



WEAKNESSES, THREATS, STRENGTHS, LESSONS LEARNED, AND OPPORTUNITIES OF VIRTUAL LEARNING¹

The inherent inequity in access to bandwidth and access to devices with which to participate in virtual learning means that a significant percentage of the population has been excluded from the virtual environment.

WEAKNESSES

The loss of the in-person dynamic:

- The energy of group learning and group dynamics is absent.
- For performances, audience feedback is not possible.
- Given technology constraints, ensembles/group music cannot exist in live format, so many genres that are taught are lost including: jazz improvisation, singing whether in choirs or small group numbers for musicals, and cyphers for hip hop.

Incomplete participation:

- Some students are not participating or are choosing not to share video during a lesson. There are many reasons for this including student shyness, shame, concern about sharing their home environment or how they look, etc... This seems to be a greater issue with middle school students than younger students. Younger students appear to be more active and willing to use their video.
- In many situations, teachers are not allowed to obligate students to turn on their cameras.
- It is difficult for students to focus for the same amount of time on-line as an in-person class.

Some teaching is difficult or impossible online:

- It is very difficult for teachers to help students make physical adjustments online. E.g. fingering for musicians or appropriate body alignment for dancers.
- It is even more difficult to assist students with these technical adjustments when students do not want to turn on their cameras.

¹ The information included in this document comes from students, teachers, teaching artists, parents, community members, non-profit staff and administrators and other stakeholders through participation in focus groups hosted by NJPAC, Evaluation and Community Conversations hosted by Arts Ed Newark, feedback from educators in the Save the Music Foundation grant schools, feedback from students and educators in NJ El Sistema programs, and information that has been received through conversations with members of our community.

Equipment:

- Some students were not able to get art supplies, dance equipment or instruments at home.
- For students who did have their instruments at home, they did not have the tools for proper maintenance. Several teachers commented that reeds broke or strings were out of tune and there was no way to replace/repair.
- Some students do not have the equipment they need for their art form. E.g. Tap Dance - students need a platform to be able to dance on and specific shoes, etc. These could be impossible to acquire for many reasons, financial considerations included.

THREATS

Funding challenges:

- Traditional fundraising models need to change i.e. galas
- Dwindling foundational support
- Focus on health and human welfare
- Insufficient local, state or federal funding

Technology:

- Lack access to technology (computers and internet)
- Lack of training on how use technology and technology best practices (teachers and families)

Changing Priorities:

- Prioritization of health related to Covid-19 and how that might reduce or distract arts learning- due to budget, time etc.

STRENGTHS

Our Virtual Learning Future

The arts remain key to empowering all. During these difficult months, the arts have been a way for students, teachers, parents/guardians - all of us - to release, find joy, and heal.

Connectivity:

- The network is expanding - people are able to connect to and/or have access to people virtually that they do not have access to through in-person.
- Educators/Organizations/Artists are able to reach people that otherwise would not have through in person
- Removing geographic boundaries - people are able to join trainings, PDs, etc... from across the globe. In some cases, the virtual removal of these geographic boundaries enabled participation by people who would otherwise never have been able to participate if the original in-person training had occurred.
- Teaching artists and school teachers have talked about seeing their idols or “great artists” in a conversation on zoom, a virtual meet-and-greet, that would not have been possible in-person. These conversations created a greater sense of connection than would have been possible in a meet-and-greet with these celebrities.

Connection between teachers and students:

- Educators are able to see the home/personal environment of students and vice versa which leads to more understanding.
- Teachers feel that they are getting to know their students better and that in turn, their students are getting to know them better.
- Students see their teachers as people who are also struggling with the pandemic. Everyone's masks come off and there is a shared vulnerability.
- It has been an opportunity to have a window into the lives of students and teachers.

Increased family involvement in student learning process:

- For some students, having guardians/parents at home to assist/facilitate learning has been useful.
- Siblings and/or parents joining in on classes - some teaching artists have started incorporating a "family day" to classes.
- It has been a unique opportunity for teachers to get to know the parents of their students - and it will result in greater connection later on. One teacher said that he will make a greater effort to get to know all of the parents of his students.

Learning in smaller groups:

- The virtual class sizes have been greatly reduced (for some classes) which makes for a better student/teacher ratio.
- Some teachers have been able to reorganize their class schedules in order to have smaller sectionals.
- As a result of the smaller groups, teachers are holding classes when it is more convenient for students. Non-traditional times are being implemented.

Focus on process not product:

- Due to the smaller number of students, the focus for most teachers has moved from the pressure to perform to the quality of the work: to the craft, the art form itself. Teachers have found it extremely positive not having to create a product (the spring recital) and instead being able to focus on the artistry, form and technique. Given that this has been one of the significant positive takeaways from the virtual experience, this should be instituted in all programs going forward. The focus should be on student learning not on the final product.
- Teachers are able to do more one-on-one/ private lessons whenever students want them scheduled (i.e.: child ends school at 3pm, parents don't get home until 5pm, available to provide private lesson from 4pm-5pm)
- With the ability to mute students, a teacher can work one-on-one with a student and have other students practicing their art form individually while on mute during class time in a way that they cannot in the traditional classroom (particular application to music)

Less focus on classroom management:

- It is a lot easier to not have to deal with a student causing a disruption or everyone talking over each other when you can control muting everyone.

LESSONS LEARNED

What Teachers and Teaching Artists Should Continue to Do

Making videos on how to practice specific art forms:

- These are resources that students, teachers, and parents can refer back to when studying/practicing.
- Allows for students' different learning styles to be addressed.

Narratives/documents/historical application - put learning into context:

- With a lot of art forms at a loss for what could be done in the beginning of the pandemic, teachers and teaching artists found themselves sharing a lot more resources in regards to the historical contexts of art forms as well as narratives.
- Teachers still want to capture and share the histories and narratives of the art forms and share with students in advance.

Use video sharing more frequently:

- Teachers loved having the ability to share, spontaneously, videos, and other artifacts through screen share.
- In the standard classroom - you would have to bring your projector, an extra laptop, etc.

Peer Review/Self-Critique (as part of NJ adoption of National Standards for Arts Education):

- Teachers have been dividing the class up and having students observe and critique each other to make up for not being able to work with an entire class at once over zoom
- Teachers have been able to have students self-review recordings of performance and self-critique
- Technology enables collaboration among students that has not been fully explored

Long-Distance speaker requiring a virtual audience:

- Podcasts/Interviews work great on zoom
- When a guest/speaker joins a classroom virtually, each student should have their own display (monitor, iPad, Chromebook, phone, etc.) so that they can have a personal, more connected experience.

OPPORTUNITIES

What We Need to Improve Virtual Learning

PD on how to teach virtually - for school teachers and teaching artists:

- Technology training
 - Technology basics

- How to be engaging/engage students via online instruction/videos
- Classroom Management in online learning
- Best practices for online learning: online etiquette for students and teachers - how to establish ground rules to keep attention span of students, have them not shut off their screens, etc.
- The following social justice training components were described as “Mandatory” by many teaching artists. In their opinion, if you work at an arts ed organization, this training should be required.
 - Trauma-informed Care
 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
 - Anti-Racism
 - Culturally Relevant Education
 - Social Emotional Learning
- TAs/Teachers want access to the same training and breadth of training that was available during the pandemic.
- There was an increase in training opportunities once training became virtual. They do not want these training opportunities to disappear.

Synchronicity of Internal and External Communication:

- Many are concerned about the need to have honest conversations with students about what has occurred and that students will want to discuss, particularly in arts classes, about what has happened.
- Many are concerned about having the appropriate training for themselves on how to handle and facilitate these conversations.
- Many are concerned about the way that different organizations are preparing themselves at all levels: not just teachers or teaching artists, but also administrators and staff members at all levels of the organization. There is a need to have difficult conversations about both the pandemic and social justice issues occurring in order to be able to model the facilitation with students as well as to really align messaging and values internally and externally to students/the community.

Re-think performance spaces:

- Organizations should find/utilize outdoor spaces for performances.
- Focus group participants provided examples of **current** performances happening, e.g. jazz ensembles performing with musicians spaced 6 feet apart and solo performances with audiences outside following social distancing rules.
- Teachers and teaching artists welcomed the idea of using the various parks and public spaces in Newark for outdoor art activities.
- City-wide student arts celebrations in public spaces, for social distancing along with livestreams

Continue to build on best practices for arts teaching and learning to mitigate transmission:

- See the September Ready: Taskforce for Arts Ed NJ report <https://www.artsednj.org/covid19/>

Funding Opportunities:

- Innovate new fundraising models
- Opportunity to develop new partnerships to leverage more dollars
- Opportunity to diversify foundation support from new local, regional, and national funders
- Administration changes that increase local, state or federal funding

Revamp School-based Arts Residencies:

Based upon feedback from teaching artists and teachers, there is value in having a hybrid residency going forward regardless of pandemic conditions.

- Many teaching artists said that it takes several sessions to introduce students to the work they will be doing together and to get comfortable with them. Videos can be a way to not only get students familiar with the teaching artist, it can introduce and reinforce concepts that are important to the art form.
- Teaching artists talked about how they had to modify the work that they do in the initial sessions in anticipation of resistance by some of the students. One teaching artist said that the videos allowed her to go deeper and be more authentic in the way in which she was sharing her art form.
- Teachers and teaching artists like the spontaneity that teaching virtually affords them. If they want to share their screen or respond to a question with a video, they can do that.
- Propose some residency sessions with the teacher joining virtually with ALL students on their own devices so that connection and intimacy with the teaching artist can be maintained, but the teacher is in the classroom with the students and she can have the students partner together on different activities.
- Going to want to keep 2 tracks of rosters for teaching artists - those who need to teach virtually and those who will teach in person in order to be equitable in serving schools who need virtual residencies and those who need in-person residencies while maintaining equity in hiring practices.

Revamp Performances for Schools:

- Pre-performance prep workshops before a show
- Present outdoor performances in order to allow the live theater experience to continue, weather permitting
- Provide videos of performances when unable to attend live performances

Out SchoolTime Programs:

In-Person is always preferred to virtual

- Provide more performance opportunities for students (parent request)
- Encourage and create opportunities for students to create art outside of the classroom - essentially getting 'Homework' and then sharing what students have created