

BRG – TERC – STEM Roundtable Discussion Part 1 – Transcript

Narrator:

Welcome to *Advancing Racial Equity in the Deaf STEM Community, Part 1: Introductions & Aspirations*. Bridge Multimedia and TERC are proud to present this accessible video podcast series, funded by the National Science Foundation. Our moderator, and the speaker for this series is Djenne-amal Morris. She'll be talking with our special guests: Dominic Harrison, K. Renee Horton, Charity Jackson, Adebowale Ogunjirin, Kristie Medeiros, and Jeanine Pollard. So, let's begin *Introductions & Aspirations* with Djenne-amal Morris...

Djenne-amal Morris:

Well, hello everyone. And welcome to our virtual round table discussion about advancing racial equity in STEM education. I'm so happy to welcome all of our participants here, and we really hope that this is going to be an educational opportunity. The objective today is to facilitate a discussion centered around racial and disability equity and inclusion among people who are Deaf, deafblind, who are of color, Black, Hispanic, or the term we use these days is BIPOC, individuals with a K-12 STEM education and within the workforce. Today we want to inspire advocacy and policy

changes from people, as you see on this video, who can influence legislation, influence policymaking as well as infrastructural change. Participants of this conversation have ranging levels of communication, such as SimCom, ASL, verbal. And so I'm very glad that we have this opportunity to hear from people that are serving in the STEM education world from different perspectives.

Allow me to introduce myself and then I will introduce my distinguished guests. My name is Djenne-amal Morris. I grew up in New York City and have been a part of the Deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind world for the last, probably about 35 years. I worked in college with Deaf adults and as well as in high school, and then about 10 years later, I was given or gifted a son, Malik Asante Lamar Morris, who is deafblind. He has CHARGE syndrome. And so he is deafblind with other co-occurring challenges, but he is the heart of our family. And that just helped me and my family to continue the work serving families of children who are Deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind. Also with co-occurring conditions. Sometimes we call that deafplus.

I have served in many capacities as a deafblind family specialist for both the Boston, New England, as well as North Carolina DeafBlind Projects. I am currently the statewide outreach coordinator for the Texas School for the Deaf and I am the president of Hands and Voices International. And so I am a Black woman. I am wearing a black shirt, glasses, and a pink sweater. The role that I have in today is being the facilitator, but I am also a professional as well as a parent who has raised a young man successfully with many challenges to live his best life, as well as two other children and my husband. And so I really, as professionally and personally believe that education is very, very important. However, within the STEM world, there is an under-representation and some inequality for people of color.

And so that's what we're gonna do today is open up and talk about what are some of the challenges, what are the experiences of the people that are here and what can we do as a community to help give access to our young people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, as well as how can we also be the change? Thank you so much, and I'm going to start with Kristie. If you can introduce yourself and describe yourself visually, and just tell us about your background and your role in STEM and what led you to the career in this field. Thank you.

Kristie Medeiros:

So to describe myself, I am wearing locks. I have a sweater on, I have hoop earrings. I am a Black woman, I am Deaf, I'm straight, and... my name is Kristie Medeiros. And I'm showing my sign name right now. I'm from Massachusetts, where I currently am and where I work, is in Framingham. I have two offices, I have one here in Framingham, and then I work out of another office in Springfield, Massachusetts. And I work at the Warden School which is under the Learning Center for the Deaf, Framing him, that's the Deaf school. And I work as a therapeutic mentor, which is kind of like a big brother, big sister. And then I also wear another hat, which is called TSS, a training support specialist.

And in that capacity, I work with youth and with parents. And my other capacity is focused on youth only. And I have worked here for six years and in the youth focused work that I do, I kind of have the background of that work is in mental health, but kind of focusing on helping them achieve their goals, working on communication skills, empowerment, identity development, and I do home visits every week. And then with the other hat that I wear, working between youth and with families, I kind serve a similar capacity, but different duties. And I have a bachelor's degree and also a

master's degree, in moderate disability education. That's the field that I'm in. And that applies to both of the kind of duties that I have both are related to education and also to working with youth. And I work with Deaf, hard of hearing, and also children of Deaf adults. That's the kind of student population that I work with, many of whom are BIPOC students. I have three children, myself. Two of them are step children. and one of them is my own. And the biological child that I have is special needs and is a teen as well. All of them are CODAs. So I think that more or less does it. So, I'm really grateful to be here, and thanks for inviting me. I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Djenne-amal Morris:

Thank you, Kristie. That's beautiful. Dominic, can we hear from you, please? Introduce yourself.

Dominic Harrison:

Certainly good morning, everyone. My name is Dominic Harrison, and I'm showing my sign name. I was born and raised in New Jersey and Texas, and now I live in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I have been a teacher for eight years and counting now. I also, I have a graduate degree in secondary education with a specialization in teaching social studies. I'm also currently doing my PhD studies in language literacy and cultural studies with a focus

on educational and cultural studies. My goal is to really support all Deaf students of color, pursue their passions, their identities, and really participate in the world. And at the same time, empower them in their participation and their place in the community. I do a lot of social justice work in the classroom. And what that looks like is really incorporating all experiences and perspectives of different racial groups within the social studies context. So I do that in the classroom and then also outside the classroom whether it be in English or science or any other field. I have traveled the world a lot. I like to see different cultures and different languages, and learn information that I can come back and share with my students here in America. So thank you for inviting me, and I'm looking forward to this conversation about STEM and how we can include our people in this field.

Djenne-amal Morris:

Thank you so much. Debo? Would you like to introduce yourself?

Adebowale Ogunjirin:

Good morning, everyone. It is almost noon. So good morning/good afternoon. My name is Debo. I have a black skin tone. My background is a solid blue. I'm wearing a long sleeve sweater that is purple. I also have a white shirt underneath. And part of the collar is showing. My full name is

Adebowale Ogunjirin. I was born in the Northwestern region of Africa, in a country called Nigeria. I was born hearing and then later became deaf. I then attended a Deaf school for my primary learning, and elementary school is where I learned ASL. And then high school, I was in a predominantly hearing environment or a mainstream environment. There was no interpreter available at that time in that school, I then attended college and studied pharmaceuticals. And that was the first time that I was really recognized and I identified as a Deaf person and the only Deaf person at that time in the pharmaceutical industry.

And so I recognized that there was more support needed for the Deaf community to be successful in this field. In Nigeria, I had various roles. I was a researcher and a tester for different pharmaceuticals. I also worked to create syrups. And then I transitioned into the governmental field and, my job there in the government was to research various pharmaceutical companies. I then decided to pursue a PhD in developing different medicines because Nigeria does not have various equipment and the tools and the resources to do so. So I began to do so in 2005. And, then I was in the US in 2005 because Nigeria did not have those resources. So I could start to develop medicines. Then I became a professor. And more in the

research development side of the medical field. And developing medicines, researching them, biology and chemistry side of medicines. I'm still learning about the culture and the environment for the Deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing and their needs and what supports are needed for them to thrive in the field. And so I'm still learning about that. I'm sure if there are any additional questions you wanted to pose, Djenne?

Djenne-amal Morris:

No. Dominic, you had your hand raised. Thank you, Debo. Dominic, go ahead?

Dominic Harrison:

It's really nice to meet you, Debo. I look forward to speaking with you. I don't have a question, but one other important piece of information I wanted to include in this conversation, just as my background, which is that I'm sitting against a beige background. I am a Deaf, black or brown skinned, and I'm kind of wearing a purple-ish whitish mixed long sleeve shirt. And also I should mention that I was born and raised Deaf. I used American Sign Language the whole way, and I picked up English along the way at the same time.

Djenne-amal Morris:

Thank you, Dominic. Alright, Charity. I'm gonna let Charity go. And then Kristie, I'll come back to you.

Charity Jackson:

Hello everyone. My name is Charity Jackson. This is how you sign my name, CJ, I'm a Black Deaf woman. I'm using American Sign Language. I was born in Texas and as a military child, I moved around quite a bit with my family. I did live in Germany for awhile, particularly in the city of Frankfurt. which is where my parents realized I was Deaf and decided to make an investment in my education by putting me in a Deaf school. And I was then in a mainstream school. I was the only Deaf person. I went to college and I got a Bachelor's degree. And then I pursued my master's, and I got a Master's degree in public administration. And I worked at a Deaf school. I currently, I'm in Maryland at the Maryland School for the Deaf. and I am the Chief Diversity Officer for the Maryland School for the Deaf. An there are in fact two campuses for the School for the Deaf, one is in Frederick, and the other is in Columbia. So I oversee the K through 12 in both of those campuses. And I'm thrilled to share my experiences. This is really my passion. And my passion is particularly investing in the BIPOC community and ensuring that Deaf education can grow and thrive. And I'm

looking forward to the day when that can happen, and we can continue to grow in this field.

Djenne-amal Morris:

Thank you, Charity. Jeanine?

Jeanine Pollard:

Hi, my name's Jeanine, and this is my sign name. I'm here, you can see behind me my room at home. And you might notice behind me, there's a TV and a plant. I'm a Black woman with natural hair that I wear in a short fro. I'm wearing pink glasses, a pink and purple shirt. And I have on gold hoop earrings with black beads. I'm really excited to be here and to be a part of this conversation focused on STEM. I wanna share my experience, both as a STEM teacher, and also a student of STEM myself.

Dr. K. Renee Horton:

Hi, I am Dr. K. Renee Horton and I am hard of hearing. Late-stage, hard of hearing diagnosed at 17. My description. I am a bald Black woman and I stand 5'2". I've got on gold hoop earrings and I'm sitting in my kitchen, with my kitchen cabinets and my stove behind me and my bay window to my right. So my first major experience was that at 17 or 18, I had gone in to do the Air Force ROTC exam. And I found out then that I had a significant hearing loss and it was enough to disqualify me for the military at that time,

and I had had this dream. I wanted to become a pilot and then go work for NASA as an astronaut. And right then everything was over and I didn't really know how to regroup from that.

I had been high functioning all my life. I graduated at 16, graduated high school at 16 and had started college. And so when that happened, I didn't really understand how to deal with that type of rejection because I watch the X being marked on my paper for reject. And it was very profound to be rejected knowing that you are intellectually capable of achieving. And so I ended up getting pregnant and dropping out of college and traveling with my husband, who was military at the time and ignoring the fact that I had a hearing loss and that I should have been doing something to be able to be functional and just chose not to. I worked at a, like a reduced limit for a very long time and was OK with that.

And then ten years later, I went back to college and decided I wanted to be a functioning adult in society, one. Two, I wanted to live up to what my purpose was like being in situations I knew I was so much more than people around me sometimes and I had more to give and I wasn't doing that. So I went back to college, and when I went back to college, I went

back with the attitude I was going to own my disability this time around and be bigger than it. And I had an amazing center. I had gone through the speech and hearing foundation at LSU at the time, and they were the ones who really taught me what type of hearing loss I had, what were the best situations to be in, which weren't the best situations to be in, how to overcome some of the obstacles I was being faced.

And after graduating undergrad... For graduate school, I had decided to start and I could not understand anything the professor was telling me, even with hearing aids. It always sounded like wawk, wawk, wawk like the Peanuts guy teacher, but nothing ever came in clear and I was totally confused and didn't understand. And so those who don't speak English as a first language present a lot more difficulty for me. And I wasn't understanding, and my hearing at the time was progressively getting worse. And so I was losing more than I was able to get in front of to be able to understand. And even though I could read lips, foreigners, I could not.

And so the professor told me I was one of the dumbest students he had ever taught, and it was a very disheartening situation at the time because my best friend was also going through all of these courses with me. We

were taking the same exact schedule so that he could be my note taker. And we were recording and doing all of that, and I just could not understand. Fast forward, ended up switching my major to physics, and even though not everyone spoke English as a first language, they adopted more of the, You kind of do it on your own. And so with anything that's kind of a do it on your own, I tend to be able to grasp that, enable to learn that, and I can kind of excel at it a lot better.

Narrator:

Thanks for joining us for *Introductions & Aspirations*, the first part of our *Advancing Racial Equity in the Deaf STEM Community* podcast series.

We've got more interesting podcasts to come, including: Part 2:

Challenges: Personal & Professional; Part 3: *The Power of Mentorship*;

Part 4: *BIPOC Representation in the STEM Landscape: Where are We?*;

and Part 5: *Creating a Positive Cycle of Representation* See you next time.

Credits:

Participants: Djene-amal Morris, Moderator and Speaker.

Guest Speakers: Dominic Harrison; K. Renee Horton; Charity Jackson;

Adebowale Ogunjirin; Kristie Medeiros; and Jeanine Pollard.

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