The motivation for this workshop began with shared feelings: wanting to actively centre equity in our work and our lives, needing to dismantle the oppressive systems in which we’ve been complicit, hoping to contribute to the vital anti-oppression and anti-racism work being done across Toronto, Ontario, and Canada. As organizations that aim to support dancers, we have a responsibility to move toward a safer, more equitable dance milieu. With this workshop, we sought to foster space for ongoing conversations around anti-oppression and anti-racism as essential practices for the dance community.

At a couple moments in the workshop, Ella lead us in a fireworks clap: a pat, a clap, and a rainfall of snaps. This workshop was just a first step – the pat that starts off the firework. We’re looking forward to continued learning, to all the claps and snaps to come.

Ella began the workshop by leading us in some introductory exercises, encouraging self-reflection, and creating a space for the important discussions to follow. We were asked to identify some questions that we brought to the room. With 42 participants the list was long, but a few of these queries were:

- How can I be a better facilitator?
- How can I bring this kind of workshop into youth programming spaces?
- How have people in this room experienced anti-Black racism?
• How can I feel comfortable in a marginalized space and feel able to speak?
• How is the work of anti-oppression approached in a non-academic setting?
• How honest and real are we going to be today?
• How do we implement anti-oppression and anti-racism on more than a metaphoric level?
• How does the community articulate their thoughts around privilege, racism, and oppression?
• How to be a better friend and to approach anti-oppression in my work as an artist?
• How can we talk about audism?
• How can this be a starting point for our organization to actively work against white supremacy?
• How to stand my ground in situations less open than this one?
• How do I bring my research & knowledge about historical suppression and erasure in dance history into the room?
• How can I be a better listener, ally and activist in regards to oppression and inclusion in the arts in Canada?
• How do I keep learning after today?

Moving forward, the goals set out for the workshop were to explore equity and racial inclusion in the dance community, to create a space for self reflection, to explore power, privilege, and implicit bias, and to connect and support one another.

We worked in pairs to discuss what we would need in order to do this work, crafting a list of community agreements. This practice offered a model for how we might make spaces for these conversations in the future.

- don’t jump to conclusions - looking at arguments - don’t assume
- let each other up - confidentiality
- not having to speak on behalf of my race
- “I” statements
- honesty, listening, articulating
- speak & not speak, not be articulate
- listening ears
- end white silence/simplicity
- courtesy to be heard
- workplace opinion in a high regard over fact
- clarity focused questioning
- shame free
- body comfortably walk
- feel comfortable to share
- kindness
- let everyone be heard
- loud speaking so we all hear
- no touching - “ask before touching
- listen in more than speaking
- space for not knowing
- space for not knowing
- safe space - environment
- don’t patronise
- listen with your eyes
- humans first
- value consent
- male
- openness non-judgemental
- generously, sincerely
- respect where we come from & what we bring
- space for Anger to be here - hold space for emotions
We walked through the room and spoke one-on-one with three different people, telling each:

1. One thing that we’ve done to support the practices of anti-oppression and anti-racism.
2. One challenge we face in practicing anti-oppression and anti-racism.
3. An urgent issue in our community – one that needs our attention right now.

We gathered in larger groups discussing the issues that arose, reflecting on:

1) What we do that perpetuates this issue.
2) What we are doing, or are going to do, or can do, to fix it.

We identified a wide range of urgent issues:

- Inequity in universities.
- Lack of access for deaf artists.
- Expectations that dancers will work for little or no compensation.
- Stereotyped perceptions of the Black body, mind, and identity.
- The overrepresentation of white men and women in positions of power in the dance community.
- Tokenism.
- Siloing.
- Opportunity hoarding.
- Selfish allyship.
- Cultural appropriation.
- Shadeism.

We identified many actions and habits that perpetuate inequity and oppression:

- Teaching at a university, as a white, cisgender man.
- Self-loathing.
- Giving in to the sensation of not having enough time to engage.
- Silence.
- Assuming negative reactions.
- Not reaching beyond our comfort zones.
- Writing about or focusing on others, instead of ourselves.
- Not calling out/in cultural appropriation.
- Not sharing knowledge for fear of conflict.
- Not extending these conversations beyond spaces that feel safe.
- Being attached to comfort and a place of privilege.
- Not engaging in embodied listening.
- Fear of calling in elders in our communities, out of deference to their role.
- Freezing up around difficult conversations.
- Not yet having the skills to counter complicity.
- Not adequately countering feelings of entitlement.
- Forgetting to account for needs that are different from our own.
- Not being informed.
• Exhaustion and lack of self-protection.
• Internalized phobias.
• Taking up space in positions of power.

We identified actions we can take and gestures we can prioritize:

• Multi-generational gatherings/discussions within community.
• Create spaces where knowledge is shared.
• Learn yourself.
• Self-care/self-love with external support.
• Using privilege in positive ways. Knowing when to use privilege and when to let someone else speak.
• Breathing.
• Teaching and mentoring.
• Supporting group models.
• Take-on support roles.
• Make room for others in positions of power.
• Make meaningful connections with new communities.

The thoughts, ideas, and momentums generated here remain inchoate, and the way forward will include follow-up workshops. Moving from the general and introductory focus of this event, we will hone-in on specific issues, investigating deeply, and seeking-out concrete actions. Keep an eye on our website and social media, or e-mail office@cada-on.ca for updates!

This workshop took place on sacred ground, which has been a site of human activity since time immemorial. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. The territory is the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Anishinaabek and Allied Nations to peaceably care for and share the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community on this territory.