

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

March—April 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 aim was to hear about the physical and emotional impact during this time, the various programs artists and educators have been using to continue their work and support their organizations/students, and how they have been using the arts to support members of their community.

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 ten 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.

- March 23: British Columbia and Yukon
- March 24: Alberta and Northwest Territories
- March 25: Saskatchewan
- March 26: Manitoba
- March 27: Greater Toronto Area Ontario
- March 30: Ontario
- March 31: Quebec (Francophone)
- April 1: Atlantic Provinces
- April 2: Quebec (English) and Nunavut

April 3: National

During the sessions, a series of poll questions were distributed to the participants asking them about their digital teaching methods during the pandemic, if they have students who are unable to receive instruction due to social distancing, and how much income they have lost due to the pandemic. 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/2020/04/pan-canadian-digital-roundtable-discussions>.

Focus Group Questions

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

1. How have the pandemic and containment measures affected your work in arts and learning?
2. How have these measures and the current situation in general affected your personal well-being?
3. What means of communication (digital or otherwise) have you used to continue your work during a time of self-isolation?
4. In this time of crisis, what measures have you taken or plan to take to benefit the community through your art form?
5. What else can the Canadian Network for Arts and Learning do to support the work you do, during the pandemic and afterwards?

Participants

A total of approximately 321 people participated in the discussions overall. The non-CNAL participants represented a variety of backgrounds (e.g., visual arts, music, theatre) and positions (e.g. teachers, gallery owners, program coordinators, artistic directors, musicians, dance instructors, etc.) across Canada.

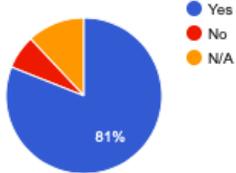
Data Analysis

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.

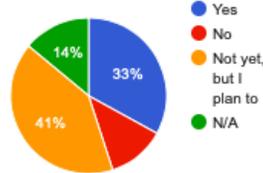
Summary of Poll Findings

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

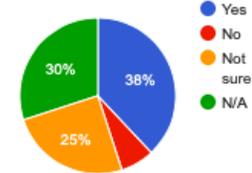
Do you have the capability to implement digital teaching methods during the pandemic?



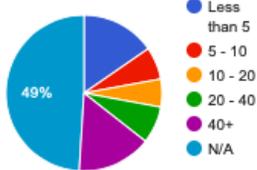
Have you implemented digital teaching methods during the pandemic?



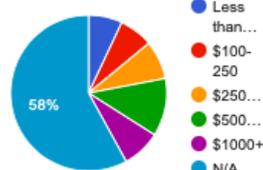
Do you have students who are not able to take part in digital instruction?



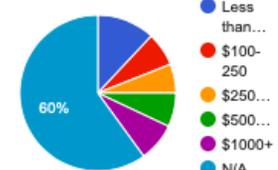
How many of your students will be unable to receive instruction due to social distancing?



Approximately how much arts instruction income PER WEEK are you losing due to social distancing?



If you are a professional artist, approximately how much artistic income are you losing per week?



Poll Results

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

1. Do you have the capability to implement digital teaching methods during the pandemic?
 - a. Yes → 81%
 - b. No → 7%
 - c. N/A → 12%

2. Have you implemented digital teaching methods during the pandemic?
 - a. Yes → 33%
 - b. No → 12%
 - c. Not yet but I plan to → 41%
 - d. N/A → 14%

3. Do you have students who are not able to take part in digital instruction?
 - a. Yes → 38%
 - b. No → 7%
 - c. Not sure → 25%

- d. N/A → 30%
4. How many of your students will be unable to receive instruction due to social distancing?
- a. Less than 5 → 15.4%
 - b. 5-10 → 6.7%
 - c. 10-20 → 5.8%
 - d. 20-40 → 7.7%
 - e. 40+ → 15.4%
 - f. N/A → 49%
5. Approximately how much arts instruction income PER WEEK are you losing due to social distancing?
- a. Less than \$100 → 7%
 - b. \$100-250 → 7%
 - c. \$250-500 → 8%
 - d. \$500-1000 → 12%
 - e. \$1000+ → 8%
 - f. N/A → 58%
6. If you are a professional artist, approximately how much artistic income are you losing per week?
- a. Less than \$100 → 12%
 - b. \$100-250 → 7%
 - c. \$250-500 → 6%
 - d. \$500-1000 → 7%
 - e. \$1000+ → 8%
 - f. N/A → 60%

Summary of Discussion Findings

Participants expressed how happy they were to come together and have a platform to discuss ideas and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted them and their work. Many artists and organizations mentioned that they had to cancel events, lessons, fundraisers, and projects. By doing so, a few participants had concerns about finances and engaging with students and community members. Participants explained programs they have been using to connect with others, Zoom being the most popular tool. They also described how they were sustaining their work by posting online and offering programming remotely. Others described ways they have been using the arts to engage their communities, such as placing artwork in their windows and creating online challenges that promote creativity. Finally, suggestions for CNAL for the future included arts advocacy and reaching out to government, as well as providing resources and webinars for professional development in the digital age.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Professional Impact

- Across Canada, many events and fundraisers have been cancelled or postponed
 - Theatres in Saskatchewan and Ontario, for example, have had to cancel their seasons
 - Some performances were cancelled one week before opening
- In-person programs have been cancelled
- Small businesses and organizations feel like they are being overlooked when it comes to government help
- Many artists and organizations stated that they have lost a lot of money
 - A dance studio in Saskatchewan had to cancel a fundraiser in March which helps them raise about 1/3 of their fundraising for the year
 - Rentals that have been pre-paid are cancelled, resulting in loss of money
 - Employees have been laid off due to lack of finances
 - A few art schools, such as in Quebec, have refunded parents for classes that have been cancelled
 - One theatre company from Alberta have cancelled their touring shows and have suffered monetary losses
- People are “scrambling” to put their programs or lessons online
 - Trying to brainstorm ways of moving festivals and events online
- Teachers have had to move to e-learning
- Contracts being cancelled or postponed for independent artists
- Teachers are unable to return to schools to retrieve anything from their classrooms, such as technology to help students
- Artists and arts organizations feeling under pressure to provide content during this time
- Artists are trying to decide if performances should continue this summer and figuring out how to plan for those

- Parents have stopped registering their children for summer camps with arts organizations
- A few artists, in Quebec for example, had been taking professional development classes prior to the pandemic and have been able to convert their work online
- Artists have exhibitions at galleries that are not being seen by the public, and they are unable to get their artwork back
- Markets are cancelled, affecting artists who sell their works there
- Schedules for performances and exhibitions have been shifted
- Freelance artists are still able to continue their work from home
- Many artists, such as those in London, Ontario, have been working longer days since they have been working from home
- New organizations, such as Creative Industries North Bay Inc., have closed their venues and do not have a lot of financial support
- A music school in Toronto stated that their numbers in enrolment will be dropping in the near future with 30-50 students that they know of discontinuing
 - Other arts educators claimed that they were also seeing a decrease in numbers as students and families are unable to afford lessons anymore
- Organizations have had to develop contingency plans for future events and conferences, with the possibility of making them virtual
- Schools in areas such as Manitoba are closed until September
- Teachers are busy gathering resources and find which ones are good or not
 - However, there is not enough time to go through all the programs
- An organization from the Francophone discussion mentioned that while their permanent staff are working from home, they have had to lay off all contractual staff
- A writer and artist in schools from the Francophone discussion commented that their projects in schools are in jeopardy
 - Found that it is a challenge to offer “living arts” (done in person) through digital means

Personal Impact

- Many people are concerned and feeling uncertain of the future
 - There has been a lot of anxiety over everything, such as money and the future
- Some artists have stated that they are using this time to create art and work on new projects
- Participants stated that they appreciated having a platform to talk about the pandemic and its effects as they feel like they *need* to discuss it
 - A few people exclaimed that talking about their emotions help them not to feel isolated
- Many people have concerns about the family and friends during this time
 - They are not physically close to their family and are unable to check on them
 - Some people have family members who are in poor health

- A few artists have stated that they or one of their family members have lost all their income and are worried financially about the future
- Participants stated they are stressed about their work and stressed about the current situation
- One participant stated that they experienced a “bit of a grieving process” after giving up work and cancelling events
- Artists are using painting or other distractions as a way to escape from the stress
- Many said that having and keeping a routine has been beneficial to keeping themselves grounded
- Participants stated that they are missing personal contact
- A few artists mentioned that they felt a rush of energy to reach out to people and provide content online
 - However, some artists expressed already feeling burned out
 - A couple of participants said that they can forget about the situation for a while, but then feel scared and vulnerable later in the day
- Many people expressed the importance of finding the balance between work and home
 - Taking care of physical and mental health is just as important as working
 - One artist in Quebec expressed, “See it more as a marathon, not a sprint”
- People are taking this time to connect with family through Zoom and sing songs to each other to help alleviate stress
- Artists and educators are using this time to adapt to the new situation and explore new online platforms
- People are noticing the importance of sustaining the arts during a time of crisis
 - Families are watching movies, listening to music, or painting with their children
- Teachers are finding it difficult not being with their students
- Participants stated that they are feeling overwhelmed with all the information that is being thrown at them
- People are trying to reach out to their other artist friends to see how they are coping
- Many people acknowledged the efforts put in by teachers to help their students
- For those who are working from home with young kids, there is pressure to still make deadlines and get work done

Sustaining Work during the Pandemic

- Organizations such as the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance are sending surveys to artists and arts organizations to determine the impact of COVID-19
 - Using this data to support advocacy at the provincial and federal level
- Teachers are offering online one-on-one lessons, such as music lessons
- Organizations such as the Kingston Arts Council in Ontario are planning on hosting roundtable discussions with artists
- Organizations such as Arts Council Wood Buffalo in Alberta have been able to continue their artist-in-residency program using Zoom

- An artist in Saskatchewan mentioned that they bought a document camera, which connects to their computer
 - It is a way for educators to use visuals to explain concepts for online learning
 - It is inexpensive
- Many people have been posting videos on YouTube to keep audiences engaged
 - Artists and educators have been posting instructional videos
 - Having YouTube premieres to showcase projects and videos created by students
 - It was suggested to also set up a viewing party through Facebook where people can make comments and critiques
- The Canadian Federation of Music Teachers launched a special e-festival for students who had festival pieces prepared
 - They still have an opportunity to have their pieces adjudicated and get feedback
- Organizations are offering a lot of free programming at this time to see what people are interested in and trying to get some attention
- Theatre companies and drama teachers have been moving rehearsals online and experimenting with different modes of technology
- One participant mentioned getting a Yeti microphone, a tool that connects to your computer through USB and can record audio work
- Galleries, artists, and organizations have been livestreaming on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram Live, and Snapchat
 - Useful to reach youth
- HowlRound, an online platform for theatre artists across the globe, provides podcasts, which includes moving theatre and performing arts online
- Organizations have been looking at how artists can take workshops online and how to support them going forward
- Organizations are trying to send fees to artists ahead of time, so they are still earning money
- People are looking at benefit packages from the government to see if artists and organizations qualify
- Online toolkits can be found on websites such as smcqeducation.ca
 - Created by Société de musique contemporaine du Québec,
- The Canadian New Music Network is in the process of developing an online hub for creative music activities
 - Though the hub is not ready yet, they are still looking for activities that can be done at home in the meantime
- Dance instructors are providing dance lessons via Zoom
- Artists in Québec and Ontario mentioned Art Hive, a community art studio
 - Galleries, such as the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Ontario, have been hosting Zoom Art Hive sessions for children to create art
- Educators have been learning professional development skills through webinars
- Symphony musicians, such as those from the Winspear Centre in Edmonton, have created Facebook pages to post videos with challenges to keep things positive and audiences engaged

- Organizations mentioned that it has been important to look to their mission statements to keep on track during this time
- Theatre companies, such as some in Ontario, have been wanting to create puppet shows and post skits online
- Schools have been using D2L and Edsby to post resources and assignments online
- A teacher from the Toronto Catholic School Board explained that the board created a portal for students to access materials, but the arts materials are not fully formed
- Organizations have been uploading “micro-teach” videos that allow instructors to post 1-5 minute lessons on anything they choose and give a prompt for writing or creating music
- People have been interested in doing mail art, where they create artwork and send it out to friends, families, and colleagues
- An artist in Manitoba discussed monetizing work through platforms such as YouTube and Patreon where you can stream your work
- Artists have suggested reaching out to local media (i.e. papers and online news sources) as they are willing to post good news stories
 - There has been great success with this in communities in Saskatchewan
- Groups such as the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra have put together interactive learning guides geared towards K-12 educators, which include YouTube links, quizzes, and musical exercises
- The Concours de musique du Canada has created a campaign called "Transmets la musique, pas le virus" to help the collective effort, creating "lighter" activities such as the sharing of confinement playlists
- The Québec Ministry of Education has created an online platform called "L'école ouverte" in which resources covering all aspects of the curriculum are shared
 - In order to make some of their activities more accessible and easier to use by parents and children at home, they have worked with education consultants on their content

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>

- BlueJeans
 - Cloud-based meetings and large interactive events that are simple, scalable and secure
- Cisco Webex
 - A video conferencing tool that allows you to share screens, record meetings, and includes a whiteboard to share notes

- Includes free or paid plans
- FaceTime
 - A video communications platform for Apple product users
- 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.
- Internet MIDI (Developed by TimeWarp Technologies)
 - Useful for long distance teaching and performing, specifically for music instruction. Users are able to connect MIDI instruments together over the internet for music lessons and rehearsals
 - The app provides an on-screen keyboard with animated keys and pedals
 - Able to access it for free through Conservatory Canada
- 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
- My Music Staff
 - Teacher software for private music teachers and music schools. Students are able to access resources and lessons online at any time. Instructors are able to schedule lessons and groups, take attendance, and manage their finances
 - Studio online service that helps with every aspect of running your music school
 - Does cost a fee per month
- Seesaw Learning Inc.
 - A platform for students to share their work and create a portfolio to share with their peers. Parents are able to see their child's work and leave comments to encourage them.
- Skype
 - Built for both one-on-one and group conversations and functions via mobile, PC, Xbox and Alexa
 - Issues with Skype:
 - Time delays
- Slack
 - An online collaboration tool. Conversations occur in channels, which are organized by topic, project, or team.
- TeamViewer
 - An application used for desktop sharing in online meetings, web conferencing, and allows users to transfer files between computers
- WhatsApp

- Messaging platform that allows users to send text messages, make calls, and share images
- Used to message people across the country or around the world for free
- WizIQ
 - Cloud-based education platform to access teaching and training modules
 - Set up for a more traditional classroom environment
- 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
 - A suggestion was made to record sessions, putting them onto a USB and mailing it out
 - Artists have been trying to connect with Zoom to make it accessible for ASL learners
 - Issues with Zoom:
 - Lag when trying to rehearse shows or do music lessons
 - Excludes rural and Indigenous communities.

Community Support Initiatives during the Crisis

- A dance teacher in Saskatchewan offered to be an artist-in-residence in people's homes through online technology to help children with the arts and movement
- Artists have been coming together to discuss the pandemic and create art, allowing them to "blow off steam"
 - People have also been creating chat groups to people who have been dealing with mental health issues
- An artist in Saskatchewan created a blog as a way to respond to people sending them artful renderings surrounding how they are responding to the situation
- Teachers have been sending videos to parents to show their children as way to show that they are thinking about them
- Organizations and artists are connecting with other communities to collaborate and support one another
- The Atlantic Centre for Creativity has created a series of videos to share what creative things people are doing
- An artist in Québec has been placing their artwork in their windows for people to view as they walk by the house
- Artists, such as a dance instructor in Québec, has been considering offering dance performances outside homes
 - Indigenous healing dances
- One artist started offering art classes for children and adults through Zoom and created The Doodle Challenge
 - People submit their doodles, and the artist will make an artwork once the pandemic is over

- Galleries, such as Arts Etobicoke, have been creating 3D virtual tours of their spaces to publish on their websites
 - Arts Etobicoke also has an interactive program called “Be the Curator” where visitors to the website are able to curate their own shows by selecting and dragging artworks that they would have liked to have seen
- People are putting teddy bears in the windows for children to spot, while others have been putting up their Christmas lights
- One musician in Alberta stated that they want to start band practices with their neighbours in their driveways
- The Young People’s Theatre in Toronto has created a series called “Inside with Imagination”
 - Staff have been uploading two-minute videos recorded on their phones or laptops to film drama games that families can do indoors
- Choir! Choir! Choir! is a drop-in singing event based in Toronto
 - It has been moved to an online platform and it is a way for people to sing songs and have fun
- Online dance parties have been a way to keep people moving and entertained
 - Ecstatic Dance Movement
- Artists posting videos to TikTok to engage youth
- Artists have been recording videos with their families, such as one artist in Manitoba, who uploaded a video for sound healing meditation
 - They have also used this as a way to ask for donations if people wish to support
- In British Columbia, one participant mentioned that they had put together a flash mob performance in the parking lot of their local care home, where they stood two meters apart. Residents opened their windows or sat on their balconies to enjoy the performance
- Organizations, such as those in British Columbia, have been posting challenges online to help people in the community stay positive
- People have been watching performances online with friends via FaceTime
 - They have also dressed up as they would if they were actually going to the theatre.

Questions and Concerns

- Many artists across the country have been concerned about trying to connect with students who may not have access to online resources
 - How do you reach those that don’t have the same access?
- How can organizations pay people who work on contracts?
- Artists, educators, and organizations are unable to reach out to rural and Indigenous communities
 - Trying to find innovative ways to connect with those communities
- With so much content going online now, artists and organizations are feeling pressure to feel relevant
- People are concerned about the long-term impact on programs and projects

- If content is moved online, will this cause a permanent change in how everyone sees and experiences the arts?
- There are some concerns about the aftereffects of the pandemic
 - Will audiences be shy to return to public spaces?
 - One artist suggested giving incentives to gather people in groups again, such as galleries uploading artwork on social media and having a scavenger hunt for people to find the artwork in the space
- Some artists, such as those in the Atlantic provinces, are trying to find a balance between free and paid programming
 - Some artists do not feel comfortable asking people for money during this time, but others are concerned about their income
 - How do you attach value to something that is already being offered for free?
- What is the role of artists and the arts as we navigate out of this crisis?
- A participant from Ontario expressed the concern about the fallout due to trauma
 - How do we as artists get in front of that now?
- Musicians across the country have been struggling to find a platform to use for rehearsals
 - One choral teacher in Québec has been looking into using Zoom for rehearsals to see students, but using multiplayer video game channels for audio
 - A vocal instructor in Toronto has been putting tracks into a dropbox. The student is then in charge of turning the music on and off and they are still performing with the accompaniment
- Educators and organizations are becoming overwhelmed by people signing up for online lessons that they have had to wait-list students as they do not have enough staff
- Teachers have sometimes found teaching online challenging due to lack of quality from programs such as Skype and Google Hangouts
- How do we consolidate online resources in a manner that is not overwhelming?

General suggestions for CNAL

- Have more discussions like this series for artists to discuss ideas and feelings
- Continue to gather resources for digital platforms and sources of funding
- Provide a platform or look into ways that will help artists and educators on digitalizing their work
 - Many people expressed they were not prepared before the pandemic
- Advocate for the arts by talking with government officials
 - One artist in Ontario discussed the possibility of bringing back the Children's Arts Tax Credit
 - Advocacy for STEAM programs rather than STEM
- Find ways to document the specific losses from artists/organizations during the pandemic
 - I.e. cancellations, loss of money, etc.

- Provide this document to the government to give them a sense of how people are being impacted
- Provide webinars for artists and organizations
 - Grant writing
 - Help in navigating through the process
 - Media literacy
 - Critical thinking
- Promote new organizations and projects/events that are coming up