to file a lawsuit against the state. The state hears them and a judge makes the statement that *“Every day a student attends a school without accreditation, the student suffers a harm that cannot be repaired.”* With that ruling, Normandy students were again allowed to leave- but Francis Howell was not accepting them- not without an individual injunction from the judge.

Mah’ria got permission to return to Francis Howell for ninth grade. Even after all of that, in 2015, she does not know if she will be able to stay.

Rihanna does not return to Francis Howell, and at her graduation, the Vice President of Education for the State of Missouri apologizes to her class, saying that the state is sorry for “*not providing the education experience they should have had.*”

Discuss some thoughts you experienced while listening.

Listening to this absolute injustice was really difficult for me. As someone who wants to go into the education field while simultaneously advocating for equity in education, hearing that such blatant, selfish inequality still exists is not exactly heart-warming. I knew this sort of thing happened in the past, and definitely had suspicions that it still carries true, but to hear in such detail exactly how these students were affected was extremely disheartening and infuriating.

To hear how those white parents spoke about these black children, as though they were less than, or like they were beings that needed to be controlled. Like all they would add to their environment was violence and drugs. It was horrible, and I hope these parents realize that what they said was recorded and exists online for all of their employers to hear.

To the mother who claims it is not a race issue- it is absolutely a race issue. When you are denying these students based on unfounded presumptions, it becomes a race issue.

To the father who suggests starting school earlier, to make school seem less attractive to students from Normandy, do you really think that twenty minutes is going to make a student who deserves a rightful education, and knows it, is going to be deterred by your suggestion? Think again. These are students, not animals.

To the school board who claims they don't want the students either, you're in the wrong business if you only want to work with the white kids. That's not reality, and you're harming both the white children and the children of color when you make statements like that.

And lastly, to the mother who demands metal detectors in the schools- do you not realize that it is dominantly white males who are causing mass shootings across the country? It's ridiculous to assume these students want to cause violence rather than receive a better education and future.

In addition to being furious at these comments that were made, I am deeply disturbed by the comments of the superintendent, Charles Pearson. When told that there are children who are not getting a proper education while the school district figures itself out, he merely responds with “*it is the reality of where they are,*” as though the nature of their education can be fixed later.

He later confirms that he does not know if it's possible for a black child in Missouri to get an equal education. Hearing that is incredibly disheartening. These are innocent

children who want an equal education just like any other child. Again, they are being forced into boxes based on predetermined factors- the product of their ZIP code. I cannot think of anything more unfair than being judged and labeled based on something you cannot change.

How does this information affect children in educational institutions?

This type of hatred towards a community is infectious. It will trickle down into the minds of your children and spread into the minds of your community members. It will cause a burning hatred for others inside of them, one fueled by injustice and anger. This is not the type of future that we as a country need.

Rather, we need a country that will be filled with love, and acceptance. A country that will celebrate diversity and look forward to diving into differences. A country fueled by peace and understanding, empathy and kindness.

If a student comes into a situation where there is someone unlike them, they should not be inclined to avoid that person. Rather, they should be wanting to learn who they are, and explore their relation to each other. We must teach our students an attitude of curiosity and exploration.

When students are curious, and eager, behavioral issues disappear. When the subject matter is relevant to them, they are engaged. And when the unknown stranger becomes a friend, a relationship is formed for life.

But digging into the statistics, as previously mentioned, this type of discrimination exists. ½ of black students are attending an institution that isn't accredited. That's completely not okay. These students become less likely to graduate and go onto higher education or technical certification, which is basically a requirement to get a job that isn't minimum wage. And without digging too much into the politics of raising the minimum wage, it can be said that those who live off of it tend to live paycheck to paycheck, and sometimes even that isn't enough.

What are some ways you could share this learning with your fellow educators once you start in the field?

It's definitely important to get the topic out to other educators about what is going on in other schools and districts. It's significant to note that this episode was created in 2015- that means it's pretty recent, and that this kind of stuff is still going on in our country.

Talking about diversity in our schools is a way to increase awareness of other cultures and raise appreciation for others who live differently than we do. It's a great way to unseat whiteness as the dominant culture, and can only be achieved through a commitment from everyone involved. This includes administration. Cultural talks led by students or guest speakers or even the principal is a great way to include everyone in the community in this commitment.

Another way that teachers could promote diversity is by picking literature and stories that reflect people who are not white men. Looking for our figures in history who are women, queer, people of color, not able-bodied, so on and so forth, is so important for students so that they can see representation no matter who they are.

How is this topic beyond the traditional aspect of education (teaching grade level standards)?

Diversity is truly something that cannot be taught- it must be experienced. It is not measurable. Intersectionality theory states that we all are both advantaged and disadvantaged and that in that, nobody is more advantaged or disadvantaged than another. Therefore, it is not something we can evaluate a person for, like we can with test scores.

Instead, we can teach kindness, gratitude, and respect. Although these are not measurable traits either, we can see them in our actions, and thus students can learn them as well. Teaching students how to be morally sound human beings is important in raising them to be functioning members of society.

In addition to moral values, we can teach inequalities and privilege. We can teach students to read up and reach out. To ask questions when something seems unfair. To stand up for others who need help. To speak for those who are silenced.

Education consists of much more than reading from a textbook. There are life lessons one must learned along the way, and I can only hope that when I become an educator, that my students will learn these life lessons with me.