

## IN CONVERSATION WITH

# TANITIÃ MUNROE

*Centering Black LGBTQ+ students in the classroom*

### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

*LGBTQ, students, Black, educators, youth, queer, experience, centering, anti-oppression, conversation, school, resources, community*

### **SPEAKERS**

Shayle Graham, Tanitiã Munroe

### **RESOURCES**

[The Trevor Project](#)

[Black Queer Youth Collective](#)

[LGBTQ Reads](#)



## The Human Library

Conversations around Equitable, Anti-Racist, &  
Anti-Opressive Practice

---

## SHAYLE GRAHAM

Hello colleagues and welcome to TDSB Human Library: Conversations Around Equitable, Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Practice. We are your host Shayle Graham and Dr. Stephanie Fearon from the Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression team. We have an insightful conversation in store for you today. Are you ready to talk courageously? Let's get into it.

Hello to all our listeners out there and welcome to the TDSB Human Library Podcast Series. In this episode, we are going to discuss centering Black, LGBTQ+ students in the classroom with Black queer mother, child and youth worker, PhD student and researcher Tanitiã Munroe. Welcome to Tanitiã.

## TANITIÃ MUNROE

Thanks for having me, Shayle. I'm really excited to be a part of this podcast series.

## SHAYLE GRAHAM

Well, we are definitely happy to have you here with us today. So, Tanitiã, before we dive into the conversation, can you just take a moment to share with us some of the passions that led you to do the work that you do?

## TANITIÃ MUNROE

Oh, boy, where do I start? I mean, it's been 20 plus years of me engaging with young people, both locally and internationally. But I think my passion started when I tried to reimagine something different from my high school experience in Jamaica. And you have me laughing now because, you know, I'm going down memory lane. But I went to an all-girls Catholic boarding school with nuns constantly riding my tail. You know, I was told I was insolent or rude because I question things and spoke up. And that led to severe punishment sometimes. I mean, you know, back then it was a very rigid and strict. But can you imagine they thought driving fear into students was the best way to educate them? Anyways, that's for another podcast.

But yeah, I think, looking back, you know, when I got my first degree, in the 90s, you know, I wanted to become an educator of a different kind. There was something that said, "This is not what school is supposed to be, or, you know, look like, you know, or feel like, you know, this shouldn't have been the experience." Anyways, you know, I did quite a lot of youth outreach in the inner city with young people they deem, "at risk", and I was drawn to this because, again, you know, I was labeled as "at risk". Oh, yeah. And then there was a time when I did graduate, you know, I was 19, then, you know, because, you know, of course, in the Caribbean, we graduate early, from University, as well. I was 19, fresh out of university, I'm going to change the world. So, I taught for a semester, and I was like, whoa, this is not for me. This is not what I want to do. And I was like, "What am I this horrible to teachers?" You know, the joke was on me. So, yeah, um, that was one piece.

I can really think through other experiences that I've had, you know, for example, I have navigated places where people wouldn't even dream of going, you know, hanging out with Black youth experiencing unstable housing, for starters. And, and some who, you know, I've worked with in custody, and I often see them out on the streets when they're released. I just treat all the kids that I engage with, as my own. And in other spaces, I have worked with children living with HIV AIDS, and who have been orphaned because they have lost someone to that disease. And I've done this kind of work watching their families struggle through the barriers and stigma they encountered and for some, you know, some of their parents or their families is surviving the loss of a child.

## TANITIÄ MUNROE

And working in the school community, you know, I have this big grin on my face now. I've always learned from and listened to Black children and youth tell stories of who they are in the hallways and on playgrounds of schools, through music, you know, their slang, teaching me their slang, or me just asking, you know, what does that mean? What are you saying? You know, and they'd laugh. You know, it's hearing them tell me about their favorite food or what they did the night before. It's their dancing and other creative expressions, right. So, I have worked with some amazing, bold, brilliant and beautiful Black children and youth who oftentimes just need a space to thrive and just be themselves, right. And I think all those things combined helped shape my engagement, my passion, and activism to always amplify their voices.

## SHAYLE GRAHAM

Tanitiä, as I was listening to your story, and all the incredible things that you were saying, I was thinking to myself Tanitiä in trouble as a child. No. And it just made me think that, you know, some of the most brilliant educators that I know were one of those children that were being deemed, as you know, "trouble makers". But yeah. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences so authentically. You speak with such passion and such zeal for students it's just phenomenal. I love it.

Amplifying the voices of Black children is so evident in the work that you do. And based on the research I've done on you, you know, as I'm, you know, googling but yeah, I'm googling you. It's clear that you are committed to centering the lives of Black LGBTQ+ students in learning spaces within schools and communities. So, tell me something: why do you think it is important for educators to co-create positive spaces for Black LGBTQ+ students in the 2021 classroom?

## TANITIÄ MUNROE

Hmm, that's a very good question. I think we understand that schools historically have been shaped by and for white cisgendered straight individuals, also their middle class norms, logics, and ideology. So, let's just put that out there. And we also know the history of schooling for Black children and youth, here in Canada. And we also understand the ongoing issues that are still there. Add race, class, gender identity, and gender expression to the mix, and you will understand the challenges Black LGBTQ+ students face. I mean, the complexities of their schooling experiences align well with an understanding of how they navigate the multifaceted and often overlapping oppressive power structures simultaneously.

They are often times rendered invisible within education and context and are also profoundly aware that if they choose to be out, this visibility may also add another layer of vulnerability, either in the school community or their community themselves -- the communities that they hail from. For these particular students, their skill and experience can be tenuous due to the isolation and the marginalization. You know, for example, the powerful combination of stereotyping in their school and community, streaming into the lower academic courses, anti-Black racism, queerphobia, and transphobia greatly impact their lived experiences. The isolation and discrimination that Black LGBTQ youth experience in school can significantly contribute to a decline in academic participation. So, I do believe that educators, parents, caregivers, and other concerned adults must pay particular attention to the needs of Black LGBTQ students who are coming from these varying intersections. These students are uniquely impacted by racism and homophobia because they're both Black and LGBTQ. And this should go without saying, however I think I should echo it, Black LGBTQ+ students should not have to wait until they're my age to read literature and engage in an experience affirming both their identities.

## SHAYLE GRAHAM

And to speak to your point, Tanitiã, around affirming the diverse identities of students, in our line of work as equity coaches, we often see the identities of LGBTQ+ students centered in very monolithic ways, as if to say, one experience fits all. But what is great about your research is that you explore the diverse schooling experiences of Black LGBTQ+ students. So, based on that, can you recommend three resources and supports for educators who are interested in centering Black LGBTQ+ students in their programming and instruction?

## TANITIÃ MUNROE

Three resources; there are so many. Let me just tell you the ones that I always use as my go to. So, the first is The Trevor Project. And it has so much resources for youth-serving adults and organization. And it has the largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning young people. I mean, when you do visit the website, you will see just how much resources is there. And the thing that I like about it is that there are also counselors available to talk to young people. So, I like that quite a lot.

A second one is Black Queer Youth Collective, which is a grassroots group dedicated to identifying and responding to the needs of Black queer and trans youth in Toronto. I think their vision is to, you know, create a space where the voices and experiences of Black queer and trans youth are heard, and they feel comfortable and safe. So that's another good one.

And I also like sharing resources around, like, you know, where educators can get books and ideas to create lesson plan. And one that I'm fond of is called LGBTQ Reads. And it is a site dedicated to promoting curated LGBTQ literature for all ages. And it's run by author and blogger Dahlia Adler. So yeah, you can check those out. And again, you know, there's quite a few resources out there for educators.

## SHAYLE GRAHAM

Thank you, Tanitiã, for sharing your insight with us today. I feel like there's still so much to learn; there's still so much to unpack. And this episode really is just the beginning of the conversation. And the hope is that our listeners, our colleague community, will continue the conversation. We have a lot of work to do. But on that note, on behalf of the Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Team, Tanitiã, we would like to thank you for stopping by and chatting with us around the importance of centering Black LGBTQ+ students in the classroom.

## TANITIÃ MUNROE

Just want to say thanks again for inviting me, Shayle. And you know, my final thought in our conversation is our youth are not failing this system. It is the system that is failing our youth. Now we understand that, and we know we need to do something different, right. Or I guess we're working on that. And for me, ironically, the very youth who are being treated the worse are the young people who are going to lead us out of this nightmare. And I'm hopeful.

## SHAYLE GRAHAM

Okay, colleagues, that's all today. We look forward to you joining us for our next courageous conversation. If you like this episode, don't forget to share it with a colleague and post it on social media using the #TDSBtalks. Be for now.