



Spotlight on Social Learning

June 2021: Community Month

The final theme of our 2020-2021 Social Curriculum is Community. A community is a group of people who live, work, or learn together, sharing common goals or resources. Communities can be large or small, local or distributed, physical or virtual. Over the course of a lifetime, we inevitably join many different communities, some by choice and some by chance. From household, to neighbourhood, to nation, each of these communities brings new possibilities and responsibilities.

Community is one of two new topics this academic year, and is intended to complement our other new topic, Identity. These two closely related topics bookend the academic year, each inviting a consideration of the other. We develop and come to understand our identity through our relationship with community, and vice versa. Both identity and community are also multifarious. Each of the many communities we join, from household to humanity, represents a chance to experiment with or explore our identity, or to define it anew.

At their worst, communities can be discriminatory and harmful. At their best, communities can help us through difficult challenges and lift us up when we are down. This year has been defined, above all else, by the way our communities we live, work, and learn in have risen to the challenge of defeating COVID-19, and how we have all supported one another through the long, lonely time that we have been unable to gather in person.

Each of the communities we are a part of has been affected differently by the pandemic. Toronto, the community we live in, has experienced one of the longest lockdowns in the worldⁱ. Public spaces have been closed, businesses have suffered, and every aspect of our public life has been disrupted.

The communities we learn in have also been profoundly affected. By the end of June Ontario schools will have been closed for twenty-six weeks, longer than any other school system in Canada. A recent analysis by Ontario's COVID-19 Science Table estimated that students will emerge from the pandemic between 1.6-3.3 months behind in their learning, with disproportionate effects on students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, racialized children and youth, newcomers, and students with disabilitiesⁱⁱ. Sistema Toronto has been operating online for fifteen months, working to keep our students engaged, connected, and curious through this difficult time, and in that time all our students have gone through important changes and developments.

The communities we work in have also been massively changed by COVID-19. Studies are underway on the effect of the pandemic on educatorsⁱⁱⁱ, and according to Statistics Canada, the arts, entertainment and recreation sector was the hardest hit of any in the Canadian economy in 2020. Employment in arts, entertainment, and recreation fell by 25.4% and total hours worked fell by a shocking 60.7%^{iv}. Individuals and institutions in education and the arts will be forever changed by their experience of the pandemic, and members of these communities rely on each other more than ever in the coming years.

As infection numbers fall and pandemic restrictions loosen, communities are beginning to face the new challenge of how to support each other in a return to in-person learning and working. For our students,

this time of isolation has made their communities more important than ever. This month in our Social Curriculum we explored three different aspects of Community with our students.

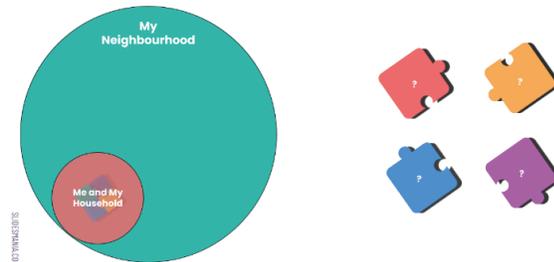
Our first activity, “Me in My Community,” invites students to reflect on the other people and communities they are connected to, starting with their own household.



Communities are diverse!

- What are some ways the other members of your household are different from you?
- What about the people in your neighbourhood?
- What have you learned from living with people who are different from you?
- How do the members of your household and neighbourhood support and help each other?

Who else lives in your neighbourhood? Who are you most connected to in your community?



“Me in My Community,” slides 5 and 7, Sistema Toronto 2021

Where quarantine, social distancing, and stay-at-home orders made us feel separated from some of our communities, other connections have intensified. Identifying the people and institutions our students feel most connected to gives them a chance to celebrate those who helped them through the past year, and recognize those they are eager to reconnect with. Students are also invited to share their how they would represent their household, their neighbourhood, and themselves in sound or music.

The second activity for this month, “Community Concert,” recognizes the importance of community in music performance. Concerts are community events, in which artists share their work and the joy they have found in it with others. This June, our students were each involved in multiple online presentations, including their Music and Movement, Strings, Percussion, and Choir classes. Each class was paired with another group, so everyone was guaranteed an audience of their peers, and each class decided with their teachers who else they would invite.



“Community Concert,” slides 5 and 7, Sistema Toronto 2021

“Community Concert” invites each class to work through how they will make their audience feel welcome and included in the concert. Each slide asks the class different questions, from who will read the land acknowledgment to how they will end the performance, and gives the students a chance prepare for their performance and their duties as hosts.

Our final activity for Community is “Sistema Pride”. June is Pride Month, a time to celebrate the diversity of our communities and their members. Sistema Toronto is an LGBTQ2+ positive organization, and we want to make every member of our community feel proud of their identity, and welcome as a part of our community. “Sistema Pride” invites our students to reflect on what pride means to them, and record a video time capsule for future Sistema students. For some, especially younger students, this can mean the things and accomplishments they are proud of, for others, especially older students, this can mean how the pride movement has impacted their lives and changed their thinking about the world and their community.



LGBTQ2+ - What does it all Mean?

- L - Lesbian**
A woman who is attracted to other women.
- B - Bisexual**
A person who is attracted to people of more than one gender.
- Q - Queer or Questioning**
Queer is a term some people use to describe sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. Questioning means a person questioning their gender or orientation.
- G - Gay**
A person who is attracted to people of the same gender.
- T - Trans or Transgender**
A person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.
- 2 - Two-Spirited**
An umbrella term encompassing gender and sexual diversity in Indigenous communities. Two Spirit is a cultural term reserved for those who identify as Indigenous.
- + - Plus**
+ means other forms of gender expression and sexual orientation that are not covered by the other letters, such as Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Polyamorous, or Non-Binary.
At Sistema we want everyone to feel welcome and included, no matter how they express their gender or sexuality.

Pride Time Capsule

“To me pride means...”
“I take pride in...”
“Pride has helped me...”
—You

Imagine you are making a time capsule for Sistema Students to open in 5 years.
Take a few minutes to think of a message for them.
What does pride mean to you?
How has the Pride movement affected your life?
When you are ready, have the teacher spotlight you so you can record your message.

“Sistema Pride,” slides 3 and 7, Sistema Toronto 2021

This year has been a deeply challenging time in the Sistema Toronto community. Our staff, students, and their families have faced confusion, frustration, social and physical isolation, separation, anxiety, and loss. At no other time have we needed each other more, and at no other time has it been so difficult to stay connected. In our final presentations this June, we saw how our community overcame these challenges together, learning and growing more than we could have ever imagined possible. Thanks to the incredible work of our teachers, parents, and students, we saw beautiful performances, thoughtful introductions, and a joyful celebration of the work we have done together. Looking back on this time, it’s clear we have a community we can all take pride in.

ⁱ Levinson-King, Robin. “Toronto lockdown - one of the world's longest?”, *BBC News*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57079577>, accessed June 14, 2021.

ⁱⁱ Gallagher-Mackay K, Srivastava P, Underwood K, et al. “COVID-19 and education disruption in Ontario: emerging evidence on impacts”, *Science Briefs of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table*, 2021;2(34), June 7, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.47326/ocsat.2021.02.34.1.0>, accessed June 14, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ Areguy, Fitsum. “Mental and physical impact of pandemic on educators focus of COVID-19 study”, *CBC News*, April 27, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/teacher-educator-study-covid-19-1.6003921>, accessed June 18, 2021.

^{iv} Cited in “COVID 19 Impact Statistics”, *Canadian Association for the Performing Arts*, <https://capaco.ca/en/research/covid-impact-statistics>, accessed June 18, 2021