

Canadian Network for Arts & Learning

Supporting Arts and Learning in a time of Crisis

Summary of Findings

National Digital Roundtable Discussion Series with
Canada Arts and Learning Community During the
COVID-19 Pandemic—Series 2

May 2020

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Project Overview

Purpose and Description

The purpose of the discussion series was to gain a better understanding of participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of physical distancing on their work in arts and learning. With new rules in place as an attempt to stop the rise in cases of COVID-19, artists and arts educators have turned to either working from home or finding digital platforms to continue the work. Otherwise they have had to close their spaces temporarily. The first discussion series, which took place between March 23-April 3, 2020, focused on understanding the initial impact of the pandemic on artists and educators and how they used the arts to support members of their community.

After months of physical distancing, and with measures being taken to reopen society, the aim of the second discussion series was to hear how artists and educators have been sustaining their work through digital and online platforms and discussing what the "new normal" could look like for the arts in the future.

The Canadian Network for Arts & Learning (CNAL) was born out of a shared belief that arts and learning, formally, informally and non-formally "enrich, empower and sustain the lives of individuals and communities." (Larry O'Farrell and Tiina Kukkonen, 2017, Transformative Action and Arts Education). CNAL believes that if decision makers understand the intrinsic value of the arts, then arts programs will return to the core of Canadian education and be accessible to children, youth, adults and the older age population.

The national digital roundtable discussion series was made possible by the Canada Council for the Arts.

Methodology

Originally, a series of three in-person Eduarts Hubs were scheduled for April 2020 to gather insight regarding the status of arts and learning in communities across Canada, the issues and barriers they face, and how they have used digital communication in their work. Due to travel restrictions, the Hubs were postponed until further notice. As a response to the crisis, CNAL organized nine digital roundtable sessions with artists and educators across the country. Zoom, a videoconferencing platform, was used to connect with participants. Sessions were recorded and posted online for others to review. The following list shows the dates of these sessions, as well as the province/territory invited to participate in each session.

- May 11: British Columbia and Yukon
- May 12: Alberta and Northwest Territories
- May 13: Saskatchewan
- May 14: Manitoba
- May 15: Greater Toronto Area Ontario

May 19: Non-GTA Ontario
May 20: Québec (Francophone)
May 21: Québec/Atlantic Provinces/Nunavut
May 22: National

During the sessions, a series of poll questions were distributed to the participants asking them about accessing money offered by the government (i.e. the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and/or the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy), using new digital communications in the future, and if participants have been able to make new connections through digital communications outside of their area. These polls were anonymous, and participants were asked to choose an answer based on the choices that were provided. The recordings of the discussions as well as results of the polls can be found using the following link: <https://www.eduarts.ca/navigating-arts-and-learning-through-a-global-crisis-discussion-series>

Focus Group Questions

The following questions were provided to participants and were used to guide the discussion:

1. Having experienced extended physical distancing and in the light of measures now being taken to reopen society, how have you been faring—
 - In delivery of programs?
 - In maintaining your personal well-being?
2. What have you learned during the period of isolation that will be helpful to you in your future work?
 - Digital technology? (Will you continue to use this technology? Which platforms? Why?)
 - What do you foresee will be the new normal for your on-site activities?

Participants

A total of approximately 208 people participated in the discussions overall. The non-CNAL participants represented a variety of backgrounds (e.g., visual arts, music, theatre, dance) and positions (e.g. teachers, gallery owners, program coordinators, artistic directors, musicians, dance instructors, etc.) across Canada.

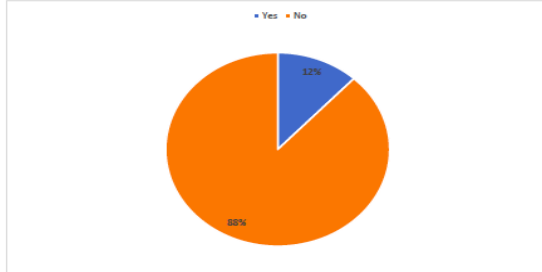
Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the discussion sessions. Quantitative data were based on the responses from the polls. Responses were calculated and made into a pie chart. Qualitative data were collected through the roundtable discussions. The recorded sessions were reviewed. Recurring themes and phrases were noted and categorized by question. Notes from the Francophone discussion were completed by the translator for CNAL, Dominique Denis.

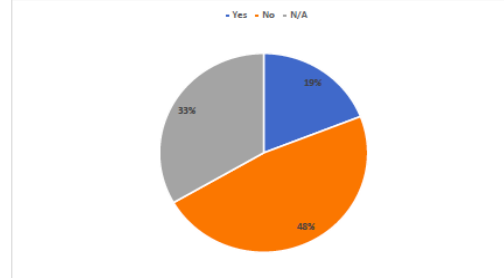
Summary of Poll Findings

A series of five questions were distributed to participants during each discussion session. The polls were calculated and made into pie charts:

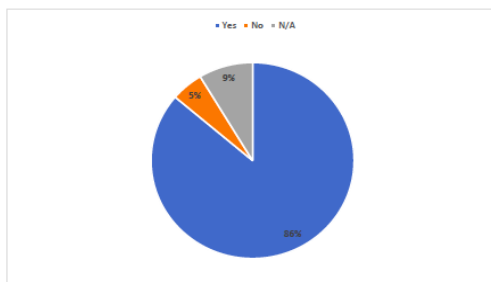
Have you access the Canada Emergency Response Benefit?



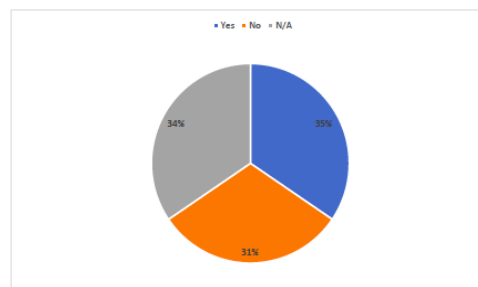
Has your organization accessed the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy?



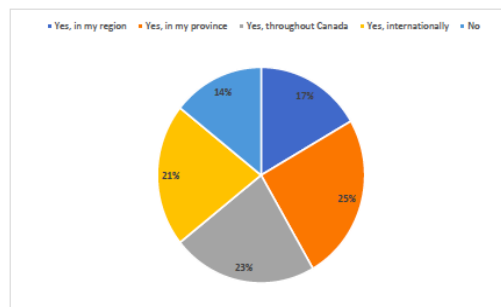
If you have been using new digital communications platforms throughout the pandemic, do you intend to continue using once social distancing measures come to an end?



If you are using new digital communications platforms, have you been able to reach a broader constituency?



Have you made professional connections through digital means that you would not likely have made without social distancing measures? (multiple selections possible)



Poll Results

The following quantitative data were received from the responses of participants from the poll questions:

1. Have you accessed the Canada Emergency Response Benefit?
 - a. Yes → 12%
 - b. No → 88%

2. Has your organization accessed the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy?
 - a. Yes → 19%
 - b. No → 48%
 - c. N/A → 33%

3. If you have been using the new digital communications platforms throughout the pandemic, do you intend to continue using once social distancing measures come to an end?
 - a. Yes → 86%
 - b. No → 5%
 - c. N/A → 9%

4. If you are using new digital communications platforms, have you been able to reach a broader constituency?
 - a. Yes → 35%
 - b. No → 31%
 - c. N/A → 34%

5. Have you made professional connections through digital means that you would not likely have made without social distancing measures? (multiple sections possible)
 - a. Yes, in my region → 17%
 - b. Yes, in my province → 25%
 - c. Yes, throughout Canada → 23%
 - d. Yes, internationally → 21%
 - e. No → 14%

Summary of Discussion Findings

After months of social distancing, artists, educators, and organizations have adapted to making their practices online and discussed ways they have sustained their work, providing ideas to others along the way. A few challenges were pointed out, as many events have had to be cancelled, and there have been concerns/issues with technology, especially in music education. Participants also discussed how they have been sustaining their well-being, as well as the well-being of others. It is evident that communities have been coming together, and teachers are hoping to turn to arts organizations for collaboration in bringing creativity to their students. With society beginning to reopen, many talked about the future and what the new normal could look like. Participants agreed that having digital aspects to their work is important and they would like to keep their online programs for the future. However, many artists are looking forward to creating art with people in-person once again.

Sustaining Work during the Pandemic

- The majority of participants have moved their programming or classes digitally. Examples include:
 - Zoom classes
 - Virtual tours of galleries
 - Interviews with artists through social media platforms
 - Providing resources on websites
- Teachers have been using Google Classrooms to continue their work and post assignments
 - One teacher in Ontario reported that 90% of students have been returning their assignments
- Many participants have been using social media to connect with the community, such as posting on Facebook or creating Instagram Live videos
 - For example, Neptune Theatre in Halifax has been using Instagram Live to interview actors and create videos such as “Tap Tuesdays”
- Teachers have been using Google Sites to share resources with other educators
 - Music educators have been using Google Sites to hold music activities that teachers have been creating
 - Useful to share activities that students can do with their families
- Instructors, such as those from Sistema Kingston, created play-along videos for music students to practice at home to get ready for their year-end concert
 - Sistema Kingston has been offering half-hour private lessons to students through Zoom
- The Winspear Centre and Edmonton Symphony Orchestra have tried to mirror what would have been happening in person and making them available digitally
 - They have been partnering with surrounding First Nations communities
 - Created live-streamed concerts
 - The Winspear Centre still has access to their space as they own the building

- Some online initiatives include:
 - Instrument Intros: resource for teachers
 - Interview series with musicians
 - “Sounds Interesting”: talking about acoustics
- Kompany Family Theatre, located in Edmonton, have been delivering hampers to inner-city students with one of their school partners
 - One of the actors from the theatre came up with an idea to put together puppet craft packages to put in the hampers
 - A way for students to get away from the screen
- The Arts Accessibility Network Manitoba have created an online exhibition, which was promoted through a newsletter and their website
 - Every day on Facebook they add detailed artist statements, which has reached many people
- Recently, there was a roundtable with the Manitoba Writers Guild, which included a series of readings and discussion
 - One of the writers commented that he felt they should keep an online gathering after the pandemic
- The Manitoba Theatre for Young People have partnered with the Frontier School Division to create videos that are distributed to students through YouTube
- The Toronto Public Library was originally opposed to online events, but came around after seeing some success stories
 - Have launched an online series and many people have watched their videos
- Art House in Halton has been offering Zoom programming once a week to stay connected with children in the community
- Frog in Hand, a dance-theatre company in Mississauga, found ways of doing task-based improvisation
 - They give people an idea and participants use that prompt to direct their movement (i.e. dance like the floor is hot)
 - The company has also created “Kitchen Dances,” which is meant to promote wellness
 - They are free or by donation through a GoFundMe page
- VUCAVU.com, a pan-national streaming platform for independent film and video artists from across Canada, provide artist talks within the context of the platform
 - The company was also giving 100% of all rental revenue that was generated on the platform back to artists to support them
- Free My Muse, a theatre company in Saskatchewan, has been using Zoom to continue their work, and have been using the breakout rooms
 - The breakout rooms allow for peer feedback
 - Different groups can work together in the breakout rooms and they will come back to work as a bigger group
 - Teachers are able to go into each room to check progress
- Teachers in Saskatchewan have stated that they would love to collaborate with artists and organizations during this time and hear new ideas on how to engage students

- The Regina Symphony Orchestra has been helping schools in the area by sending links and educational information to help teachers provide arts education to their students
- CARFAC Ontario has been recording the experiences of artists during the pandemic
 - They have also been compiling recommended practices for paying artists during the pandemic, which can be found on their website
- OrKidstra, a program based in Ottawa, launched at-home programs
 - Staff have been supportive in making trips to change strings on instruments for students while following health and safety guidelines
- A music instructor based in Ottawa bought a Blue Yeti microphone and made sure they had a strong internet connection (5G) to continue group music classes online
 - They are using improvisation techniques, such as call and response, where the instructor will play something, and students will respond
- MASC (multicultural arts, schools, and communities) have been working with schools and senior facilities to continue their practices
 - Supporting artists has been a priority, and paid 50% to all artists after having to cancel all events
 - They have also been offering free trials to gather interest in programs
- Teachers have noted that some of their more introverted students have been coming out of their shells through the online platforms
- Arts New Brunswick reported that they easily transitioned to online programming and are still continuing with the majority of their programs
 - They have adopted new digital aspects, such as direct deposit to pay artists rather than sending cheques
- The Coalition for Music Education have created several programs online and created digital alternatives
 - Music Monday, which is an annual event across Canada, had to be quickly re-imagined as schools closed
 - It was a 12-hour digital broadcast, with live performances, keynote speakers, interactive activities, etc.
- The English Language Art Network (ELAN), based in Québec, have been funding artists to do classes, such as artists from ArtWill Studio
- A few theatre companies, such as those at the InterAction School of Performing Arts in New Brunswick, have been interested in doing radio plays
- Crimson Coast Dance Society in British Columbia reported that they are producing a festival that is coming up in July
 - They are looking for ways to create live performance interactions, and have thoughts of micro-performances or safely distanced performances
- An artist in British Columbia has been working on “Living Room Art”
 - A way for people to connect with artists in their area
 - There are multi-room sessions where people can jump from one room to the next, so people have a chance to interact with different artists
- Evergreen Theatre, located in Alberta, released a few short digital clips that cover science myths/facts geared to the Alberta Science curriculum

- Facts delivered through banter between characters from their Three Little Pigs and Big Bad World musical theatre show about science/energy efficiency that toured schools last year
- The Toronto Catholic District School Board has an arts resource person who is in charge of providing information to all arts teachers, which has been helpful
- Théâtre jeunesse Les Gros Becs has used the opportunity to get a head start on their 2020-2021 season, turning a negative into a positive

Challenges

- Many festivals, concerts, programs, etc. have been cancelled, which has resulted in loss of income
- There is some debate over using synchronous learning for classes
 - For example, the Toronto Catholic School Board has suggested looking into synchronous video conferencing for teachers and students; however, the union is telling teachers not to use it because of privacy concerns
- While teachers have had some success with Google Classrooms, others have reported that not all of their students show up for lessons
 - Teachers have reported that they are finding it hard to get assignments back from students
- Sistema Kingston reported that they have had only 30% uptake from students
 - Possibly could be due to lack of internet accessibility
 - It has also been labour intensive for instructors
- A few artists and educators have stated that they have been overwhelmed by all the information that has been thrown at them
 - Participants also stated that they need to be careful about how much work they are doing in the day as they can do too much and get burnt out
- There has been some equity in communities in the Northern part of the country, especially in rural areas
 - Technology and internet are not always reliable
 - When libraries were open, students could go there to access internet
 - Now that the libraries are closed, they lose that access
- Organizations are looking towards city leadership to see if they can plan summer programming or not
 - Alberta has stated that summer camps are allowed to be offered, but organizations are not allowed to operate their facilities
- A few dance instructors stated that their classes have come to a halt
- Though Alberta is in Stage 1 of reopening, some art galleries are not feeling prepared to open to the public yet
 - One art gallery hopes that they can bring staff come back to the space in June and prepare to open again in the summer
- Participants have found telephone and online meetings exhausting
- Artists noted that they are not getting immediate feedback like they are used to, which contributes to the feeling of loneliness during this time
- Students in music classes are unable to play instruments since they do not have them at home

- The arts are not getting a lot of attention in schools during online learning
- Neptune Theatre School in Halifax has been finding it difficult to get people to enroll in virtual classes
- An artist-in-residence who works for schools in British Columbia claimed that it was challenging to do something interactive or online because of all the hoops that they have to go through for the schools
- Académie des arts trouve ta voie, which serves the community of children living with various disabilities, explained that they had to cancel their annual fundraising event, which is their main source of revenue
- An artist and writer working in schools in Québec had a project involving a school board and over 600 children; they are discussing transferring the project online, but the scale of the project poses challenges to this approach

Digital Platforms used by Participants

The platforms included below were mentioned in the online discussions. CNAL has also compiled a list of resources for the arts and learning sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. This included arts-specific resources, links for digital learning, collaboration and skill sharing sites, and additional digital platforms for collaboration:

<https://www.eduarts.ca/resources-for-the-arts-and-learning-sector-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

- Acapella
 - Allows you to collaborate with any musician around the world. Whether you are a musician and play the piano, guitar, flute, drums etc., or love to sing a cover song or simply jam and record music—you can use Acapella singing app as a multi-track tool to create multi frame music videos
- Brightspace
 - Resources for changing from classroom to online courses during the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak
- Flipgrid
 - Used by millions of PreK to PhD students, educators and families around the world, Flipgrid helps learners of all ages find their voices, share their voices and respect the diverse voices of others. Educators spark discussions by posting Topics to a classroom, school, professional learning community, or public Grid. Students record, upload, view, react, and respond to each other through short videos. Flipgrid is video the way students use video ... social, engaging and fun!
- Google Classrooms
 - Makes teaching more productive and meaningful by streamlining assignments, boosting collaboration, and fostering communication. Educators can create classes, distribute assignments, send feedback, and see everything in one place. Classroom also seamlessly integrates with other Google tools like Google Docs and Drive.
- Google Meet
 - Premium video meetings free for everyone

- Jam Kazam
 - Able to play music with other musicians from your homes across the Internet as if you were sitting in the same room. You can record your performances at the track level, share your recordings, and even broadcast your live sessions to family, friends, and fans.
 - Helpful for choral rehearsals
- Kami
 - The leading PDF & document annotation app for schools. Improve engagement and interaction in the classroom with Kami as your digital pen and paper. Kami is offering FREE assistance to schools impacted by Coronavirus closures occurring worldwide
- NINJAM
 - Open source (GPL) software to allow people to make real music together via the Internet. Every participant can hear every other participant. Each user can also tweak their personal mix to his or her liking. NINJAM is cross-platform, with clients available for Mac OS X, Linux, and Windows.
- Zoom
 - This was the most popular mode of connecting with people online
 - Video communications platform for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat, and webinars across mobile devices, desktops, telephones, and room systems
 - Participants stated that they liked the screen sharing function and that it was fairly easy to use

Sustaining Well-Being during the Pandemic

Personal Well-Being

- Participants stated that they make a point of going for jogs along trails
- People planning Zoom reunions with friends and family
 - Connecting with families more
- Participants have become aware of “screen fatigue” and are trying to be mindful of boundaries
- Actors have stated that they have been using this time relax and take a break from the hustle of their busy lives
- Some people have been thriving working from home as they have fewer distractions
- Pets have helped people through the pandemic
- Yoga and meditation were recommended by many participants for relaxation and mindfulness
- Artists have been turning to their work to help them focus and relax
 - People reported that they are not thinking about any art shows or requirements and are just creating

Community Well-Being

- Different groups have come together to gather resources to share to others
 - Sharing lessons
 - Sharing collaborative videos and efforts
 - Uplifting for arts educators to see continuation of creativity and thinking outside the box
- Teachers have turned to social media, such as Twitter, to express some challenges and ideas
 - Twitter has been a helpful resource where people can post examples of things that have been going well in their digital teaching practices
 - Walls have come down between educators and they are sharing their strategies more openly
- Some school boards, such as those in Ontario, are allowing teachers to do about half of their workload to maintain their mental health and not become overwhelmed
- People are using Facebook to organize events and reach out to people to check in
- Organizations, such as Gateway Theatre in British Columbia, have made a point of having meetings to see how colleagues are doing
 - Every Friday afternoon they have a “happy hour” for everyone to connect over Zoom
- People are taking part in arts opportunities, such as karaoke and creating social-distance dance numbers
- Educators stated the importance of trying to find the balance and well-being of students
- Many artists and educators have stated that they are showing their students the importance of the process of creating art rather than putting pressure on the final product
 - Able to engage in a more exploratory and experimental way in the arts
- The Cultural Programs in Oakville have been sending out care packs through Food for Life to seniors
 - They put out a call to the community for artwork and letters to put in the packs, which would then be digitally reproduced
 - Over 200 submissions were received within a week of the call
- Teachers have been looking at holistic aspects of teaching, where they are trying to understand the communities of where students are coming from and how we can move forward in the future to help them
- A few teachers, such as those in Saskatchewan, reported that their human resources departments in their boards have been encouraging mental health and well-being
 - A teacher for the Regina Catholic School Board requires teachers to fill in a report every few weeks, which includes a section to discuss their well-being and how they have been taking time for themselves
- Organizations are looking to support teachers and want to reach out to collaborate and share information

- One participant suggested that it would be great to have a mentor program to help others figure out how to move their practices online
- Some participants have found that talking to others over the phone rather than the computer has been more effective
 - Allows for a deeper one-on-one conversation
- The Canadian New Music Network has been contracting people to do small bits of work for the organization, and also stated that they have been asking artists what is feasible for them rather than the other way around
- Participants reported that they have been asking colleagues for help more often, such as learning tech skills and creative work
 - It also allows them to get to know their colleagues more
- Participants have noted that people have had more humanity about what has been happening
 - People have had more empathy, which will hopefully translate in the future after the pandemic
- InterAction School of Performing Arts has been holding online music nights
 - People record themselves at home and submit their performances, which are edited and put on Facebook
- After sending out a survey to families, Gateway Theatre had a number of responses saying they were not interested in online classes
- The CMC (Canadian Music Centre) has created a campaign entitled "Transmets la musique, pas le virus", and encourages members to share their playlists, in order to boost morale and create a sense of community

The “New Normal”

Digitally

- Teachers believe that if schools do not open in the fall, they will *have* to do synchronous learning, which makes teachers worried
 - Not sure what it will mean for jobs in the future
- At the beginning of the pandemic, teachers were panicking because they had never used a few of the digital platforms before
 - Now teachers are embracing the digital platforms saying that they are easier to use
 - Teachers are interested in still using Google Classrooms in the fall
- Museums are trying to find ways to connect to students and teachers digitally that would still be meaningful and would give them the museum experience through a screen
 - More virtual tours in museums and galleries that will include interactive activities
- Dance classes might include pre-recorded videos and zoom classes
- Many participants agreed that there needs to be a hybrid between on-site activities and using technology in their practices
- Educators in Manitoba stated that they would possibly see governments mandating online courses for students since they see that it is working

- There will be an improvement in technology, such as better-quality platforms with little to no lag
 - More apps will also appear
- There may be great learnings that could promote more connections with communities farther away, such as Northern or rural areas
- Educators in the Greater Toronto Area have stated that they will be driven by data to see how successful programs and digital platforms have been
 - They want to keep digital aspect as options for students
- Teachers should be making a loud call to arts organizations and have them help
- Educators are interested in bringing more technology into the classroom and virtual experiences
 - This could help students who function better on a virtual platform than in person
- There is some concern for music educators if things stay digital as they have had many issues with online classes
- Digital formats can help with accessibility
 - Able to reach those who might not be able to see shows or take classes because they are farther away
- Arts educators are able to build a bigger base of students from around the world

On-Site

- Some museums in Windsor, Ontario, still want audiences to come back to the museum have them back in the gallery space rather than solely interact with exhibits online
 - Teachers and students might not be able to come back in the fall due to policy for field trips
- Dance classes will be opening at a much later date after Stage 3 of reopening in Alberta
- The comfort level of the public will influence decisions on whether organizations will reopen or not
- A few organizations, such as the Arts Accessibility Network Manitoba, has suggested that they should give employees the opportunity to work from home as this might help with accessibility
 - It may work for some, and it may not work for others
- Some organizations, such as Manitoba Possible (a wheelchair dance group), need to have their space back for their activities to work and make sense
- People are missing the emotional connection in theatres and are excited to return to their spaces
- Artists are hoping that they can use this time to redefine the value of the arts and make them an essential service
- There will be more sanitizers and masks found in shared spaces
- Dance instructors have stated that their classes will be physically spread out, and there might be more theory work rather than practical work
- Educators suggested site-specific arts and teaching
 - Being outside as much as possible might help

- While participants agreed that life will never be the same as it was before the pandemic, many stated, “We will get back to on-site activities”
 - This is a chance to learn what works and what does not
- A dance studio in Saskatchewan suggested having half of the class in-person and the other half online, and have the groups switch every week
- One participant stated that it will be a shock to go back to in-person programming as people have become accustomed to staying home and quieter environments
- The majority of participants stated reported that they will go back to on-site programming/teaching, but they will be making their all their activities digital
- Organizations will have to generate trust again once places start reopening and making people feel comfortable to gather once again

Questions and Concerns

- What are the arts going to look like in the fall?
- How are the arts going to look in elementary schools?
 - School boards urging teachers to focus on literacy and numeracy; where do the arts fit in?
- Many participants expressed concern about internet accessibility
 - Should be a human right to have internet access
 - Huge equity issue
- Will parents be ready to embrace online virtual learning?
 - An Ontario teacher stated that there are many immigrant families in her area, and parents might not be tech savvy
- How can we model and teach “how to be a person” online?
 - Digital citizenship and being considerate online
- What will the comfort level be for audiences to return to large spaces?
 - Might influence more cancellations of future concerts or shows
- How do we begin to monetize things since the regular product will not be the same if it is offered digitally?
- How do we move forward in a hybrid fashion regardless of the crisis, so we are offering options to different learning styles?
- How do we get the best information we can find?
 - People are looking for guidelines and what the best course of action will be
- How do we reach people without the technological know-how? (i.e. those with severe disabilities)
- Theatre programs are wondering if it is meaningful to move digitally or if it would be worth it to wait?