


FEBRUARY 2025 ISSUE

Catholic Teacher

MAGAZINE of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association



LEARNING FROM BLACK VOICES

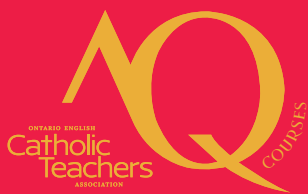
A special issue of
Catholic Teacher
magazine, featuring the
contributions of Black
Catholic teachers.

IN THIS ISSUE

Addressing Anti-Black Racism and Misogynoir in Schools

A Journey of Faith and Advocacy: My Path as a Black Catholic Teacher

Dealing with the Impact of Anti-Black Racism in the Workplace



**learn
teach
succeed.**

An illustration of two people from behind. The person in the foreground has dark curly hair and is wearing a light pink long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. They are pointing their right hand towards a large pink speech bubble. The person behind them is wearing a yellow and orange striped shirt and blue jeans. The background is a solid red color.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



As February unfolds, it brings with it an important opportunity to celebrate the diversity and achievements of Black people in Canada and reflect on the vital contributions they have made to our shared history and culture. For our Association, it is also a time to recognize and honour our Black members – those who go above and beyond to inspire and nurture their students, create inclusive spaces, and strengthen our Catholic school communities through their commitment to equity and excellence.

Black History Month is also a time to reflect on Canada's painful history and the distinct challenges that Black people in Canada continue to face in their daily lives, such as systemic barriers, racism, and discrimination. For our Association, this also includes the many experiences of our Black students and fellow Black Catholic teachers.

As part of our commitment to combatting systemic barriers and creating a more equitable and just future for Black Catholic teachers and students, the Association has developed new resources to support Black students and their families. These tools, designed with input from teachers across the province, address the unique challenges Black students face and provide strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable classrooms. I encourage all members to explore these resources in the Members' Area of our website, particularly the Learning from Diverse Voices video series. The latest installment, Teaching Black Students, amplifies the experiences and insights of Black members, offering a window into their journeys and a powerful reminder of why this work is so essential.

The February issue of *Catholic Teacher* magazine continues this conversation with a collection of articles that highlight the strength, creativity, and advocacy work of our Black members. One piece that left a deep impression on me is Staff Officer Tia Duke's "Time and Space," where she reflects on the importance of embracing her identity and the transformative power of collaboration. Tia's recounting of how this very issue of *Catholic Teacher* came to fruition through her connections and vision is a testament to the impact that one person's leadership and courage can have. Another must-read is Staff Officer Duke Nicholson's "A Journey of Faith and Advocacy," which chronicles his 23-year journey as a Black Catholic teacher and union leader. Duke's story is one of resilience, faith, and an unwavering commitment to justice. His work in co-creating the Dufferin-Peel Elementary Unit's Anti-Black Racism Committee and developing the Association's first-ever AQ course on anti-Black racism showcases the incredible contributions Black teachers are making to reshape pedagogy and foster inclusive environments for all.

These pieces, and others in this issue, reflect the heart of what it means to be a Catholic teacher. They invite us all to reflect on our own journeys as teachers and our common commitment to advocacy and social justice. I want to thank those who have shared their voices for the courage and grace these articles provide, and for all their contributions both in our schools and across our Association. You have provided me with the opportunity for further reflection and learning. I am sure that all those reading this issue will benefit from this willingness to share as well. To the Black members who contribute every day to making OECTA the vibrant and dynamic Association it is, I extend my deepest gratitude.

Together, let us honour Black History Month by learning, reflecting, and taking meaningful steps to advance the causes of equity and human rights, as we continue in our commitment to enhance our view of the world through each other's eyes.

In solidarity,

René Jansen in de Wal
President

ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

If you would like to connect with us to share your thoughts, ideas, or concerns, please reach out to us at publicaffairs@catholicteachers.ca.
There is no voice more important than a member's voice.

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Cover: Catholic teachers who contributed to the creation of the *Teaching Black Students* video - part of the *Learning from Diverse Voices* video series.

UP FRONT

SIGN UP FOR EXCLUSIVE PROVINCIAL ELECTION TEXT ALERTS

As the Association prepares for an early provincial election, we want to make sure that Catholic teachers have all the information and opportunities you need to make your voices heard!

By **signing up for text alerts**, you will receive important, exclusive, time-sensitive information on a variety of topics, including:

- The upcoming provincial election
- Political action opportunities in your community
- Bargaining updates
- Professional development opportunities and deadlines
- Upcoming Association events

Your cellphone number will not be shared with any third party and will be used strictly for Association business. You will be able to opt-out of receiving the alerts at any time.

Click **HERE** to sign up



Text Alert Sign-up
Get Exclusive Election Info



CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

Black History Month

- 3 Spring AQ Courses Begin
- 10 School Deadline for Young Authors Awards (Class Entries to OECTA Staff Representatives)
- 17 Family Day
- 20 World Day of Social Justice
- 21 Unit Deadline for Young Authors Awards (School Entries to Local OECTA Unit)
- 22 National Human Trafficking Awareness Day
- 26 Pink Shirt Day

MARCH

Women's History Month

- 3 Provincial Deadline for Young Authors Awards (Local OECTA Unit to Provincial Office)
- 5 Ash Wednesday
- 8 International Women's Day
- 8-10 Annual General Meeting
- 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 22 Earth Hour
- 31 OTIP Teaching Awards Nominations Close

APRIL

- 1 Scholarships & Fellowships Application Deadline
- 9 Day of Pink
- 11 Spring AQ Courses End
- 18 Good Friday
- 20 Easter Sunday
- 22 Earth Day

DEVELOP DEEPER CONNECTIONS WITH STARLING MINDS

Building authentic, meaningful relationships can be challenging in today's fast-paced world. Starling Minds' latest online workshop, Deeper Connections, offers helpful tools and interactive exercises to make the process a little easier.

Running on **February 18 and 25**, from **7 p.m. to 8 p.m.**, Catholic teachers will have the opportunity to:

- Recognize and manage emotions more effectively
- Enhance empathy to better understand and connect with others
- Improve your communication and conflict-resolution skills
- Strengthen and nurture your relationships with emotional resilience

To register for the Deeper Connections workshop, you must have a Starling Minds account. Registration is free for Catholic teachers.

Access the Starling Minds platform with the access code: MEMBER.

Click [HERE](#) To Learn More

AGM 2025

This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held in person at the Westin Harbour Castle Hotel in Toronto from **March 8 to 10**.

The *Resolutions and Nominations* booklet is available in the Members' Area at **catholicteachers.ca**. This booklet includes all proposed policy, procedural, and by-law changes to be debated at AGM. Contact your local unit office to find out how you can provide input regarding the AGM resolutions.

Members who wish to observe AGM online will be able to access portions of the meeting via livestream. The link to watch will be available in the Members' Area at **catholicteachers.ca**.

Click [HERE](#) To Learn More

OTIP TEACHING AWARDS NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN!

A great teacher shapes minds, inspires dreams, and leaves a lasting impact on their students and communities. The OTIP Teaching Awards are a joint initiative between the Ontario Teachers' Federation and the Ontario Teachers Insurance Plan that recognizes teachers who make a difference. If you know a Catholic teacher whose commitment, creativity, and energy result in a superior experience for students, consider nominating them for these awards. Winners are hosted at a ceremony in Toronto where they will be presented with a personal award of \$1,000 and a certificate of recognition.

Nominations close March 31.

Anyone can nominate a teacher in Ontario's publicly funded schools. A winning teacher will be selected in each of the following three categories: elementary, secondary, and a beginning teacher in their first five years of teaching.

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Building Inclusive Schools

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Events

/ OECTA Honoured for Leadership in Social Progress

On October 30, 2024, the Pearson Centre celebrated the invaluable contributions of organized labour at a sold-out gala event held in Toronto. The evening recognized unions' pivotal role in driving positive and progressive social change across Canada. From championing equity, diversity, and inclusion, to advocating for fair wages, job security, and safe workplaces – labour organizations have long been at the forefront of creating a more just and inclusive society.

Four of Canada's leading labour organizations were honoured with **Pearson Centre Leadership Awards** for their trailblazing work. Accepting the awards on behalf of their respective organizations were:

- **René Jansen in de Wal**, President of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
- **David Bulmer**, President and CEO of the Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario (AMAPCEO)
- **Linda Silas**, President of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU)
- **Sean Strickland**, Executive Director of Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU)

The event also featured an engaging armchair discussion with the honourees, moderated by Indira Naidoo-Harris, Pearson Centre vice-chair and former MPP and Ontario minister of education. Their dynamic conversation highlighted the collective achievements of Canada's labour movement and reaffirmed its vital role in shaping a more equitable future.

The evening served as a testament to the enduring impact of unions in advancing equal opportunity, reducing barriers, and creating pathways to rewarding careers for workers across Canada.

/ National School Food Program Celebrated

Teachers know first-hand the impact that poor nutrition can have on a students' focus and ability to learn. The Association has long supported the call for a national school food program, and with the leadership of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) the federal government announced such a program earlier in 2024.

First Vice-President Chris Cowley was on hand for the announcement of Ontario signing on to the National School Food Program, making it the third province to take this vital step. He expressed OECTA's strong support for the initiative, which backed by a \$108.4M investment over three years, will significantly expand the reach of the province's Student Nutrition Program and First Nations Student Nutrition Program.

Following the announcement, Cowley met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to personally thank him for his government's commitment to this transformative program. Their discussion highlighted the critical importance of providing students with healthy, nutritious meals to support their success and well-being.

The Association commends the CTF for championing this initiative and acknowledged the essential work of community-based agencies that make these programs a reality every day.



First Vice-President Chris Cowley with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at announcement of Ontario's sign-on to the National School Food Program.

APPLY BY APRIL 1

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Consider applying for a
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OR
FELLOWSHIP?

Qualified members can access a variety of scholarships and fellowships to help further their studies and career.

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Consider applying for a
BURSARY?

Each year, bursaries of up to \$1,000 are awarded to individual members who are pursuing undergraduate studies, post-graduate studies, or professional development activities as part of their lifelong learning.

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APPLY BY MAY 1

LEARNING FROM DIVERSE VOICES

Teaching Black Students

BY PATRICE HALL-JOHNSON, FELICIA MARSHALL, AND ANN MARIE VANNESTE

The Learning from Diverse Voices and Member Spotlight video series were created to encourage growth and inspire Catholic teachers to have meaningful conversations on accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE). While the videos are not designed as classroom resources, they offer many practical ideas and suggestions to make your teaching practice more inclusive.

In each video, Indigenous members and members from equity-deserving groups from across the province share their personal stories and professional expertise. In this article, you will find reflections from Black members featured in the video Teaching Black Students, including their reasons for participating, experience with the project, and hopes for Catholic teachers who view the series.

Click [HERE](#) To Watch Teaching Black Students

Felicia Marshall

Where do I begin! It was such an honour to be part of OECTA's Learning from Diverse Voices series. When the call for participants came, I was filled with both excitement and hesitation. On one hand, I saw it as an incredible opportunity to share my journey as a Black teacher. On the other, I questioned whether my story would truly be valuable or impactful enough. The self-doubt crept in as I thought about how to articulate my experiences – experiences that span from my time as a student to my current role as a teacher and mother to two boys in our education system. After talking it over with my husband, who encouraged me to apply, I realized that my story was important; not only for my own growth, but to give a voice to others who might be experiencing, or have experienced, similar struggles. I decided to submit my application, trusting that my story, though deeply personal, could offer insight and perspective on the realities of teaching in a diverse, and often challenging, educational environment.

Experience filming and interviewing

Filming the video was unlike anything I had ever experienced. The moment I arrived at the studio in Toronto, I was overwhelmed by a mix of emotions. There was excitement, but also a level of nervousness – after all, I was about to share a deeply personal part of myself with strangers. However, the warm welcome I received from the OECTA team put me at ease right away. In the time leading up to my interview, I sat and listened to the stories of other educators – stories of triumphs and challenges alike. Many of them shared struggles that mirrored my own, and I felt a strong sense of connection with them. There were teachers from all areas across Ontario coming with the same goals and passion to share their lived experiences surrounding accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity, as well as those of their students. When it was finally my turn to be interviewed I was nervous, but the team's encouragement and gentle guidance helped me open up and speak from the heart. The interviewer reassured me that she was there to support and guide me through the process, but also welcomed me to speak organically about the topic of Black students in education. I can not say enough how great the team was that day and the amount of support that they gave me. As I began speaking, I realized that the words came more easily than I expected. I did not have to force it; my message flowed naturally from the heart.

Reaction to watching the video

Watching the finished videos for the first time was a surreal and emotional experience. I did not know what to expect on the day of the official viewing, but I was deeply moved by how accurately the team captured the voices of everyone who participated. It was like I was hearing my own story for the first time; a story mixed with great accomplishments, but also moments where the system failed



Click [HERE](#)
To Watch Felicia's
Member Spotlight
Video

me. The tears came not just from recalling painful moments, but from the realization that my story was not just mine – it reflected the stories of so many others. I listened that day to the experiences of other teachers who had stories like mine, stories of great teachers that supported their educational journey, but also stories of hurt. I watched alongside my family, observing the pride in their faces as they saw my story unfold on the screen. My children especially were in awe, and their excitement as they saw “mommy on TV” made the whole experience feel even more significant. It was not just about me sharing my own journey, it was about setting an example for them – showing my children that their little voices matter too, and that together we would navigate their educational journey.

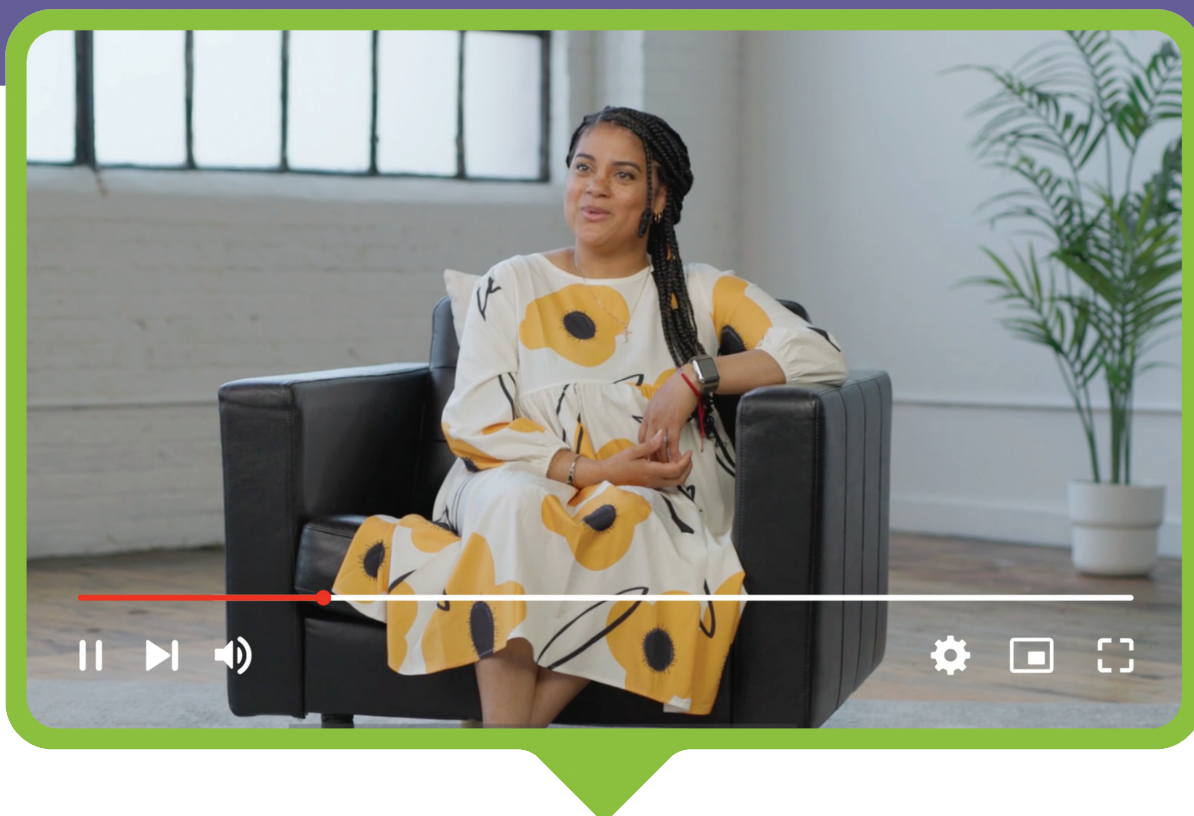
Takeaways for Catholic teachers

One of the most important takeaways I hope Catholic teachers can gather from this video series is the power of empathy. It is essential that we take the time to truly understand our students, their backgrounds, and their challenges. As teachers, we need to actively listen and create safer spaces where students feel comfortable sharing their experiences. We must also remember that our own experiences, whether of struggle or success, can shape how we interact with our students. As a Black teacher, I've learned that building trust and showing vulnerability can foster deeper connections with students. It is not just about academic achievement; it is about nurturing the whole child – emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. We can not be the

mentors and role models our students need unless we are open, compassionate, and willing to grow alongside them.

I hope this video series will spark important conversations about the work we still need to do as teachers. The focus of my school board for the 2024-25 school year is “Living in Hope,” which I feel speaks so much to this project. It is only through hope and understanding that we can begin to tackle and dismantle old practices. Hope gives us purpose, drive, and is necessary for change. I know and understand that there is no quick fix to the challenges we face in the classroom, especially when it comes to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion – but that does not mean we should not try. Change is slow, but it is necessary. We need to continue working together, supporting one another, and demanding that all students, regardless of their background, feel seen and heard. My story is just one of many, and I believe that by sharing all our voices, we can create a stronger, more inclusive educational system where everyone belongs. Students and teachers today should not have to experience feelings of loneliness and isolation when the core meaning and message of the word Catholic is universal and all-inclusive. It is time that we model this throughout all areas.

I am proud to be part of this movement. I hope that by watching this series, other teachers will feel empowered to make a difference in their own classrooms and communities.



Patrice Hall-Johnson

I wear many hats in both my professional and personal life. I am a full-time Kindergarten teacher with the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB), where I have the privilege of shaping young minds at a foundational stage of their education. In addition to my teaching role, I serve as co-chair of the Black Employee Network (BEN) with the OCSB, a position that allows me to advocate for equity and inclusion within the school board. My passion for education extends beyond the classroom as I am also a part-time faculty member at Algonquin College and an associate teacher for the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. These roles enable me to contribute to the development of future educators, sharing insights from my journey and inspiring others to make a difference in students' lives.

I am humbled to have been recognized for my efforts and dedication to education and community service. Some of my most cherished accolades include the 2024 Director of Education Commendation, the 2023 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence, and the 2022 CTV Faces Magazine Professor of the Year Award. Beyond these

professional recognitions, I have received numerous awards for my volunteer work, advocacy, and commitment to community-building. Balancing these achievements with my responsibilities as a busy mother of two and a graduate student working toward my goal of eventually obtaining my doctorate has been challenging, yet deeply rewarding.

My experience

Learning about cultural humility is an essential aspect of our roles as Catholic teachers. Cultural humility invites us to approach our work with openness, self-awareness, and a commitment to lifelong learning. It encourages us to acknowledge and address our biases, understand the diverse backgrounds of our students, and respond to their unique needs. This practice is vital for supporting the holistic development of our students, ensuring that they feel respected and included in their educational journey.

Reflecting on my own experiences growing up in Ottawa during the 1980s and 1990s, I recognize how different the landscape was. Diversity was largely absent in the population

and educational materials, prejudice and racism were both seen and felt. These experiences shaped my commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for today's students. The Learning from Diverse Voices series offered an opportunity to address these issues, providing a space to reflect on the progress we have made and the work that still needs to be done.

Participating in this project was therapeutic for me. It allowed me to share my lived experiences in a professional space where my voice was not only heard, but valued. This process of storytelling and advocacy was deeply healing, offering a sense of validation and belonging that I had long sought. It also reinforced my belief in the power of representation and the importance of creating opportunities for others to share their stories.

Through the series, I was able to contribute to a vision of hope for the future. By sharing my experiences, I aim to inspire others to embrace inclusivity and cultural humility in their practices. This work is not just about acknowledging the challenges of the past. It is also about paving the way for a brighter, more equitable future for our students and communities.

As I continue my journey as a teacher, advocate, and lifelong learner, I remain committed to fostering environments where every student feels seen, supported, and celebrated. The video series is a testament to the transformative power of sharing our stories and learning from one another. It is my hope that this work will inspire others to join in the ongoing effort to build a more inclusive and compassionate world.

A huge shout out and thank you to the production team for their vision, and for bringing a vast range of voices and experiences from across the province to share their experiences.

Click [HERE](#) To Watch Patrice's Member Spotlight Video



”

**It underscores
the importance
of creating
spaces where all
individuals feel
seen, valued, and
empowered to share
their stories.**

“

I have learned that by embracing their backgrounds, identities, and experiences, I can foster a learning environment where Black students thrive academically and personally.

Ann Marie Vanneste

From the moment I received the call-out to speak about teaching Black students, I was compelled to jump at the chance. I felt as though this was something that I needed to do. The opportunity to share my experiences, challenges, and insights as an educator working with Black students felt incredibly important, not only for my own growth, but for the collective understanding of how we can better support these students in the classroom.

My experience filming the interview

When I first received the call to participate in the interview, I was immediately struck by the significance of the moment. It felt like a chance to address a topic that I am deeply passionate about – teaching Black students – and to contribute my perspective to a broader conversation. For over 20 years, I have been the only Black teacher at my high school, All Saints. During the filming, I was energized by the opportunity to share the nuances of this experience. I spoke from my heart, reflecting on the challenges Black students face, and the strategies we, as teachers, must employ to help them succeed. While I was excited to share these thoughts, I also felt the weight of responsibility – the responsibility to be honest, to speak from my own lived experience, and to offer something meaningful that would resonate with my fellow teachers. Throughout, I kept the vision of so many of my students and Black Student Association members close to my heart as I spoke.

The venue was so professionally set up, yet it had such a relaxed and inviting atmosphere that made me feel right at home. The interviewer established a kind rapport from the moment they started asking questions. I felt as though I could have spoken about this topic for hours.

Reaction to watching the finished video

Watching the finished video was a deeply emotional experience. I kept thinking to myself how I wished there was something like this for teachers when I was a student. There is something incredibly vulnerable about seeing yourself on screen, especially when you are discussing topics that are so personal and deeply tied to your own teaching journey. I was proud of how the interview turned out. It captured the essence of my beliefs and feelings about the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Watching it back allowed me to see the power of storytelling and how individual experiences can spark



broader conversations about change in education. This was one of the most valuable interviews I have ever done.

Takeaways for teachers

One of the main takeaways I hope teachers gain from watching this video is the importance of understanding the unique needs of Black students. Too often, we hear about systemic issues like unequal access to resources or implicit bias, but the true work lies in creating an environment where these students feel seen, heard, and valued. As teachers, we must be intentional about recognizing and addressing the cultural and emotional needs of our students. Building relationships with Black students that are based on trust, respect, and understanding is fundamental to their success. In my own classroom, I have learned that by embracing different backgrounds, identities, and experiences, I can foster a learning environment where Black students thrive academically and in their personal lives. I am also beyond proud of the work All Saints staff have done over the past four years. Oftentimes, one must first work through being uncomfortable to become comfortable diving into anti-Black racism work.

Hope for teachers moving forward

Looking ahead, my hope is that teachers in K-12 settings and beyond will take a critical look at how they engage with Black students. I hope we can move beyond simply “teaching the curriculum” and shift our focus to the human beings in our classrooms. As teachers, it is crucial for us to continuously ask

ourselves how we are supporting our students, emotionally and socially? How are we challenging stereotypes and fostering an environment that embraces diversity and inclusion? This kind of reflection and action is vital to ensuring that all students, particularly Black students, have the opportunity to succeed.

In conclusion, speaking about teaching Black students in this interview was an experience that allowed me to reflect on my own teaching journey while also considering the broader impact that we can have on the future of Black students. My hope is that this video, and the series as a whole, inspires teachers to engage with their students in a deeper, more compassionate way, and to challenge themselves to create classroom environments where every student feels empowered and valued. By listening to, learning from, and advocating for our students, we can contribute to a more just and equitable education system for all.

Click [HERE](#) To Watch Ann Marie’s Member Spotlight Video

Education That Lifts Students Up, Now That's Wzup!

BY MICHAEL GRANDSOULT



Click **HERE**
To Watch
"AfriCanuck"
Music Video

From conception to publication, it took me ten years to create the African-Canadian anthem, "AfriCanuck."

The chorus, "AfriCanuck, that's wzup!," was first conceived and performed in 2008 at a Toronto Catholic District School Board Black History Month celebration. It began as a simple call and response chant to hype up the crowd before my students took to the stage to perform a play. Fast forward to today, and the phrase is a regular part of student vocabulary at Scarborough's St. Maria Goretti CES, said in passing to their peers and teachers in the hallway and during various other activities.

The original song was written to fill the large void of African Canadian content I felt as a musician and educator. Far too often, the norm for Black history month is instruction centered around Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and other figures of the American civil rights movement. While these icons deserve to be celebrated, there are so many Black Canadian heroes whose stories are not widely known. The "AfriCanuk" music video speaks to this need. It is framed around a student doing research on Black Canadian history, which leads him to seminal Black Toronto cultural hub, A Different Booklist. My goal with the video was to promote literacy by showcasing several books on prominent Black Canadian figures, and I'm proud to say it worked. Goretti graduate, MC Delighta, (who was part of a student remix of "AfriCanuk") told me that she wanted to borrow *The*

Kids Book of Black History in Canada by Rosemary Sadlier after seeing it featured in the video.

Students are not meant to just sing along and watch the video, but are further engaged with follow up tasks. The song is accompanied with questions that have them go out to learn more about Black Canadian heroes, analyze literary devices, and compare the process of using digital media versus print publications for research. Many students have expressed that the song is rich with facts and naturally inspires them to learn more. Goretti graduate and remix writer MC Marley Winner commented that it was easier to write about a topic he liked.

Ultimately, we read to write and write to recite. The final task is for students to do their own research and create their own version of "AfriCanuk." These student remixes have been presented in class, shared over the PA system, presented at assemblies in the gym, and in a full circle moment, shared at the same board-wide event where the chorus was first heard all those years ago. Taking part in these student remixes has helped improve students' writing skills and boosted their confidence in public speaking. MC Da Boss, who wrote a great piece on Wayne Simmonds, echoes this growth in lines like, "It may seem hard but there is one main key to success, just keep refining your craft and you will reach your best."

(Chorus) AfriCanuck yup that's wzup [4x]

AfriCanadians ain't just come/
1st known recorded one **Olivier Le Jeune**/
'Fore European colonization begun/
They hired **Mathieu Da Costa** to speak tongues/

With Mi'kmaq give dap bridged the gap/
Free Black paid for that's a feather in his cap/
Many others shackled subtracted to booty/
Read Code Noir to savoir or ask **Chloe Cooley**/

Hardly lowly ruly resistance was bubbling/
Hardest Black ever **Harriet Tubman**/
Carried gun man but not to hurt her kin/
Or enslave to poison point for liberation/

Really hear hymns for hidden coded secrets/
Wade in the water from dogs off leashes/
MikeAll's speech and Royce Birth's beat/
Mean more soul fire than **Marie Joseph Angelique**-

(Chorus) AfriCanuck yup that's wzup [4x]

Flow circulates like **E. McCoy's** lubricating cup/
1st Black **Dr. Anderson Abbot** made the cut/
Need a cab pickup hail **Thornton Blackburn**/
The City's 1st taxi King St. track served/

Real facts word no embellishment/
Freedom Dawn with **Josiah Henson's** settlement/
Carrie Best penmanship write for liberation/
Mary Ann Shad taught for integration/

Viola Desmond not let in but brutally removed/
Now pic sits in Nova Scotia's Govt. House Ballroom/
Yall behooved to build a hall for my dude **William Hall**/
Inspiration to stay blazing if you hit the wall/

Queen Victoria Crossed him off her award list/
Do support like **No 2 Construction forces**/
MikeAll ride riddim **John Ware** style with horses/
Hoist voice like torches help we recite chorus-

(Chorus) AfriCanuck yup that's wzup [4x]

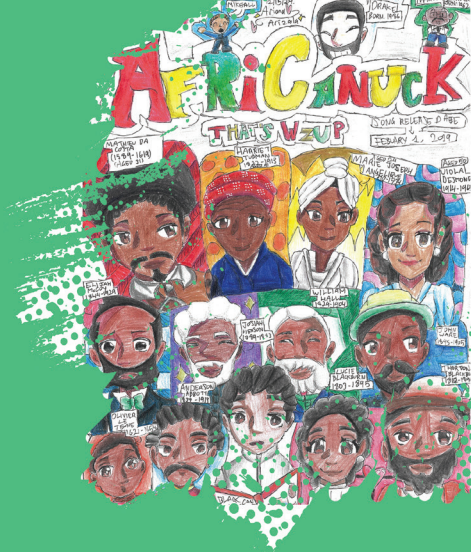
Not just the past but must view the future/
And aim youth to more than ball or tool shooters/
It's cool to move units not measured in metric/
Arrest history like **Maestro** and Drake records/

Raise expectations from basement to veranda/
With labour **Lincoln** like **Alexander**/
Do me have to flee in the streets running from beast/
Can be **Chief** like **Saunders** and run the police/

Need to realize that Black Lives Matter/
Would **Loku** be dead if he was White with the hammer/
I don't know the answers just posing questions/
To get collectives stepping in progresses direction/

Know that me descend from Negus thrones/
Please show that me ascend above negative drones/
MikeAll sends these poems as a wake up/
AfriCanuck yup that's wzup!-

- Written and performed by Michael "MikeAll" Grandsoult



Questions for Discussion

- 1/ Many "firsts" are name dropped in the lyrics. List the names of all the "firsts" and why they were "first."
- 2/ Pick your favourite line(s), copy it and explain why it is your favourite.
- 3/ Explain the word play, or double meaning, used to reveal facts about the following peoples' lives:
 - "...more soul fire than Marie Joseph Angelique"
 - "Dr. Anderson Abbot made the cut"
 - "Need a cab pickup hail Thornton Blackburn"
- 4/ The video seems to promote books over digital technology. Explain how books can be better than digital technology. Explain how digital technology can be better than books. Which do you prefer and why?

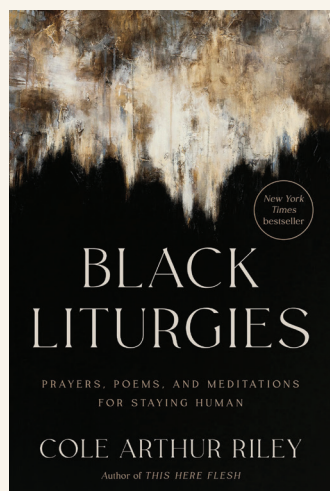
"AfriCanuck is a powerful and captivating song that celebrates the invaluable contributions of black people to Canada and the world. The lyrics paint a picture of the rich culture and achievements of black communities throughout time. The song's message is uplifting and empowering, reminding us of the strength, resilience, and brilliance of black people. What an interesting way to teach a history lesson!"
– Mr. Andrew Gergely, TCDSB Teacher

Michael Grandsoult is a member of Toronto Elementary Unit teaching intermediate grades at St. Maria Goretti in Scarborough. He is a Hip Hop Headucator for whom Hip Hop education is a key dynamic of his teaching pedagogy.



Books! Books! Books!

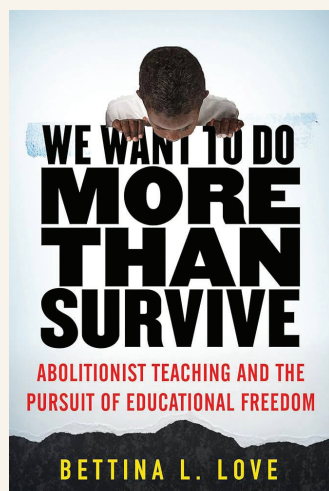
A selection of recommended readings by Black authors, from Black Catholic teachers.



Black Liturgies
by Cole Arthur Riley

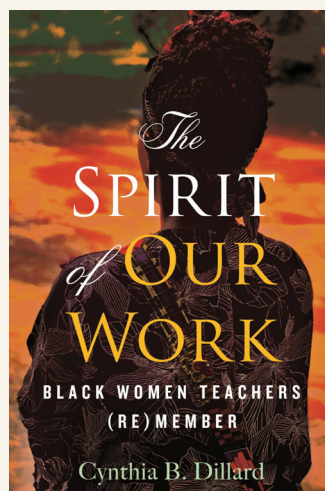
A collection of prayer, poetry, and spiritual practice centering the Black interior world, from the New York Times bestselling author of *This Here Flesh* and creator of *Black Liturgies*.

In this book, she brings together new prayers, letters, poems, meditation questions, breath practices, scriptures, and the writings of Black literary ancestors to offer 43 liturgies that can be practiced individually or as a community.



We Want to Do More than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom
by Bettina L. Love

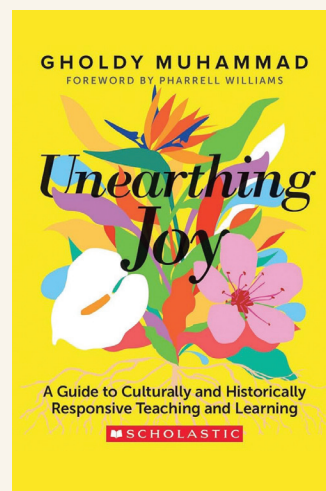
Drawing on personal stories, research, and historical events, an esteemed educator offers a vision of educational justice inspired by the rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists. Drawing on her life's work of teaching and researching in urban schools, Bettina Love persuasively argues that educators must teach students about racial violence, oppression, and how to make sustainable change in their communities through radical civic initiatives and movements.



The Spirit of Our Work Black Women Teachers (Re)member
by Cynthia B. Dillard

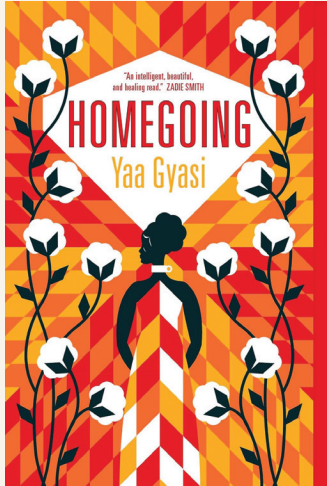
An exploration of how engaging identity and cultural heritage can transform teaching and learning for Black women educators in the name of justice and freedom in the classroom.

In *The Spirit of Our Work*, Dr. Cynthia Dillard centers the spiritual lives of Black women educators and their students, arguing that spirituality has guided Black people throughout the diaspora. She demonstrates how Black women teachers and teacher educators can heal, resist, and (re)member their identities in ways that are empowering for them and their students. Dillard emphasizes that any discussion of Black teachers' lives and work cannot be limited to truncated identities as enslaved persons in the Americas.



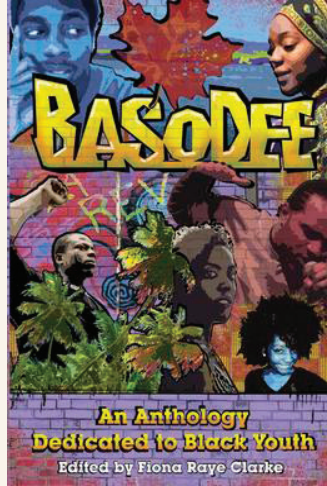
Unearthing Joy
by Gholdy Muhammad

In this follow-up to *Cultivating Genius*, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad adds a fifth pursuit to her groundbreaking instructional model – joy. She defines joy as more than celebration and happiness, but also as wellness, beauty, healing, and justice for oneself and across humanity. She shows how teaching from cultural and historical realities can enhance our efforts to cultivate identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and—indeed—joy for all students, giving them a powerful purpose to learn and contribute to the world.



Homegoing
By Yaa Gyasi

International Bestseller and a winner of several other notable awards and esteem acknowledgement, *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi follows the parallel paths of these sisters and their descendants through eight generations: from the Gold Coast to the plantations of Mississippi, from the American Civil War to Jazz Age Harlem. Yaa Gyasi's extraordinary novel illuminates the troubled legacy of being enslaved both for those who were taken and those who stayed – and shows how the memory of captivity has been inscribed on the soul of our African diaspora.



Basodee: An Anthology Dedicated to Black Youth
Edited by Fiona Raye Clarke

This is a great text to read as it was written for Black youth by Black youth and allies. It contains several genres ranging from essays, to poetry, to photography and more. The authors are diverse, representing continental Africa, Afro Caribbean, African Canadian, as well as different socio-economic backgrounds. This variety works to reflect the nuance that is the Black experience and represent authentically.

Paula Visits Nana

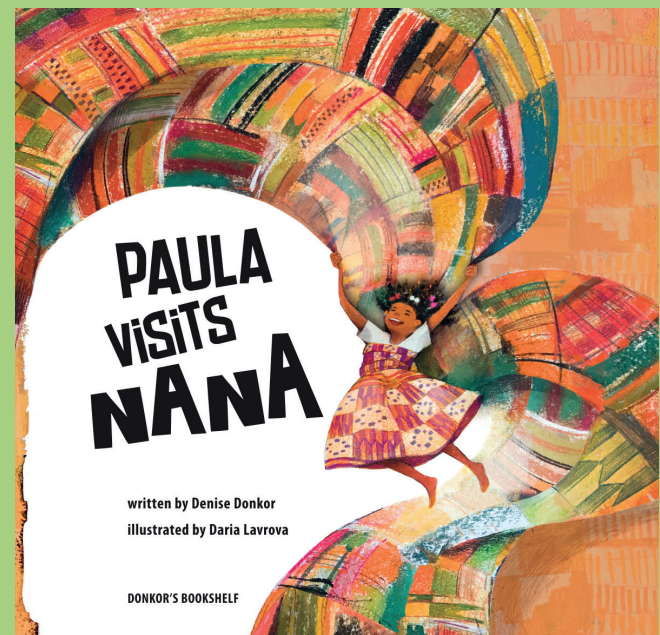
By Denise Donkor

Paula Visits Nana is an engaging and culturally rich children's book that takes readers on a heartwarming journey of love, learning, and cultural exploration. The story beautifully weaves together the vibrant traditions of the Kente cloth, the significance of colors, and the introduction of the Twi language, making it a delightful read for children and young adults. Educators and parents will find *Paula Visits Nana* an excellent resource for introducing children to different cultures, traditions, and languages.

Denise Donkor is co-chair of the Awards and Social Committee and co-chair of the Occasional Teacher Committee at Dufferin-Peel Elementary Unit. *Paula Visits Nana* is her first book. The child of Ghanaian parents, her book draws on her own personal history.

In her own words, Denise describes her book: "This story is deeply personal, inspired by my own relationship with my grandmother – or rather, the relationship I wish we could have had. Though our conversations were often but brief, I wish I had asked more. I see a reflection of this in Paula's bond with her grandmother, mirrored in the connection between my mother and son. She speaks to him only in Twi, and while he doesn't respond in full Twi sentences, he understands every word. It's beautiful to witness how our language and culture are being passed down to future generations. It celebrates the passing of generational knowledge through love and familial bonds and I hope my book finds its way into the homes and classrooms of many, offering children who rarely see themselves in stories a chance to be represented."

A signed copy of Denise's book can be purchased from her website donkorsbookshelf.com, or order online at Indigo.ca or Amazon.ca.





I Am an Abolitionist Teacher

BY ALLISON PARSONS

This poem expresses my commitment to becoming an abolitionist educator, emphasizing the importance of guiding principles rooted in social justice, anti-racism, and liberation. It reflects my dedication to loving and protecting Black children, advocating for their freedom, and addressing the root causes of their suffering. Through the act of self-reflection, my hope is to strive for meaningful change in schools through authentic teaching practices that prioritize substance over superficiality. My poem, titled *I want to be*, envisions creating spaces for students to express joy, heal, and embrace their Black identity while resisting systemic injustices.

I want to be ...

I want to be an Educator rooted in abolitionist teaching.
Finding my North Star to guide the way.
Using its light to love and protect dark children.
A North Star, shining principles rooted in social justice and liberation.

I want to be an Anti-racist Educator rooted in abolitionist teaching.
A self-reflective learner examining my practices and biases.
Striving to reclaim our schools, class by class, student by student,
Parent by parent, and community by community.
One who prioritizes substantive pedagogy over superficial gimmicks.

I want to be a Black Educator rooted in abolitionist teaching.
Keeping my eye on the root causes of dark children's suffering,
Advocating for their freedom and demanding their liberation.
Disrupting injustice, resisting, agitating, and tearing down.

I want to be an Educator who leads through abolitionist teaching.
Creating spaces for freedom dreams.
Embodying joy through artistic expression.
One who protects the humanity of dark children,
Supporting healing through truth-telling and loving Blackness in community.

I want to be an Educator rooted in abolitionist teaching.
I want to be an Anti-racist Educator rooted in abolitionist teaching.
I want to be a Black Educator rooted in abolitionist teaching.
I want to be an Educator who leads through abolitionist teaching.



Letter to my Black students

Dear Black Learner,

Always remember who you are and whose you are.

Remember that you are a child of God, descended from a lineage of strength.
Your ancestors are those who fought for you in so many ways.
Some marched, some shouted, some said no and some said yes, while others
may have sat in silence as an act of resistance.

Always remember, you are joy.

Joy that is laughter.

Joy that is peace.

Joy that is liberation and resistance.

Always remember, you are love.

In the melody of Nina Simone, you are “Young, Gifted, and Black.”

Never be afraid to lift your voice and use your voice.

Let your light shine; let your goals be reached.

You are loved.

Signed,

Ms. P

Allison Parsons is an English and special education teacher at Cardinal Leger Secondary School, and vice-president of equity for the Dufferin-Peel Secondary Unit.

Time and Space

BY TIA DUKE

A few years ago, to grow my confidence as a leader, I decided to embrace a strength of mine by naming it. I will light-heartedly say, "I'm an idea person." Truth be told, I have claimed this strength with an air of levity or sternness depending on the idea I am proposing and the meeting I am in. Overall, I have affirmed myself by noting this strength. I love a good reciprocal conversation; I am a "bounce an idea off you" kind of person. I will give ideas away, and I like to support others' ideas too.

Looking back on my career as a Catholic teacher, I realize being an idea person has come with challenges. People may see me as being a know-it-all, bossy, or not "staying in my lane." Admittedly, it causes complications when my ideas are bigger than my work title, job description, budget allocation, or sphere of influence. Throughout my career journey I have been fortunate to meet mentors, coaches, and caring colleagues who, in their own unique ways, advised me to embrace time and space. I was encouraged to be intentional and strategic about what I wanted the outcome to be, regarding the visions of innovation and creativity that take up space in my brain.

- Brainstorming and connecting with others to share ideas, best practices, and exploring what is working, possible, and what can be improved on is incredibly fulfilling. Connecting with others has been especially rewarding for me. This Black History Month edition of

Catholic Teacher magazine is the result of a wonderfully generous conversation with a national staff colleague from the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), Executive Staff Officer and Anti-Racism and Diversity Education Consultant Gail-Ann Wilson Mitchell. She and I chatted about our similar roles and career trajectory, equity work, and shared Caribbean heritage. Between admiring her fashion sense and cracking a few jokes, Gail-Ann casually mentioned the award-winning Black History Month edition of ATA's publication and its impact on their association. On that crisp day in Ottawa at the Canadian Teacher Federation Women's Symposium, I thought about how great it would be for OECTA to do the same. That was spring 2023.

Late that fall, I pitched the idea to Michelle Despault, Director of Public Affairs – probably later than I should have. She is always very supportive, but time was the logistical challenge for her team. For me, it was time, space, and capacity. In March 2024, the Association welcomed a new Communications Specialist, Eden Debebe. There are so many positive ways Eden has impacted me that she is probably unaware of. Her presence in the OECTA space is a blessing. September 2024 I shared my pitch for a February Catholic Teacher Magazine with her, early enough to implement. This magazine issue is truly her head and heart at work. Gail-Ann's work sparked an idea in me I could not give up on, and Eden's vision of creating

a space for Black Catholic teachers to use our unique voices, experiences, and gifts was the perfect opportunity to bring it to life. Look at God's timing.

By being an "idea person," I have learned it is important to know when to move back, move over, move alongside, or move completely out of the way. I have learned that investing time into meaningful connections can result in beautiful collaborations and creates space for others. In the end, the results are incredible.

Tia Duke is a staff officer in the Professional Development department at OECTA Provincial Office.



BE THE CHANGE

Discover OECTA's transformative new AQ Course, **Addressing Anti-Black Racism to Change Pedagogy and Practice, Part 1**. This course gives teachers the knowledge and tools to actively unpack anti-Black racism in educational settings.

Participants will:

- Explore the historical and contemporary contexts of anti-Black racism.
- Examine the impact of anti-Black racism on students.
- Learn actionable strategies to create inclusive and equitable learning environments for all.

Through engaging modules and practical activities, teachers will develop the skills to critically reflect on their own practices and implement meaningful change in their classrooms. This course not only enhances teaching approaches, but also deepens understanding and commitment to social justice and equity.

**Stay tuned - summer
registration opens May 9.**

Click **HERE** To Learn More

A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND ADVOCACY

My Path as a Black Catholic Teacher

BY DUKE NICHOLSON

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Reflecting on my 23-year journey as a Black Catholic teacher, I am reminded of the many high points and challenges that have shaped my career. My path has been one of faith, resilience, and a steadfast commitment to justice and equality.

My involvement with the union began midway through my teaching career, when my staff representative, who shared my beliefs and values, encouraged me to run for the position as she was retiring. She wanted someone to continue the good work she had started, and for the past five years I have proudly served as my school's union representative.

Most recently, I have been more active in the OECTA space. For the past four years, I have co-chaired the Dufferin-Peel Elementary Unit's first-ever Anti-Black Racism Committee with fellow Catholic teacher Jamie Philip. We started this project from scratch by submitting a proposal to gain official committee status. Our aim is to foster inclusive, respectful classrooms rooted in the Catholic values of dignity and equality. We strive to engage with teachers, providing them with practical tools to ensure every student can thrive – emphasizing unity, fairness, and the moral duty to uphold justice.

Last year, I decided to step out of my comfort zone by sharing my experiences as a Black male Catholic teacher on a broader scale. Conversations with my peers and staff were no longer enough; I wanted to make a bigger impact. I pursued this by applying to write OECTA's first-ever AQ course on anti-Black racism. Not long after, Addressing Anti-Black Racism to Change Pedagogy and Practice Part 1 was born. Alongside three other wonderful writers – Nia James, Doreen Bonsu, and Jessica Campbell – we created something so important. This course is deeply rooted in the everyday classroom experiences

of our Black teachers. Collaborating with many Black teachers across the province, we wanted to tell our own stories, as well as theirs.

The course is comprised of five modules:

- 1/ **The Elephant in the Room**
- 2/ **Looking Inward, Outward, and Backward**
- 3/ **Anti-Black Racism in Ontario Schools**
- 4/ **Governance and Policy**
- 5/ **Reimagining Strategies for Amplifying Black Voices**

Our journey is rooted in Christ, and each module title has a distinct connection to scripture.

As the year came to an end, we wanted to share our journey in more detail with other Black teachers, providing them with a course preview and affinity space for those who sometimes felt unheard. In early January, we were able to do just that. OECTA's Professional Development department hosted a virtual session with about 40 Black teachers to preview the course. The course writers, Staff Officer Tia Duke and I, all participated. Members' questions surrounding identity, language, accessibility, and discussions on our favourite parts of the course led to many great conversations. The most prevalent feedback was that having an affinity space for Black educators was invaluable.

The course officially began on February 3, the start of Black History Month.



Pictured L-R (top) Doreen Bonsu, Tia Duke, Duke Nicholson, (Bottom), Nia James, Jessica Campbell

What's next?

As I continue my journey as a Black male Catholic educator, I am filled with hope and determination. The work we have started is just the beginning. As we move through Black History Month and beyond, let us carry the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and unwavering commitment to excellence in education. Together, we can create a future where every student feels valued, heard, and empowered.

Let us remember that our journey is not just about addressing the challenges of today but also about paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive

tomorrow. By embracing our shared values of dignity, equality, and justice, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of our students and the broader community.

I encourage all teachers, administrators, and community members to join us in this mission. Reflect on your own practices, engage in meaningful conversations, and take actionable steps to foster inclusivity and equity in your classrooms and schools. Together, we can build a more just and compassionate educational environment for all.

Duke Nicholson is a member of the Dufferin-Peel Elementary Unit (DPEU), co-chair of the DPEU Anti-Black Racism Committee, and is currently serving as a staff officer in the Professional Development department at OECTA Provincial Office.

”

**Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail. They are new
every morning; great is your faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:21-23**

You Are Not Alone: Dealing with the Impact of Anti-Black Racism in the Workplace

BY NIA JAMES

Happy Black history month! We have again reached this fleeting time of year where we, as Black teachers, get to share the sheer awesomeness of Blackness with friends, co-workers, students, and countless others across Turtle Island. While we know the importance of this month in colonized spaces, the reality remains that for Black educators in the Catholic school system, February can be straight up exhausting.

We are often the “only” in our school, and this month we will inevitably take on more tasks, including, but definitely not limited to; organizing presentations and performances, showcasing Black excellence, discussing the African diaspora, spearheading assemblies and celebrations, promoting Blackness in the arts, facilitating discussions, highlighting intersectionality, supporting Black students, encouraging student-led initiatives, mentoring and being a role model – with a deep understanding of the importance of representation for our students – and of course, trying to be present and truly enjoy the fruits of our labour!

Let's be real, this experience is not unique to Black History Month – it is the reality for Black educators in Ontario every month of the school year. We exhaust ourselves because we hope that we are saving the Black students we teach from having the same negative experiences those of us who were raised in this system had not too long ago. Our students are always our top priority, but who is taking care of us?

Being a Black teacher in Ontario can be traumatic. The isolation, the triggers, the pressures, the covert and overt racism, the pushback (oh, the mind-boggling pushback!), and the loneliness. It literally brings us to our knees, and yet we keep getting back up. But what do we do when we reach the point where we *can not* get back up?

Though it took me time to realize it, for almost two years I had been traumatized by the anti-Black racism I was facing at my school. Getting in my car to go to work was a daily struggle. I would do deep breathing exercises for my entire 40-minute drive to try to relieve the tension built up in my body. My stomach

was constantly twisting in tight knots. Every day during announcements, or during my planning time, I would cry - the tears would not stop. I would cry at school. I would cry at home. I would cry at my sister's house. I would cry on the phone with friends. This became my normal.

My family life was heavily impacted. I am an amazing mom, but during that period of my life I could not be. My husband later told me that as he watched me be brought to my knees again and again, he was "terrified."

In May of 2022, I could not get back up. I could not get in my car to go to work. I could not stop crying. I reached out to a doctor who had knowledge of anti-Black racism (thank Black Jesus, because we also know the health care system often fails to properly treat Black women and girls), and she diagnosed me with anxiety resulting from psychological trauma due to racism suffered in the workplace. She prescribed medication, recommended therapy, and wrote a note for a two week leave. I have not returned to work since, as I was subsequently approved for a medical leave through the Workers Safety Insurance Board (WSIB).

This is an extremely simplified version of my story. As a Black teacher, this journey has been long, riddled with setbacks, systemic barriers, re-traumatization, paperwork, emails, and endless amounts of self-advocacy. I share my story here because I want Black teachers to know you do not have to go through this alone.

We have options beyond continuing to suffer within the system.

It is imperative that as Catholic teachers, we know how OECTA can help. We need to know what the Association has in place for Black members at all stages: before we are brought to the breaking point, when we break, and when we are healing.

The Association offers the following guidance to help you navigate anti-Black racism in the workplace.

- » Contact the Association: If you believe you have been mistreated in the workplace by an administrator, colleague, student, parent, or third party, do not hesitate to reach out to your local unit office for guidance and support. Even if your concern does not fall under a human rights violation, you are entitled to a safe and respectful workplace free from discrimination or harassment.
- » Understand grievances and school board complaints: If you believe that your rights have been violated, it is important for you to speak to your local unit office. The Association will review your concerns with you and determine whether a grievance should be filed. Similarly, the Association is here to provide support and assistance for those filing a complaint under their school board's harassment policy. You are not alone in this process; your Association stands with you every step of the way.

- » Seek confidential counselling: The mental toll anti-Black racism causes can not be overstated. Members have access to confidential counselling through the Counselling and Member Services department at OECTA Provincial Office, offering a compassionate ear and professional guidance during difficult times. Additional digital resources are also available in the Member Mental Health and Wellness section of the Members' Area at catholicteachers.ca.

Click **HERE** To Access
Mental Health Resources

- » Contact your local Vice-President of Equity: Finding someone who truly understands what you are going through can be hard. Consider reaching out to your local unit's Vice-President (VP) of Equity for support. As of October 2024, 34 units have added this position onto their local unit's executive. Their duties include leading efforts to foster human rights, accessibility, inclusion, and justice.
- » Explore Workplace Human Rights Resources: For comprehensive information about addressing workplace human rights concerns and complaints, see the *Members' Guide to Workplace Human Rights Concerns*, available in the For Your Benefit section at catholicteachers.ca. These resources are designed to help you navigate challenging situations with confidence.

Click **HERE** To Access
the *Member's Guide to Workplace
Human Rights Concerns*

- » Use the OECTA Human Rights Intake Form: The Human Rights Intake Process is designed to provide members with an opportunity to identify an instance (or instances) where they believe that their human rights, as recognized in the Ontario Human Rights Code, have been violated. Easily access the Human Rights Complaint Intake Form online, available in the Members' Area at catholicteachers.ca.

Click **HERE** To Access
the Human Rights Complaint Intake Form

While we can not take a break from the weight that our Blackness is forced to carry in colonial institutions, remember that it is okay – and necessary – to take a step back when the weight becomes too much. We do not have to carry it alone. OECTA is moving toward a future where the safety and well-being of Black members are prioritized, and supports are always available for those who need them. Remember that help is here. You are not alone.

Nia James is an elementary teacher with the Halton Elementary Unit, the executive officer of equity on the Halton Elementary unit executive, and a former member of the Diversity Advisory Board representing Black and racialized members.

Addressing Anti-Black Racism and Misogynoir in Schools:

A Call to Action

BY JOLLY-BÉATRICE TOUSSAINT

"I'm invisible. They don't see me; it's like I don't exist...except when something wrong happens."

That was shared with me by a Black student in one of my elementary school sessions. On another occasion, a high school student shared being repeatedly mistaken for someone else by their teacher. "The teacher keeps confusing us in the class: there are only two of us [Black students] in their class." These reflections highlight a common experience for many Black children and educators in our schools; a reality of being both overlooked in moments that call for recognition, validation, and opportunity while also being hyper-visible or singled out for perceived wrongdoing. It also highlights the systemic biases operating in our schools.

As Catholic teachers, we are called to reflect on the way anti-Black racism and misogynoir manifest in our schools, and what we can do to create spaces of belonging, joy, and healing – where Black children, educators, and families can feel safe, valued, and dignified. We should see statements like these as a call to action to address these systemic issues. It is not optional; it is our moral, professional, and legal obligation. As Karen Murray, Toronto District School Board system superintendent of equity, says, "These issues persist not because we don't know better, but because we choose not to act."

As a Black cisgender woman working as an equity consultant at a Catholic school board, I usually introduce myself with an emphasis on shared interests or languages spoken rather than my racial identity, because I have never liked labels. Yet, I find that the way people see me, their perception of my Blackness, gender, and even professional role, often overshadow my individuality, in both subtle and overt ways. These perceptions tend to influence my interactions with others. I have witnessed how this reality has impacted Black children, families, and colleagues in various and often harmful ways. Fortunately, in my role, I have also had the privilege to help students and educators better understand the impact of anti-Black racism and misogynoir – beyond retiring the use of the N-word or racial slurs.

Systemic challenges in education

Anti-Black racism is not limited to an individual act of prejudice; it is deeply embedded in policies, practices and attitudes that perpetuate inequities. Dr. Carl James reminds us that, "anti-Black racism is systemic, not individual." In schools, anti-Black racism can manifest itself overtly in acts such as racial slurs, or in more insidious ways, such as microaggressions that marginalize Black voices and trivialize Black experiences.

The term "anti-Black racism" was first expressed in 1992 by Dr. Akua Benjamin, a Ryerson University social work professor. Benjamin sought to highlight the unique nature of systemic racism on Black-Canadians and the history of slavery and colonization of people of Black and African descent in Canada. (Black Health Alliance)

Other examples of anti-Black racism in the classroom include the over-policing of Black students, a lack of (positive, affirming) representation in curricula and teaching materials, the mispronunciation of Black students' names, stereotypical assumptions about academic capability, and resistance to programs designed for Black students (often perceived as "reverse racism" or segregation).

Misogynoir is a specific form of bias at the intersection of racism and sexism that amplifies the challenges faced by Black women and girls. Its beginnings can be traced back to the time of chattel slavery, during which harmful stereotypes of Black femininity originated. In addition to perpetuating these damaging stereotypes, this bias tends to devalue Black women's contributions, frequently placing them in nurturing or subordinate roles while denying them academic and leadership opportunities, or weaponizing their assertiveness and advocacy as aggression.



In my conversations with numerous Black women in leadership roles across school boards and the education system, many share experiences of invalidation, tone, and language policing, stereotyping, idea theft, dismissal of lived experiences, undermining of efforts and initiatives, micromanagement, harsher discipline, unrealistic expectations, limited advancement opportunities, lack of mentorship or support, and exclusion. Many also share the impact of colourism (sometimes referred to as shadeism), usually at the hands of non-Black colleagues or supervisors, and occasionally, by fellow Black individuals.

The term “misogynoir” was coined by Dr. Moya Bailey, a NorthWestern University communication studies associate professor in 2008. (Mashable)

Adultification bias: Consider this scenario: an educator labeling a seven-year-old Black girl, who happens to be taller and bigger than her non-Black peers, as “aggressive” and “threatening.” “She is so big compared to the other kids that even I feel threatened when she stands in my way,” says the teacher. This sheds light on yet another form of bias, where Black children are viewed as older and less innocent than their peers. Adultification bias was studied by Canadian researchers Stella Igweamaka and Nana Appah, who found that Black girls as young as five are often seen as needing less protection, leading to harsher disciplinary measures compared to their non-Black peers, thus robbing them of their childhood. Black boys are also victims of this bias. They are often expected to display levels of maturity and resilience beyond their years, eroding their sense of safety and belonging in school environments.

Legal and ethical obligations: In Ontario, the Ontario Human Rights Code and *Education Act*, clearly outline a school’s mandate to foster environments free from discrimination and harassment. The Criminal Code also holds educators legally responsible for preventing harm to students under their care, which includes addressing acts of racism, microaggressions, and other forms of discrimination. Catholic social teachings call us to uphold the dignity of every person and prioritize the needs of the marginalized. Thus, it is our duty as Catholic teachers to intentionally and actively address anti-Black racism, misogynoir, and the adultification bias impacting Black children. Silence is complicity – it harms our students. Let us also remember that addressing the needs of Black students, families, and staff does not negate the needs of other equity-deserving groups, nor take anything away from them. As Catholic teachers, we must avoid perpetuating lateral (horizontal) violence. Equity is not a competition between Indigenous and equity-deserving groups, it is about giving everyone what they need to succeed.

Paulo Freire popularized the term “horizontal violence,” which can occur between oppressed peoples because of their oppression in the class hierarchy. Horizontal violence may be considered an effect of adversity or personal and/or group historical trauma.

Call to action for educators – actionable steps

Ask yourself: Are you maintaining the status quo or challenging it? Are you erecting new barriers or removing existing ones?

Self-reflection: Take the time to reflect on your own biases, privileges, and power, with considerations of how they may influence your interactions with students and colleagues. Participate in professional development and ongoing anti-racism training to recognize, address, and dismantle biases, anti-Black racism, and other forms of oppression. Learn how they impact Black individuals and those who appear Black. Learn how to use restorative justice approaches to navigate disciplinary issues involving Black students to prioritize understanding, accountability, and healing.

Recognizing bias is not a one-time act. It is a daily commitment to unlearning.

Community agreements: In my practice and experience, I have found co-created community agreements – shared norms that prioritize respect, accountability, and belonging – to be a powerful tool to combat biases, address inequities, and hold space for conversations on sensitive topics, such as race and racism. In the classrooms where educators and administrators work with students to craft community agreements, the shift in school culture is evident. The process allows all students to identify their needs and work collaboratively to draft a plan to meet them. “...While reading each other’s needs as learners, the students realized that our class was neither safe nor inclusive,” an elementary teacher shared, “...they took the activity seriously and really worked together in making those statements.”

These agreements are not just about rules, they are about fostering meaningful relationships. As Marcia Lynch, a retired teacher with the Ottawa Catholic School Board, emphasizes, “It’s about listening to others’ stories and understanding the impact of the language and actions we use every day.” Her reflections are a great reminder that inclusive practices begin with empathy and accountability. Through these co-created community agreements, educators and students can work together in creating environments where all students, including Black students, feel seen, valued, acknowledged, and safe.

Centering joy: Dr. Andrew B. Campbell, social justice teacher and assistant professor at the University of Toronto, reminds us, “The education of Black children is not just about correcting inequities, but amplifying their joy, brilliance, and potential.” Fostering identity-affirming environments where Black students can see themselves represented positively and be unapologetically themselves is a proven way to actively celebrate Black identities, and allows Black students to thrive.





Explore and apply teaching frameworks like Dr. Gholdy Muhammad's *Unearthing Joy*, and adopt Afrocentric pedagogies to counter the erasure of Black contributions in the curricula. Centering joy is a form of resistance and healing.

Affirm, amplify, and listen to Black voices: Representation does matter, but it is more powerful when it is authentic and affirming. Integrate Black voices, histories, achievements in every aspect of education. Center Black voices in decision-making processes and actively invite Black educators, families, and students to lead discussions that impact them. Listen to Black voices by providing opportunities for Black individuals (students, families, staff) to share their experiences, support Black student affinity groups, associations, forums, and encourage student-led initiatives.

Support Black leadership by providing mentorship, resources, and equitable, inclusive opportunities for Black staff to thrive with dignity and joy. Remember that children are always watching. They see how you treat Black individuals (their parents, your colleagues, the school's guests and staff) in your community. Model inclusive behaviours and language.

BE THE CHANGE

The Haitian motto *l'union fait la force* (unity is strength), serves as a powerful reminder that change cannot happen alone. Black children, families, colleagues, and communities need you and I to work with them. Let us team up to honour the dignity of every individual, now. Be part of the solution, not the problem. Together, united, we are stronger.

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