Strategies for Ethical Engagement

Developed by John MacCallum, Teoma Naccarato, and Jessica Rajko, for the purposes of the Dance Computing Studies Discussion Group.

We understand that the discussion of difficult topics such as marginalization and oppression can produce discomfort for different people at different times and for different reasons. In many ways, the goal of this group is for all of us to cultivate a certain comfort with this discomfort, and for that, we must work together to ensure the space is one in which people can rest in discomfort, comfortably, and publicly. We recognize that learning about a topic such as race simply reinforces our existing relationship to it, without destabilising differentiated standpoints nor the power relations through which they are sustained. The thing that must shift is our practice of relating to people and ideas. More than simply being here to share ideas and be exposed to those of others, we are here to share and witness the cultivation of practices of learning to see, hear, speak, and relate in new ways, ways that may feel uncomfortable at first.

To follow are some strategies for engaging critically and ethically with one another, not in spite of but thanks to the valuable differences in perspectives that each and every person brings to the (virtual) table.

Cultivating generosity:

Listening, actively: When others are speaking, listen – full stop! Listen, and then take time to respond. If you can, begin with a question.

"Reading-in": If you find that you are more familiar with a text or topic than someone else, read them in! Even in the instance that someone has less expertise in a given area, they may have much to contribute by way of questions.
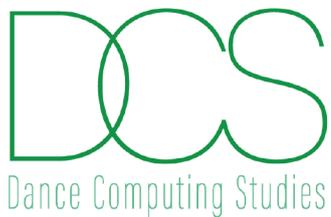
"Calling-in": If someone says something that you do not understand, or that you disagree with, consider using questions to initiate a respectful and generative dialogue about these differences.

Sharing the air: Practice taking space, as well as making space for others, especially voices that may be(come) marginalised in the group. Finding this balance is the responsibility of everyone present.

Articulating and respecting boundaries:

Speaking from the "I": Use "I" statements, and speak from your own experiences. If you choose to use "we" or "you" consider who is implicated in and excluded from your statement, intentionally or not, and with consent or not.

Asking, not assuming: Always ask and listen; do not make assumptions about people's identities or beliefs.

"Calling-out": If someone says something that offends you, one strategy is to "call them out", either personally or publically in the group. This can be a valuable means to interrupt or pause the momentum of harmful discourse.

Leaving the room: Sometimes it is necessary to remove oneself from a harmful situation entirely until clear boundaries can be (re)established. This is always a valid choice.

Embracing difference and discomfort:

Making and acknowledging mistakes: When discussing complex issues like race, we may make mistakes not only in word-choice but in logic, and these mistakes may cause hurt and pain to others. We must acknowledge and learn from our own and one another's errors, remaining generous even as we respect boundaries.

Hanging out in uncertainty: There are no easy or immediate solutions to complex issues like systemic oppression; discomfort is inevitable and at times productive in dialogue about race, or when bringing silenced issues into the open. Dialogue does not have to conclude with consensus.

Ensuring confidentiality:

Keeping it in the group: What is shared in the group stays in the group – unless otherwise specified or agreed upon.

Asking permission to share: If you would like to share or reproduce ideas, images, audio, video or any other materials that emerge in the context of the group, be sure to seek explicit permission from everyone involved.

Sharing of documentation: Each zoom session will be recorded for sharing within the group only. Likewise access to the Slack channel and permission to view and edit the shared google docs will be given exclusively to participants of the group.

Familiarising yourself with the data privacy policies of the platforms we are using: The platforms we are using for exchange and documentation such as Zoom, Slack, and Google Drive have their own policies with regard to data privacy; please inform yourself of these.
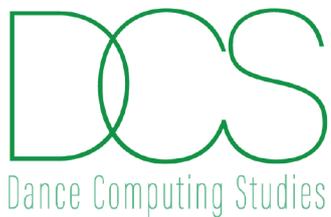
References & Related Resources:

Several organisations have developed resources aimed at facilitating equitable and constructive dialogue on race and racism in live and virtual contexts. Many of the resources below are adapted from others in the list, making authorial contributions somewhat distributed and collective. In addition to the footnote citations, we as authors acknowledge inspiration from the various resources below.

Alderman, J., Balla, S., Blackstock, C., & Khanna, N. (2006) Guidelines for the Ethical Engagement of Young People [online] available from <https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/guidelines-ethical-youth-engagement_1.pdf>

Allied Media Projects (2014) Healing Justice Practice Spaces: A How-To Guide [online] available from <https://justhealing.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/healing-justice-practice-spaces-a-how-to-guide-with-links.pdf>

Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance (2017) Tips for Naming, Intervening and Addressing Systemic Power [online] available from <http://aorta.coop/portfolio_page/tips-and-tools-for-addressing-systemic-power>

Cloud 9: Collective Love On Ur Desktop (2020) Community Guidelines [online] available from <https://cloud9.support/communityguidelines>

Fleur Larson Facilitation (n.d.) Equity Leadership Skills for How We Will Do the Work Together [online] available from <https://www.fleurlarsenfacilitation.com/resources>

Just Lead Washington (n.d.) Tool C: Community Agreements for Productive Conversations on Race [online] available from <https://justleadwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/REJI-Organizational-Toolkit_Tool-C.pdf>

Muindi, M.F. (2020) Four Theses On Intellectual Generosity [online] available from <https://blog.solutionsforpostmodernliving.com>

Native Land Digital (2015) Native Land Map [online] available from <https://native-land.ca>

Oregon Center for Educational Equity (n.d.) What Did You Just Say? Responses to Racist Comments Collected from the Field [online] available from <https://education.up.edu/_files/2018_interruptions.pdf>

School Reform Initiative (n.d.) Pocket Guide to Probing Questions [online] available from <http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/probing_questions_guide.pdf>

Seed the Way (2018) Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In [online] available from <http://www.racialequityvtnea.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Interrupting-Bias_-Calling-Out-vs.-Calling-In-REVISED-Aug-2018-1.pdf>