



THE COUNCIL OF ONTARIO **DRAMA** AND **DANCE** EDUCATORS

**Drama and Dance: Creative Community
in the time of COVID**

**Reopening Schools in Ontario in
September 2020**

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PREAMBLE

CODE builds our drama and dance leadership, advocacy work and resources on our guiding beliefs and principles. Our primary principle is to do what we say we will do. All the words that follow are meaningless if we do not act on them. Self-reflection and self-improvement as an organization are essential to our work. [CODE'S Mission Statement](#)

We are asking school boards to take time to reflect on what will be done as schools prepare to reopen. In crisis situations, educators feel a pressure to jump in and make, adapt, and cope. That is what we did this March, and it has been compounded by the social and racial upheaval we are witnessing in the world. We have been shaken up. And now, to build a strong foundation for schools to reopen, we need to take a breath and consider the 'big ideas' of what we really want to do, what education is for, and how we need to support our students. In [a recent webinar](#), New Zealand drama professor Peter O'Connor quoted [Neil Gaiman's description](#) of what he called "the pause" of our breath:

It doesn't feel like real time. Normally, we breathe in and we breathe out, and we never notice the beat between the breath. Right now we are living in the place between the inhalation and the exhalation, existing in the pause. This is where we are right now after three and a half months of coping and somehow creating as quickly as possible, and right now we are barely breathing.

This is what CODE is taking time to reflect upon before beginning the hard work of creating useful resources to support schools reopening. We urge school boards to take a pause to reflect and lay a solid foundation for the education of our students in the fall.

In this document, we are sharing some big ideas about the role of both drama and dance, as well as already existing CODE resources for you to consider while you plan and while CODE begins its resource writing this summer.

CODE SUPPORT FOR ONTARIO SCHOOL BOARDS

CODE is offering to liaise with school board summer writing teams involving drama and dance messaging so that each school board is not working in isolation. CODE is willing to host all drama and dance resources that boards create, giving full credit, and making them available on our website.

We have CODE board members in the following boards:

- Bluewater DSB
- Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB
- Hamilton-Wentworth DSB
- Hastings and Prince Edward DSB
- Lakehead DSB
- Near North DSB (North Bay)
- Peel DSB
- Toronto Catholic DSB
- Toronto DSB
- Trillium-Lakelands TDSB.

We have almost 1000 CODE members across the province. Please email president@code.on.ca to receive the name and email for CODE board members teaching in your board or contact any of our [CODE BOARD MEMBERS](#) based on their role on our board.

We have seven CODE regions across the province, each with a varying number of boards depending on geography and population. Each Region has a Regional Committee chaired by the Regional Coordinator who is a CODE board member with a vote. We are inviting one drama and one dance teacher to represent each board and share their local news and issues with their Regional Coordinator to make their vote more inclusive. Every Regional Coordinator has a Facebook group for teachers in the region to encourage online discussion that includes pedagogy and philosophy as well as practical considerations. In April, each of our Regional Coordinators posted a short video on their Facebook pages highlighting a CODE resource that worked well for Distance Learning. [REGIONS, VIDEOS AND FACEBOOK PAGES](#)

ADDRESSING TRAUMA AS WE RETURN TO OUR SCHOOLS

❖ **Actively support and respect Indigenous students and teachers.**

Focus on unlearning and relearning our history, challenging systemic racism and injustice wherever it exists, and teaching drama and dance without appropriation.

Please use our [In A Good Way Resource](#) and [CODE'S Call to Action](#). CODE works in active and respectful partnership with the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Association of Ontario www.fnmieao.com

❖ **Use the power of drama and dance to make positive change in classrooms and communities, locally and globally.**

*Recently CODE completed a two-year review of all of its resources, some dating back to the 1990s, with a focus on equity and current pedagogy. We have removed problematic resources and identified those which require revision. We continue to create new resources and respond to immediate social justice needs. [Black Lives Matter](#)
Many of our on-line resources deal with social justice issues.
[Social Justice through Social Media](#)*

❖ **Become deeply familiar with the drama and dance curriculum.**

Although our arts curriculum was last revised in 2009, it has become a model for countries around the world such as Australia. Dance as an art is not only about learning steps, just as math is not limited to adding and subtracting. It is about creating movement to communicate ideas with your body. All of us, regardless of body size, shape, flexibility, strength and coordination can speak with our bodies. Dance as an art focuses on creative process, critical thinking and the sharing of feelings and ideas. “Embodied learning” is when the body, mind and soul are all actively engaged at the same time. [Elementary Scope and Sequence Dance](#)

Drama is not imitation of the superficial or always putting on a performance. It is about role-playing, students speaking their truth, and bringing stories to life. It is about exploring issues and problems, solutions and possibilities. The pedagogy of drama in education is connected deeply to theatre, but drama in our classrooms is about so much more than “putting on a play”. [Elementary Scope and Sequence Drama](#)

❖ **Engage in personal reflection about dance and drama before you begin planning to avoid bias and misconceptions.**

For example, the ability to stop climate change is not exclusively dependent on STEM subjects. We will not save the world by focusing with laser-like focus on science, technology, engineering and math without also developing highly refined creative imaginations honed to explore all possibilities. We will need personal and social

responsibility to implement what we invent. The only way to move forward together after COVID is to ensure that students have access to all of the ways of knowing and experiencing the world.

Recognize that there is bias within the arts. All board documents on the well-being and social and emotional health of returning students should include all four of the arts in the curriculum, not just one or two of them. **Explore whether or not the arts are equally resourced in your school board and are supported equitably by Instructional Leaders and/or Consultants.**

There will be critics of arts education...actually they are not just concerned about the arts, they actually fear the arts. They fear that the arts are not rigorous enough [and if not qualified] will deliver arts education in a half-hearted way passing on those values that the arts are not important and a waste of time. (Eric Jensen, 1998)

Children will embed those values systems into their own psyche so that when entering high school they will choose arts classes with the mistaken belief that 'this will be a bird course' and I don't need to do much to get a high grade. However in the hands of a qualified teacher, students will quickly learn that arts classes are indeed rigorous and equally demanding as our conventional academic disciplines. (Carmelina Martin, Dance and Drama Educator, 2014)

❖ **Embrace social and emotional learning by ensuring the classroom is an emotionally and socially safe space.**

A primary focus of drama and dance teachers is to ensure that the classroom is safe emotionally and socially for all students. We know that our students are only truly safe when the most vulnerable students feel safe. When they feel secure, they can engage deeply in the creative process, explore their emerging thoughts and feelings, share their critical thinking, and respond supportively to the ideas and work of their classmates. The complex emotional world of the students can be safely explored through being one step removed by the safety of being in role in both dance and drama.

“Social-Emotional Learning is a process being prioritized across the globe intended to provide students with the knowledge, attitude and skills needed to understand and manage emotions, to confront challenges and make responsible decisions by being self-aware, socially aware and confident—in essence, preventative mental healthcare.”
SEL, 2020

❖ **Be sure to develop community building activities for use as you begin to work together again.**

Drama and dance will be particularly useful for helping teachers recreate community in their classrooms and to support their students. Develop safe ways of greeting one

another, showing support for one another, and managing the complex range of post isolation emotions with new practices and routines. There are community building resources on our website.

[Building A Classroom Community Through Character Education](#)

Grade 1 Drama

In this unit, students will participate in a variety of drama activities that explore the Character Education traits of Kindness, Respect, and Empathy. Students will tell personal stories and use tableau and movement to represent these stories and examples of these traits. Students and teacher will engage in whole group *role play to problem solve and explore the perspectives of other characters to deepen their understanding of kindness, friendship and helping others.*

❖ **Follow the money.**

Our economy has suffered greatly during social isolation and many students will have experienced this first-hand. Others may remain completely unaware. There are eleven Financial Literacy dance and drama resources on our website. These two may be useful for self-reflection as well for classroom teaching of dance and drama.

[Financial Literacy and Inequities in the Distribution of Wealth](#)

Grade 4 Drama and Financial Literacy

Through role play, students will experience the patterns of the distribution of wealth and privilege and examine the inequities and injustices that this economic structure produces. While in role, students will explore the challenges that cultural/political leaders face in trying to distribute wealth, as well as what they as citizens can do to work toward creating a more just economic system.

[Financial Literacy and Making Choices](#)

Grade 5 Dance and Financial Literacy

Using a variety of resources, students will explore the impact and implications of personal choices. They will consider the media's role in the choices people make. Students will use the elements of dance in a movement piece to communicate the power of addiction and addictive behaviour.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

CODE has already developed Distance Education resources in collaboration with the York Region Arts consultants for ARTSECO (The Arts Education Consultants of Ontario) and these are posted on our website. [Elementary Resources](#) [Secondary Resources](#)

We posted resources for parents when schools first closed and these provide useful links for teachers engaged in distance education. [Elementary](#) [Secondary](#)

Visit [CODE YouTube](#) to watch drama and dance classes in action or learn about a resource easily adaptable for distance learning.

RETURNING TO OUR CLASSROOMS

Already started....

CODE is currently preparing support documents for all teachers with an emphasis on those that use both drama and dance integrated into the teaching of other subjects in elementary classrooms. This work is focused on providing concrete instructional strategies and lesson plans appropriate for social distancing and restricted classroom space. These will be made available in early August. We have five groups already working on these resources, creating them by division:

- Primary
- Junior
- Grades 7 and 8
- Secondary Dance
- Secondary Drama

Each group will focus on adapting our favourite CODE resources, community building games and instructional strategies to **accommodate social distancing**. We will look at the practical arrangement of space for movement and activities for drama and dance while seated at a desk or standing beside it or in a drama or dance studio. We will focus on supporting classroom safety practices in the time of COVID.

ELEMENTARY INTEGRATED TEACHING

Drama and Dance

One of the most positive safety realities for the teaching of drama and dance is that few materials are needed by our elementary teachers. What will be used most often by classroom teachers is no different than for most subjects. Because costumes and props are not essential for classroom work, relatively little or no equipment requires cleaning or sharing.

The biggest challenges for elementary teachers working with drama and dance will be the same ones they will face for most subjects: creating social distance and maintaining it in their classrooms while engaging their students in their learning. Having said that, drama takes place primarily in the imagination through creative and critical thinking and can help to make sitting in desks for longer periods of time more palatable. Movement can be made smaller and can also be done spread out in the classroom with desks moved to the side. Travelling movements will be defined by the space available. When weather permits, the school yard will provide a safer environment for the students to move around at a distance exploring different energies and ways to move in horizontal space. However, movement on the spot, exploring and creating shapes at different levels, and exploring vertical space and body energies can all be done safely apart in classrooms. Students can learn body control as they develop shapes on the spot to communicate what it is they wish to say through their bodies. Partnering can mean someone as close as 2 metres or as far away as across the room. Groups can use mirroring, breath, and flocking to coordinate their movements from far away. Drama and dance work will be very useful in providing students with more body control and spatial awareness.

Elementary drama and dance is most often used in the teaching of Literacy, Numeracy, Science and Social Studies. Tableaux, role-playing and spoken word are frequently used as drama instructional strategies as are games and activities to physically engage the students as they explore ideas, find solutions to a problem, or develop responses to an inquiry question.

This will be the focus of CODE'S summer resource writing: to adapt existing resources and create new ones to accommodate curriculum expectations while maintaining social distancing.

SECONDARY CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS

Both dance and drama teachers are very much in a similar position. Dance and drama traditionally involve physical contact, extensive movement, touch, and close proximity. The primary challenges for dance and drama in our secondary schools will be ensuring that students are socially distanced as they work and adapting their lessons to accommodate this essential safety practice when schools open.

The following recommendations reflect safe practices, but ultimately teachers are responsible to their local public health authorities, as well as school board, teacher federation, and Ministry of Education policies.

Dance Credit Courses

- Teachers can divide the class into groups that take turns using the space when travel movements are the focus of the work.
- Lifts and other contact work will need to be eliminated or simulated from 2 metres or further apart.
- Composition will be limited by these constraints but the creative challenges this presents can become the focus of dance at this time. For example, working as a group while far apart will become a new and different focus for compositional explorations.
- Distancing is essential because students exert themselves and breathe deeply in dance.
- Students must each have their own water containers that do not require refilling during class time or where refilling is essential, disinfecting the taps must take place.
- Masks may be worn safely in dance class as there will be no physical partnering work.
- Washing of hands will also be very important before and after dance class.

Drama Credit Courses

- Teachers will need to rethink their groupings, engage in more partner and small group work, and use whole class work when movement around the room is not essential to the activity or lesson.
- Speaking is an integral part of Drama. Masks may be worn safely if required but there may be issues with hearing and with breathing behind the mask.
- Distancing is essential because students speak at different volumes and explore the various vocal choices available to communicate character, message and mood. This is especially important if masks are not required by your school and/or school board.
- Students must each have their own water containers that do not require refilling during class time or where refilling is essential, disinfecting the taps must take place.

- Washing of hands will also be very important before and after drama class.

For both Dance and Drama, no shared materials (props and costumes) are absolutely required for classroom work.

- Students should not share clothing or footwear.
- Studios working in small groups will have to be monitored for social distancing and to ensure pens, pencils, phones, computers and other devices often used in drama are not shared.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Classroom Space will be particularly important for both dance and drama studios/rooms. Students do not sit in desks and their movement often includes sitting or lying on the floor or carpet as exists in some drama studios

- Teachers will have to work closely with caretaking and observe school and board sanitation protocols and procedures.
- Dance barres must be disinfected between classes with students positioned in the same location for the entire time working this way. Lessons should be organized to ensure this is possible.
- For dance, change rooms must be limited to one or two students at a time depending on their size and how often they can be sanitized throughout the day. Students may have to arrive to class in their dance clothing.
- Lighting equipment may be used by the teacher to enhance the work but sanitization must take place on lighting boards between classes.
- Sound systems will likely continue to be used but only by the teacher with sanitization taking place after each use.
- Decluttering and reorganizing the classroom/studio/space should take place before schools reopen.

Performances in Dance and in Drama

At this time it is much safer for drama and dance teachers to assume that no performances will take place in front of a live audience.

CODE will be investigating the various practices of our professional Theatre colleagues to better understand the those practices that fit with Ministry and school board requirements as they are finalized over the summer.

CODE ADVOCACY FOR DRAMA AND FOR DANCE

Ontario boards of education need to act forcefully to maintain drama, dance and all the arts as well as Physical and Health Education and Indigenous Studies in our schools in the fall. Please read our joint advocacy letter here. [English](#) [French](#)

CODE believes the following are needed for teachers of drama and dance:

1. To become dance and drama literate to inform instructional and assessment practices.

Every discipline has a language, a specific vocabulary, that allows one to describe and explain what it is they are teaching and observing for assessment purposes. This needs to be a critical component of teacher education so that the dance/drama curriculum documents are accessible and easy to understand. The learning of this very specific vocabulary is necessary to facilitate meaningful assessment practices because teachers need the language of the discipline to scaffold the learning and effectively observe, describe and assess the learning when it is occurring in children.

2. To understand that dance and drama disciplines are forms of embodied learning and cognition

From Eric Jensen [Arts with the Brain in Mind](#):

The Arts as a Major Discipline

If we place value only on higher test scores - and if the test measures only math, problem solving, and verbal skills - the arts are at a clear disadvantage. If we demand quick results, the arts will not supply them. The arts develop neural systems that often take months and years to fine-tune. The benefits, when they appear, will be sprinkled across the spectrum, from fine motor skills to creativity and improved emotional balance.
(p. 1)

Brain Developer

....the arts promote the development of valuable human neurobiological systems. Theories of the brain exist that help us understand what is going on when we do art. The arts enhance the process of learning. The systems they nourish include our integrated

sensory, attentional, cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities, which are, in fact, the driving forces behind all other learning. (p.2)

Can we value the non-academic benefits of the arts?

- *The arts reach students not ordinarily reached, in ways not normally used. This keeps tardiness and truancies and eventually dropouts down.*
- *Students connect to each other better - greater camaraderie, fewer fights, less racism, and reduced use of hurtful sarcasm. (Carmelina Martin, 2014)*
- *The arts change the environment to one of discovery. This can reignite the love of learning in students tired of being filled up with facts.*
- *The arts provide challenges for students at all levels, from delayed to gifted. It's a class where all students can find their own level, automatically.*
- *Arts connect learners to the world of real work where theatre, music, dance, and visual arts have to appeal to a growing consumer public.*
- *Students learn to become sustained, self-directed learners, not a repository of facts from direct instruction for the next high stakes test.*
- *Students of lower socio-economic status gain as much or more from arts instruction than those of higher socio-economic status.*

What Makes the Arts a Major Discipline?

Jensen's criteria to see if the arts can receive a passing grade as a major discipline:

1. **Is the discipline accessible?** *Pass*
2. **Is it brain-based?** *Is it hard-wired in us to do the arts? As it happens, brain research has located anatomical structures dedicated to processing specific art experiences.*
3. **Is it culturally necessary?** *A discipline should serve clear cultural needs. It should promote the betterment of humanity as well as local culture. (p 5)*
4. **What is the down risk?** *Could it hamper learning? There are no known cases that the arts curriculum, taught either integrated or modular, has, by itself, lowered test scores, increased problems, or reduced graduation rates.*
5. **Is the discipline inclusive?** *A discipline cannot be elitist. Can it be learned, if not mastered, by an overwhelming number of students? Research shows that all levels of society can and do participate in the arts. Race, religion, culture, geography, and socioeconomic barriers do not constitute barriers.*
6. **Does it have survival value?** *Is the discipline necessary for the species to survive? Communities survive based not only on their technology, but also on their culture. Art creates, enhances and defines culture...Art making facilitates*

the creation of large, strong communities that embody important values. These communities' values are established and shared through metaphors of the visual, musical, and kinesthetic arts.

7. Is it wide ranging? *The discipline must have sub-disciplines that add breadth, depth and credibility. (pp 4-7)*

The arts, dance and drama in our case, get a passing grade on all these fronts, which means the arts need to be done every day at every grade at every school...not just sometimes...this means we need competent teachers to be able to deliver quality arts programming in either an integrated way or in a modular way - in any case they need to experience each art form to effectively integrate or teach discreetly.

Carmelina Martin, Dance and Drama Educator and founder of PULSE, CODE'S Provincial Student Dance Conference, 2014 CODE Conference Presentation

3. To understand the difference between innovation vs imitation in the field of dance education specifically.

This is a misunderstood art form in the education system even from 'dance people' who have been 'trained' physically in the private studio/conservatory setting. The creativity framework is not well understood in dance and needs modelling and in some cases, re-education, especially if the teacher is a product of poor modelling and experiences in their former elementary and secondary education in dance, even if they received such education which in many cases is still inconsistent provincially. Teachers need to embody their own learning by experientially exploring instructional templates to better understand the creativity framework and this art form.

This month the New Jersey State Board of Education made news by releasing an [Arts Education & Social and Emotional Learning Framework](#) in conjunction with its adoption of the 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standard for Visual and Performing Arts. The framework shows the inherent connection between SEL and the arts, and outlines how educators can effectively incorporate SEL into the arts education curriculum. <https://selarts.org>

This document, like New Zealand's [Te Rito Toi](#), makes it so clear as to why drama and dance and the other arts are necessary for teaching after trauma and for a rigorous and enriched education of our students.

IN CONCLUSION

CODE will continue to emphasize higher level thinking skills, interdisciplinary learning in elementary grades, and the pedagogy of community, such as social relationships, personal and social identity, active listening, and respect for your own body, and for the others in the room. We will focus on creative process and critical thinking and integrate these skills with math, technology, and science work so that our students will be truly ready for what comes next. We continue to give students the opportunity to find their voices, share their thoughts and feelings and work together in a new way.

The content for drama and dance is whatever is important and relevant at the time! In the fall this will include well-being, coping with anxiety, resilience and personal and social responsibility.

We in education must ensure that we also include finding hope and rediscovering a belief that our future can be a good one.

Who better to tackle all of this in our schools than drama, dance, and the arts?

We saw where people turned for comfort when we were in isolation in our homes. The Arts became more important than ever before.

Please ensure that all of the arts remain in your board's classrooms this fall.