

## **Letter from AI**

### **Ashleigh A. Allen**

My name is Ashleigh (she/her), and I am cis-gender and white. I have lived for most of my life as an uninvited guest on traditional, ancestral, unceded land of the Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe and Mississaugas of the Credit River peoples in the Dish With One Spoon territory called Toronto/Tkaranto. I trace the maternal side of my family to Belgium, Italy, and Romania, and I am a first generation settler on this land. My more distant paternal side was recently part of British colonization of Massachusett peoples and their land in what is called Boston, Massachusetts and French colonization of Haudenosaunee and Mohawk territory in what is called Montréal, Québec. I continue to learn about myself as a white settler on stolen land and acknowledge and take ownership of my family's settler colonial story. Beyond Toronto/Tkaranto, I have lived in France and Italy and spent nearly a decade living on the unceded land of the Munsee Lenape and Canarsie people in what is called New York City. The politics, art, and chosen family in these various places have shaped my evolution and inner revolution.

I am a poet, educator, and researcher. I have been a classroom teacher for more than a decade, first in New York City and more recently in Toronto, and I have been involved in community writing workshops for even longer. I continue to learn from those I share space with in classrooms and beyond, and I remain especially close to the people and places who taught me early on that education must centre the lives of the those present while being anti-homophobic, anti-racist, and trauma-informed. Since my return to Toronto/Tkaranto a few years ago, I have been cultivating classrooms spaces and curricula with students and educators that are also deliberately anti-colonial. Because of these priorities, classrooms and non-traditional learning spaces alike increasingly demand that our relationships to time and space evolve to be more adaptable to allow us to foster deep care and love.

In recent years, I have found myself creating spaces and communities that I desire, which is often what those around me also desire. I frequently work with friends, old and new, to rethink ways to be together. I have been running a monthly writing workshop with Ben Gallagher through the Toronto Writing Project for three years. There we work with educators in cultivating a writing practice while in community. We recently started a workshop series for teenagers, which has allowed them to connect to others and their own lives in rich, unexpected ways. I also recently dreamed up a project with Doug Friesen called Remix Camp, which will take place summer 2021. I am in community with people and land in intentional and fortuitous ways daily. I am presently thinking through logics and ethics of care in and out of academia and where I may be welcome and also where and how I may be welcoming in my own pedagogy and praxis. I am grateful to the communities that have welcomed and continue to inspire me as I learn about land, the water, and us.

### **Doug Friesen**

My name is Doug. I go by he/him and am a white settler. My mennonite grandparents fled religious persecution in the former U.S.S.R. and finally ended up settling in Manitoba on Treaty 1 territory: the land of Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dene, and Métis Nations. I grew up helping on farm land that was stolen and I have many privileges because of this.

I have taught in the public education system since 2002 and been a professional musician for equally as long. I am committed to staying connected to practice and have become a part of a community of educators who are interested in looking at music education that is anti-colonial and does not define what music is *for* students. We have started a group of Ontario music educators from various public boards and universities that are involved or interested in promoting and facilitating Music In Education that is not traditional Western Art Music ensemble/performance classes. This group runs a non-competitive annual festival for guitar ensembles, DJ clubs, rock bands, bucket drumming groups, and many other amazing school programs. These and other teachers have also more recently begun meeting to discuss, reflect on, and attempt anti-racism work in music classrooms. This group meets monthly to share resources, stories, tensions, and to work together to speak out against systemic racism of institutional music education.

I acknowledge that THE major developments of music in North America have come from, often appropriated, racialized communities and that institutional music education is complicit in systemic racism by still continuing to hold white Western European Music at the centre and above all other practices. I hope we can push back on/disrupt this together.

I recently began reading this statement at the beginning of classes I teach or workshops I facilitate. I hope that my work as an educator and musician is constantly searching for this push back and disruption. I also strive to expose, discuss and push back on colonial defaults and exclusions in my daily life as a partner, parent, and friend.

### **Lindsay Cavanaugh**

My name is Lindsay, I go by she/her, and am a fourth generation white settler on Turtle Island, meaning I have been socialized to uphold whiteness and coloniality. On my Dad's side, I have Irish and French ancestors who lived primarily on the East coast (Mi'kmaq territory). On my Mom's side, I have British ancestors who settled in what is now called southwestern Ontario. I grew up in so-called London Ontario on the traditional territories of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee-Delaware Nation. Growing up as a fourth generation white settler in smaller Canadian cities in a conservative-leaning family meant that I was not exposed to anti-racist and anti-colonial ideas until I entered university. I was raised to be 'colour-blind' and 'accept people of all backgrounds' without the context that Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities have and continue to be systematically oppressed. I continue to unlearn that socialization and explain to my family of origin why those beliefs are problematic. I now live in Tkaranoto, where I moved to start my PhD. Before coming here, I worked as a teacher in so-called-Victoria BC (on Lekwungen & WSÁNEĆ territories) and northern

Ontario in an Oji-Cree First Nations community called North Spirit Lake. I am a cisgender queer femme woman in my late twenties, living with an invisible chronic illness. Being femme is an important part of my identity; I claimed it as way to resist my experiences of homophobia and patriarchy as a feminized queer person. Over time, I have come to realize that my experiences of queerphobia, femmephobia and patriarchy are mediated through my whiteness, settler-status, thinness, and class.

I find myself in different communities, but often try to surround myself with people who are 2SLGBTQIA+ or queer-adjacent because I find it nourishing to be in an environment where my queerness does not feel like a confrontation or discussion topic. I also believe it is essential to work in solidarity with other communities, which, for me, means developing deep and sustaining relationships with Indigenous, Black, people of colour, especially those who are queer, trans and/or disabled. I don't think any solidarity work is possible without authentic relationships where I am listening, learning and remembering to step back when it is not my time to be taking up space. I feel it is my responsibility as a white settler to continuously unlearn and divest myself of whiteness, modelling an ethic of care (what I consider a femme tenderness) and spirit of disruption (anti-normativity) in my work and everyday life.

I try to enact tenderness and disruption in my friendships, family, research and teaching practice. I am currently trying to start a caring collective for PhD students which is all about us supporting each other with the understanding that people experience different barriers accessing education. I try to disrupt the deep-seeded norms within my family by having ongoing discussions and challenging their ways of knowing. In my research, I focus on 2SLGBTQIA+ futurities and in my teaching, I am passionate about disrupting white settler cis-heteropatriarchy in the time/space of schools (physical/psychological organization, curricula, pedagogy, and assessment practices). Having conversations is an important strategy for me. Also combining a tenderness approach while doing this work can help support some of the embodied and affective responses I've seen coming up in people. It is definitely a privilege to be able to hold some tenderness for people (dominant groups) as they are learning. I find this easier for witnessing people learn about issues that are not related to my own identities, which is why I think solidarity work is so important. We can support each other by taking on some of the emotional labour of helping people who share some of our identities move through the discomfort that accompanies anti-oppressive education. For example, I can take on the labour of talking with a white student who is feeling guilt after learning about the genocide against Indigenous people, which might save an Indigenous educator from feeling burn-out doing that work alone.

## **Ty Walkland**

My name is Ty (he/him)—short for Tyler, although really only my mother calls me that. She and my grandparents emigrated to Toronto/Tkaranto from England in the 1960s. My father, also of British descent, was born in Montreal. I am both a first and second-generation white settler on this land, having spent my entire life living and working in the Greater Toronto Area. My family is something of a hybrid, too: we are gifted artists and musicians and thinkers, but generational poverty has kept many of us tied up in jobs

that break our bodies and barely pay the bills. I am the first person in my immediate family to attend university, let alone pursue a doctorate. I continue to grapple with how that lineage—my family's and the colonial legacy in which it's entangled—ought to pave the road ahead.

I have spent the last decade teaching and doing research in Ontario schools. My experiences growing up as a queer, working class kid have shaped my work as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, and budding scholar. I became an advocate for LGBTQ+ youth especially in my early days of teaching in secondary schools. By my second year in the classroom, I was developing and facilitating workshops about gender and sexual identity, homophobia, and transphobia for youth, teachers, and senior-level administrators in my school board. I would go on to do similar work to address poverty and class bias in schools.

This same spirit animated my master's research, which explored the ways precarious teacher labour impacts the professional lives of occasional teachers in Ontario. That project brought practicing teachers together to collaboratively inquire into their lived experiences of precarity and consider its ripple effects. Our inquiry surfaced many of the challenges occasional teachers face in and through their work, while also directing us to productive points of intervention to support ourselves and others facing long-term career uncertainties. Together we have participated in various career panels and classroom talks, produced professional development workshops for teachers and educational leaders, and co-authored conference papers and academic journal articles that give voice to a rarely-heard population of education workers.

Supporting practitioners like myself to address the systemic injustices that rob so many of our students and colleagues of their full rights to live and learn is my most important mission as a teacher educator and researcher. As I've learned from my Addressing Injustices family, this work must be grounded in community and care. To that end, my current doctoral research explores critical and holistic approaches to school-based drug education by centring education practitioners—namely teachers—as key agents in the production of knowledge for improving equity outcomes for students who use drugs. Through a process of collaborative inquiry, my participants and I will generate, reflect on, and mobilize data from our everyday practice in order to surface possibilities for a drug curriculum that emphasizes care and harm reduction over abstinence. This work grows out of my commitment to rewrite the cultural narratives we've metabolized about what drugs are and why we use them, and to confront the stigma that has haunted mine and my family's struggles with substance use.

Having spent my early teaching days turned outward to face the injustices that plague the broader communities I belong to, I now find myself turning inward to better care for myself and those I love. For me that means prioritizing personal over institutional commitments and finding fun even amidst the fury. It means protecting time to exercise and rest my body. It means sharing meals, reading poetry, watching great films. It means remembering, always, that underneath our identities, our codes of ethics, our CVs, and our hopes and aspirations, we are human beings.

## **Ben Gallagher**

My name is Ben, I use he/him pronouns, and am cis-gender and white. I'm a first generation settler – my mother moved to Canada as a child, and my grandfather on my father's side moved here from Scotland. Both sides of my family came to Canada to escape the effects of WWII, and I'm still learning about the histories on this continent that they entered through the move to become settlers, as well as the family histories they wanted to leave behind (mostly struggles with class and coloniality in the UK).

I currently live on the East coast, in Mi'kma'ki, which is the unceded (never surrendered) territory of the Mi'kmaw people. These lands are governed by Peace and Friendship Treaties, treaties I am learning about and attempting to uphold. I have two young children, and want to do my best to offer them educational opportunities that I did not have growing up, to learn about their treaty rights and responsibilities, especially as they will be confronting an uncertain climate future.

I've been thinking about ideas my friend and colleague benjamin lee hicks has shared with me, about ways in which we make spaces that are capable of supporting the unexpected, whenever those unexpected aspects of people are revealed to us. And also about the work of my friend Loree Erickson, who emphasizes both collective care and radical access as ways of building a world that works for everyone.

I've been stocking my bookshelves with kids books from Flamingo Rampant, my friend j's publishing project, to show my kids and their friends that there are many possible ways to be in the world, and there are stories that reflect those possibilities.

I regularly donate to social justice causes in Mi'kma'ki, most recently the Black Lives Matter Solidarity Fund NS and the Mi'kmaw Treaty Defenders fund. My own research focuses on community poetry workshops as educational spaces, and I try to use those workshops to uplift, celebrate, and learn from Indigenous, Black, queer and trans poets and authors, all of whom are demonstrating the many possibilities contained within language and life.

## **Bishop Owis**

My name is Bishop (they/she). I am a dis/abled, queer, fat, genderqueer/trans person of colour, and the first in my family to go to university. I am also an educator, occasional writer and artist and community activist. I am a second generation Canadian, born in Toronto/Tkaranto on unceded territory belonging to the Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe and Mississaugas of the Credit River. I am from people who were indentured slaves under British imperialism, colonized in their homelands, and later came to Canada in the 1980s as uninvited settlers in Tkaranto. My ancestry has roots in Guyana, Egypt, Italy, Portugal and China. I come from people who have been both colonized and settlers.

I am often in community with people I don't share identities, experiences and histories with. This is both confusing and humbling, as I continue to learn how to work with people (white, cis, straight, etc) who can't and don't understand my worldview while doing the work of showing up for Black, Asian and Indigenous communities whose identities and oppressions I don't share. I continue to hold space for contention, nuance and un/learning in my work as an educator, and center care and love at the core of my solidarity work. In my writing, I always center work that is desire-based, often thinking, writing and talking about thriving, joy and creating just worlds for the future.

My orientation towards education comes from a place of care, love and justice. Paulo Friere (2005) writes that "it is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, well-thought-out capacity to love" (p. 5). This quote is how I see myself in my role as an educator and researcher. I am a fierce lover and activist for justice. I model this by being vulnerable with my own students, sharing the parts of myself and my work that fuel my desire for social justice. I've made it a regular practice of donating funds through whatever means available to individual fundraisers, community initiatives in Toronto and guest speakers in my classrooms. I encourage and crowdsource these funds with my students, matching their total with funds I apply for as an educator, researcher and sometimes out of my own pay cheque. I don't say this as a way to garner attention or praise, that is not my goal.

My actions are meant to show my commitment to how I repay Indigenous and Black community educators, scholars and activists for their labour, their words and the ongoing violence they face. It's the bare minimum. The most important way I practice my commitments as an educator and researcher beyond research and teaching is through conversations. Sometimes these conversations are formal (invited guest talks) but more often than not they are spontaneous. They are conversations I have with acquaintances who go silent when I tell them who I am and what I do for a living, people in line at the checkout, people I befriend in dog parks, my friends' family who struggle to use my chosen name and understand what it means to be trans, or why voting for a political party means endorsing policies and initiatives that defund social services. These are unintended moments of activism, where instead of doing what I actually want to do (quietly disappear) I open my mouth and the words come pouring out. In elementary school, I would be moved from my spot in class because I was so chatty. Little did my teachers know, everywhere they moved me I was still talkative and distracting everyone; I could strike up a conversation with just about anyone and hold my own. That is my gift as an educator, and my biggest asset in practicing my commitments towards QTBIPOC thriving and joy.

### **Rob Simon**

My work in the Addressing Injustices Project is in many ways inspired by my family history.

My grandparents, Gretel and Rudy Simon, were Holocaust survivors, who escaped Germany to the US in 1938. My grandmother's parents died in Auschwitz. Though my grandmother told few stories of my great-grandparents, those she did tell haunt me. Stories commonly took place during wartime, marked by my grandmother's pronounced guilt at not being able to save her parents' lives.

In 2002, on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*—the “night of broken glass”—my grandmother gave a speech at a Chicago synagogue. She shared the following story:

I had one year of high school ahead of me when Hitler came to power . . . One morning a classmate came to school in a Nazi uniform. He handed the teacher Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, opened to a section about the Jews and asked that it be read aloud. The teacher could not dare to deny the request. Can you possibly imagine my feelings having to listen to this? At first I wanted to put my head down. But then I told myself that these misguided fools should be ashamed, not me. I held my head up high. . . . It was not easy to hide my tears, but I knew I had to be strong.

My grandmother dreamed of becoming a teacher, but was not allowed to finish school. Hearing stories like this, I felt, though I couldn't fully understand, her loss. My grandmother's belief in education as a means of transcending historical suffering was forged in the crucible of moments like this.

I was also raised to believe in the transformative ideal of education—something Jamaican poet and novelist Andrew Salkey reminded me is a commonality among Jews and his own community. As he put it, “Your mind is the last thing your oppressor can take from you.” I attended and taught at schools and universities on stolen land, built alongside unmarked mass graves of Black and indigenous children. I was educated in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma, the site of the Tulsa Race Massacre. I did not learn of the Massacre, then called the Tulsa Race Riot, until high school, and I remember our reference librarian telling me that books on the Race Massacre were stolen as quickly as they were acquired.

Reflecting on my family history and how it informs my research, I am reminded of the contemporary urgency of our work in Addressing Injustices, how it both unsettles and renews my commitment to social justice education. I am also reminded that, like Jeffrey Goldberg (2015), as an American Jew now living in Canada, I am only able to engage these ideas because my ancestors “made a run for it when they could.”

I share these stories to situate my commitment to listening to and learning from the joys, struggles, and urgent politics that my co-researchers, adults and youth, bring to our work together. We engage texts about historical trauma and pressing civil rights issues—from celebrating all-gender identities and cherishing Black lives to remembering genocide—to envision and enact a more socially

just future. We place these stories next to our own and those of our families, many of which, like my grandparents', are marked by refusal, forced migration, xenophobia, racism, or transphobia.

What does it mean to invite stories like these into our research and teaching? Stories that touch upon what Elizabeth Dutro (2013) has called incomprehensible experiences?

In *Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1903) writes of the veiled promise of “a hope not hopeless but unhopeful.” Rather than sink into despair—as discussions of reparations for Black communities crumble, as the rights of trans children are denied, as 50 percent of hate crimes in Europe are directed at the dwindling Jewish population, as the church refuses responsibility for the cultural genocide of their Residential School project—we confront these issues to cultivate the incomprehensible, radical hope of our grandmothers. We address injustices through embodying and enacting hope as a way of being in the world (West, 2017). An opening, to paraphrase our colleague Ben Gallagher, to making the world we want from within the world we have.

#### **Our work as a team:**

- Arrive daily as our whole, messy selves
- Support (each other, students, MTs etc) to investigate the issues that matter to them. This is a commitment towards acceptance and encouragement, I suppose, rather than a commitment to a specific injustice. Perhaps this past year, where we haven't been able to gather in person, has been a time to reconsider the implications of that commitment and what it means for us ethically (our past work, and the work we hope to do in the future)
- Started to think more deeply about our ethics and who our commitments are to (AERA presentation in April 2021)
- Reflection, thinking and writing about our work (previous data) and how it fits in the world today
- Slowing down in our process
- Check ins at every meeting