

May 27, 2020

Dear Minister Lecce:

The **Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE)** wishes to submit feedback as part of *Ontario's Plan to Reopen Schools*. Our organization, now in its fiftieth year, represents over 1000 dance and drama educators across Ontario who have been engaged in remote learning since March. During this time, we have gained valuable insights from educators and created [resources to support learning from home through dance and drama](#): Parent Resources, Teacher Resources, and [Video Examples](#) that have been shared with the Ministry of Education and Ontario arts consultants (ARTSECO).

CODE has a long history of fruitful collaboration with the Ministry of Education. As the Ministry consults key educational stakeholders, CODE can provide valuable input about the impact reopening schools will have on students across the province, as well as ways to support learning in new contexts. Previous projects CODE has developed with the Ministry of Education include [Think Literacy: Drama and Dance](#), [Curriculum Support for the 2009 Revised Arts Curriculum](#), [Financial Literacy in the Arts](#) resources, the [Learning Through the Arts video series](#), arts-focused [EDUgains resources](#), and the [Ministry-Aga Khan-Museum curriculum project](#). CODE's exemplary work on curriculum projects led to the Ministry of Education commissioning us to create a comprehensive Guide to Developing Curriculum Writing Projects for all subject associations in Ontario.

CODE would welcome the opportunity to bring this expertise to an Education Table or Task Force to examine issues related to the Arts when schools reopen. We can give both practical considerations and speak to the importance of the Arts in supporting students who return to school after a time of crisis. Recently, we shared with you the work of Professor Peter O'Connor of the University of Auckland, a wonderful resource called [Te Rito Toi](#). This bi-cultural resource, created in partnership with Indigenous writers, was inspired by work done with students after the Sichuan earthquake, Christchurch terrorist attack, and Australian bushfires. In it, O'Connor notes that "the arts are central to rebuilding individuals and communities after disaster." We hope that you will watch [Prof. O'Connor's recent webinar](#) for the World Alliance for Arts Education in order to learn more about the ways that countries like Canada can become leaders in this re-envisioning of schooling. We believe that Ontario, which has long been admired around the world for its ground-breaking work in arts education, could once again be at the forefront of this work and would provide an exciting model of collaborative learning in the Arts to other countries around the world.

As part of the plan to reopen Ontario's schools, CODE suggests the following guiding principles to frame learning in, through, and about the Arts:

The health, safety, and well-being of children. The Trillium Lakelands District School Board operates on the idea of "feeding all four," which means attending to students' minds, bodies, spirits, and emotions. Dance and drama are uniquely positioned to work in this area of thinking and feeling, which has been recognized by neurologists such as Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor: "Although many of us may think about ourselves

as thinking creatures that feel, biologically we are feeling creatures who think... and we live in a society that values what we think over what we feel.” (*My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist’s Personal Journey*, 2008)

Social and emotional learning. Educators must develop trauma-informed practice to help students process the crisis they have endured and re-engage with school. Dance and drama, as social art forms, provide a safe place to explore ideas, feelings, and emotions: “We are exquisitely social creatures. Our survival depends on understanding the actions, intentions and emotions of others. Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the minds of others, not through conceptual reasoning but through direct stimulation...by feeling, not by thinking.” (Neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti, *New York Times*, 2006.)

Student engagement and embodied learning. Many students have become disengaged from school during this period of remote learning, which has been largely sedentary, educating students “from the neck up.” Dance and drama educators know that kinesthetic, embodied learning engages students, and can be harnessed to promote learning in other areas such as literacy and numeracy. We need to find innovative and embodied ways to integrate learning and to reframe learning ‘gaps’ as opportunities to work holistically with arts-based approaches. As Valerie Strauss recently noted, “This is an opportunity for ‘new beginnings.’ It is time to implement more movement, not less; more hands-on experiences, not less; and more outdoor playtime, not less.” (“Why kids shouldn’t be forced to sit at desks all day when schools reopen, *The Washington Times*, 2020).

Finally, we are asking the government to work with subject associations like CODE to create **networking opportunities for educators to share the innovative best practices they have learned during remote learning.** CODE has already begun this work through our online resources, and would welcome the opportunity to develop more supports for teachers.

As educators who work in the areas of critical and creative thinking and problem solving, we can potentially transform this crisis into an opportunity to reimagine the ways in which dance and drama can support, strengthen, and inspire our students when schools reopen. We would welcome the opportunity to share this work with your government and to work together on behalf of Ontario students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Deluzio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a stylized "Deluzio".

Jane Deluzio, President, CODE