



Ontario Art Education Association

Visual Arts & Media Arts **Reimagined**: Recommendations for Reopening Schools

Preamble

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the landscape of public education and the lives of countless students, teachers, and their families over these past months. Whether students return to classrooms this September, either full-time or partially, the Ontario Art Education Association's board of directors thought it prudent and timely that some guidance be provided to the provinces' elementary and secondary teachers, as planning is now underway. Maintaining authentic, vibrant, and responsive Visual Arts and Media Arts K-12 programming can play a crucial role in supporting those individuals suffering from trauma, and offering young imaginations a means of expression and control in their daily lives. **The following recommendations reflect best practices, but ultimately must be determined by local public health authorities, as well as school board, teacher federation, and Ministry of Education policies.**

Moreover, these recommendations should be considered with equity and diversity as overriding principles. Considerations regarding access to personal (i.e. home) space and materials may vary for individual students, and will depend on their daily circumstances (i.e. a student may not attend each day, may be residing in multiple households etc.). Offering students choice in media use and approach is considered a best practice in differentiating instruction. Teachers should also maintain a heightened awareness of students' social-emotional wellness during all interactions.

These recommended policies and procedures have been organized under headings which pertain to all elementary and secondary teachers instructing Visual Arts and Media Arts. Additional recommendations, related to secondary curriculum matters, have been included afterwards. Also, attached to this document are suggested strategies for teaching Visual Arts and Media Arts in a distance-learning environment. **This document has been prepared by practicing and specialist Visual Arts and Media Arts educators, under the auspices of OAEA.**

Elementary and Secondary Teachers: General Recommendations

Art Materials and Supply Organization

1. If possible, provide individual students with an art kit so that media and materials are not shared or borrowed. Consider different kit contents, based on frequency of use, budget, and availability. Below are suggestions for "high-touch" supplies, under basic, better, and best categories:

- ▶ Basic kit: pencil, eraser, fine-tipped marker, a sketchbook, watercolour set with brush, coloured pencils, math set (which includes ruler, protractor, compass), crayons, and glue stick;
 - ▶ Better kit: pencil, eraser, fine-tipped & medium markers, sketchbook (multimedia), watercolour set with brush, coloured pencils/watercolour pencils, math set, crayons, glue stick, water-based colour markers;
 - ▶ Best kit: pencil set (HB, 2B, 4B), eraser, shading stick, fine & medium markers (all colours), sketchbook (multimedia), watercolour set with brush, coloured pencils/watercolour pencils, math set, crayons, glue stick, oil/water-based pastels, brayer & tube of block-printing ink
2. Supplies should be dictated by curriculum expectations and authentic assessment. The potential for integrated instruction, aligning subject requirements in the elementary curriculum, and reducing costs could dictate a whole-school approach to organizing students' supplies. Parents or caregivers should be fully informed about essential supplies to ensure equity and access for all students.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Tools, Materials, and Classroom Spaces

1. Teachers must strictly adhere to new Ministry of Education protocols, as well as established school board health & safety policies: which activities are allowed, based on students' ages, maturity, and wellness; materials prohibited in primary and middle school grades, etc.
2. Only those cleaning/disinfecting products permitted by your school board can be used in classrooms. Commercially available products (e.g. spray cleaners, disinfectant wipes) are prohibited due to health and safety standards.
3. Allow for more transition time for cleaning, before and after lessons. School-based decisions and negotiations will become necessary in collaborating with custodial staff, building manager, and administration with regards to cleaning/disinfecting degree and frequency.
4. To facilitate efficient cleaning, declutter and reorganize your classroom; remove any non-essential materials, books, hardware, and resources. This will make desk, table, and counter surfaces easier to clean. (For senior elementary teachers with dedicated visual arts spaces, see below "Managing studio space..." under Secondary School Curriculum and Instruction Considerations.)
5. Limit available supplies to only what is required for a particular class or lesson.

Storage of Artworks

1. Reduce contact as much as possible with student work by maintaining portfolios, for storage.
2. Have students use sketchbooks for most of their 2D work. These should be retained by students or, for easier access, stored in the classroom.
3. The use of digital portfolios can alleviate space restrictions and a lack of curatorial or evaluation time that teachers may have during the day. Teachers can assist students in compiling their digital portfolio, where completed artwork is photographed, then sent home the same day. Standard permission would have to be acquired from parents/care-givers. Teachers could post students' work to an online art gallery site or shared via approved social media.
4. Incomplete artworks could immediately be posted, on a bulletin board or temporary clothesline, to store/display until the next class.

Curriculum Design and Modifications

1. Have multiple plans available and be flexible with instructional strategies. Favourite lessons or units may have to be modified or postponed because of concerns related to shared supplies, collaboration, and high-touch materials.

2. In elementary grades, the potential for integrated learning across disciplines remains an effective means for engaging students through real-world problem solving and thematic instruction. New COVID-19 protocols and constraints may make arts integration, even arts-based teaching, a more viable pedagogical approach. As well, reshaping secondary classes through integrated instruction—combining one or more subject areas—is certainly a feasible alternative, and promotes the type of complex and authentic learning that happens outside of schools.
3. Purchase or have students create sketchbooks to use for most 2D task planning and some final solutions; mixed-media quality paper would be ideal. Sketchbooks can remain in the student’s possession and would have to be evaluated in the classroom, rather than taken home by the teacher.
4. Use art portfolios to record students’ problem-solving process and keep their work separate from others.
5. Offering students choice in media and approach is best practice in differentiating instruction. Choice allows teachers and students to honour authentic learning processes and value intrinsic motivation.
6. Video recordings or screen-casts of short lessons or demonstrations can make more efficient use of instructional time and create conditions for individualized attention.

Teacher Health and Safety

1. Follow school board and teacher federation policies/recommendations pertaining to PPE, cleaning/sanitizing protocols, physical distancing, attendance & contact tracing, etc. These are in addition to health and safety operating procedures already in place.
2. Keep a couple of “emergency” lesson plans on file, in case of illness (COVID-19, or otherwise).

Instructional Changes

1. Handouts or class sets of textbooks will be unavailable. Instead, task instructions should be written on a white board, chart paper or digitally projected and/or recorded for students.
2. Some students may attend regularly, while others may experience disruptions to their attendance for a variety of reasons, including those related to illness. Draw upon your best improvisational teaching skills and always be responsive to individual student’s circumstances. Incorporate opportunities for whole class or small-group review and catch-up as a routine.
3. Collaborative activities (e.g. murals, sculpture installations, puppetry, some art-based games) need to be reconsidered as solitary tasks, given physical distancing requirements. This also includes instructional groupings or cooperative learning strategies as potential health hazards. In place of physical collaboration, consider how technological tools and templates (e.g. GoogleDocs, Jamboard) can promote cooperative learning. Various digital software programs and/or apps may further supplement instruction in this area.
4. Mobile or “art-on-a-cart” teaching, especially in senior elementary schools, may need to be implemented if students are to remain in isolated cohorts. This would minimize the number of tools and spaces that need to be regularly cleaned/sanitized.
5. Social sharing of art responses or works-in-progress (i.e. walk-about, think-pair-share, student-created displays) might not be possible due to physical distancing. In fact, students leaving their seats to retrieve supplies or even sharpen a pencil will need to be regulated. (See #3 above)

6. Dedicated visual arts rooms will need to be reorganized to accommodate physical distancing guidelines. Rows, rather than groupings of tables, will become the norm. Clear access to sinks for hand washing should be available. It is likely that students will be required to remain in their seats for the duration of a class or instructional period.
7. Teachers may have to assume greater responsibility as “studio technicians” because communally-handled equipment (e.g. pottery wheel, etching press, class computer, pencil sharpener, 3D printers) will either have to be operated by the teacher or removed from use. For instance, substitute individual plastic hand-sharpener for the communal pencil sharpener. In other cases, equipment may require cleaning/sanitizing after each use.
8. Assessment for learning strategies become even more significant, given that student attendance may be sporadic and curriculum content may need to be scaled back. Although all students should strive to meet curriculum expectations, these unprecedented pandemic circumstances may mean that projects or tasks are only partially completed. However, if assessment is based on triangulation of learning evidence (i.e. written, conversational & observational), the emphasis on evaluating a finished product becomes less critical.

Secondary School Curriculum & Instruction Considerations

1. **Managing studio space** will be key in visual arts classrooms, computer labs, and specialized studios. Arranging desks/tables to meet physical distancing guidelines may require: eliminating surfaces, reconfiguring seating, removing other furniture and extraneous equipment. For digital/media art facilities, additional cables and electrical connections may be required for rearranging work stations; video editing suites or small darkrooms may only allow for one user at a time. Students should be prohibited from any teacher prep or storage rooms adjoining classrooms. Specialized studios (e.g. ceramics/sculpture, video production) will require equally stringent modifications in order to meet with COVID-19 protocols.
2. **Equipment use and protocols** should emphasize solitary use of materials at all times. Where possible, students should bring their own equipment such as laptop computers, tablets, cameras and smartphones to support digitally-based assignments. Social distancing and sanitizing protocols outlined by school boards should be adhered to in all instances where equipment is shared.
3. **Curriculum and instruction for Special Series Courses** may need to be adapted, modified or wholly rethought, given COVID-19 protocols and restrictions. Examples: (a) in a ceramics course, clay recycling would have to be abandoned, individuals should receive their own clay block for hand-building, and shared equipment (e.g. pottery wheels, banding wheels, slab roller), if used, will require cleaning after each user; (b) photography classes that are not entirely digital, will have to make accommodations for solitary or distanced darkroom use; (c) sculpture materials that release dust or other particulates should be avoided altogether as they can irritate respiratory systems; (d) video productions, using student performers, will have to adhere to new protocols for performing arts, developed for dance/drama (i.e. see CODE).

School-wide Events or Actions

1. **Art exhibitions**, to celebrate student’s creative output, can transfer to your school’s website, posted to a class webpage or as an online presentation. Teach students about curating and writing descriptive artist statements. Ensure that media release forms are completed and abide by board privacy policies.

2. **Photo and video shooting on school premises** can continue as long as students are encouraged to shoot in an outdoor space, rather than indoors. Where possible, students should bring their own equipment (e.g. laptops, tablets, cameras and/or smartphones) to support their digitally-based assignments. Protocols about physical distancing should always be followed.
3. **Performance production activities** (e.g. sets, props) for dance/music/theatre should be assigned to individuals, rather than groups, to control access and ensure physical distancing. Schedule work to limit the number of students actively participating at one time. If possible, have students use individual art supplies to avoid cross-contamination.
4. **Collaborative public art projects** (e.g. murals, outdoor installations) can be adapted and should highlight “working together,” even when physically apart. Planning can be accomplished through digital means. Schedule work to limit the number of students actively participating at one time. If possible, have students use individual art supplies to avoid cross-contamination.
5. **Whole-school wellness** can put into service visual art and media art as powerful tools, with the potential to positively impact student mental health, beyond regular visual arts units or classrooms. Art making has assumed a significant role during this period of COVID-19 management. Where possible, it can infuse different subject areas or drive a whole-school (actual or virtual) wellness program. Visual or media arts teachers might seize opportunities to lead or act as catalysts. In secondary schools, connecting with guidance counsellors and Student Success teams may be beneficial in moving forward with any arts-based wellness initiatives. (Although teachers of visual or media arts are not trained art therapists, they can use recognized, inventive strategies that permit students to reflect on and represent their emotions, anxieties, and traumas.)

Distance-Learning Tips *

1. **Distance learning requires adaptability, modification, and a flexible mindset.** Establish regular online meetings, set clear expectations, and keep lessons current and authentic. Prepare lessons in advance and plan to be nimble in the moment, in order to provide both group and individualized instruction as well as in-time feedback and redirection.
2. **Encourage students to create a dedicated space** in which to do artwork/school work. Larger families will have a more difficult time providing space for everyone. Suggest a dedicated area of the kitchen or using green painter’s tape to mark off personal “studio space.”
3. **Engage students with meaningful tasks/projects** and ensure that corresponding artists and techniques are relevant to their lives. Include work that is reflective of students’ cultural backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Challenge them with new perspectives.
4. **Be flexible** in allowing students to take the assignment in another direction and to express their views, interests, and feelings. Be that positive and accepting place where students can express their insecurities, mourn their losses, and express what they’re going through. Visual arts and media arts can provide a safe space for social-emotional learning.
5. **Make family participation an important component.** Assignments that include student choice and voice will allow for scaffolding and increased student engagement. When parents are involved because they are excited about the learning, art becomes more important in learning at home. Consider incorporating wellness actions and reflections, as a regular part of subject tasks, for both individual and whole family responses.

6. **Provide valuable and timely feedback;** don't obsess over grades. Assessment will look very different. Students still require ongoing feedback and will benefit from encouragement and validation, based on the evidence within their work. Be prepared to provide redirection, and to help them process their reflections and feelings. Also remember, if assessment is based on triangulation of evidence (i.e. written, conversational & observational), the emphasis on evaluating a completed final product becomes less critical.
7. **Allow students to showcase their work** and accomplishments, to celebrate the art in their daily lives. Not every assignment has to be focused on making a finished product. Find ways to celebrate students' successes, whether through virtual exhibitions or individual conversations. Show students how to celebrate and apply their artistic knowledge successfully to the everyday: have them go outside to identify textures and patterns in nature, find five objects in their homes that exemplify geometric shapes, or take a virtual field trip to an art museum and ask them to write a poem about an inspiring artwork.
8. **Develop a "minimum, better, best" list of art supplies** that can be used in a kit that students can take home. (See "Art Materials and Supply Organization" above)
9. **Re-imagine everyday materials** as home art supplies. Often, students do not have many, if any, art supplies at home. Lessons and projects should be designed with everyday materials, tools, recycled items, etc., as an option. This is a great opportunity to teach students how to problem solve around an obstacle, just as many professional artists do in their practice.
10. **Create visually compelling worksheets,** videos, and materials to grab your students' attention, using content that is streamlined and succinct. Instead of providing text-based instructions, create images, diagrams, and videos to explain processes.
11. **Streamline your resources.** Limit the number of documents and resources your students have to manage by streamlining them. Consider preparing a single document or slide deck for each task, lesson or unit with hyperlinks to additional resources that may be required.
12. **Add clarity and consistency to new routines** and expectations. Adding consistency to your practices and communicating these clearly (i.e. what times of the day or week you post work online, how students can best access resources, how they can best reach you etc.) will alleviate cognitive load and stress for most learners.
13. **Purchase or make student journals/sketchbooks** to document artistic process and idea generation, and to serve as a place to practice technical skills. While these could be purchased, they could also be constructed from loose printer paper between two sheets of construction paper.

* The above section was adapted from "Tips for Teaching Visual Arts and Design in a Distance-Learning Environment," published by the National Art Education Association, May 18, 2020. Used with permission.

Writers: Vanessa Barnett, Michèle Kleinschuck, Suzanne Legacey, Cheryl Mootoo, Bob Phillips, Timea Szoboszlai, & Cyrel Troster | **Editor:** Bob Phillips

OAEA acknowledges that there may be omissions in this document and that information will change during the coming months. This is a living document that may be updated as public health advisories and Ministry of Education guidelines evolve.

For further curriculum and instructional resources, links to the Ministry of Education and other documents, and COVID-19 specific suggestions, consult the [OAEA website](#).