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#LEARNFROMHOME

TEACHERS RESPOND TO NEW WAY OF LEARNING

NEW TOOLS, SAME GOALS HELP STUDENTS #LEARNFROMHOME

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Finding a way to teach drama to students at three local elementary schools while everyone is isolated at their homes has led teacher Kelly Stevens to team with comedian Martin Short in a video project combining provincial curriculum with a lot of fun.

"I thought what kids might benefit from right now is laughing," said Stevens, an arts teacher at St. Augustine's and St. Bernadette's Catholic elementary schools in Dundas, and Canadian Martyrs in west Hamilton. "So I wrote a comedy unit called the gift of laughter for all grades, K-8, that integrates language curriculum into the drama lessons."

While researching comedians to use in lessons as examples, she figured Hamilton-native Martin

Short could be an inspiration to her students. Stevens had taught his nephew, Patrick, a Grade 8 student at St. Joachim in Ancaster. So she worked with Patrick and his mother to contact the star and develop the project. Short agreed to make a video with Patrick to inspire students to be funny in their own videos.

"In normal times I never would have thought to ask, but I thought maybe Martin Short was also in his PJs like the rest of us and might have some time that in normal times he might not have," Stevens said.

Students send her their comedy videos which they watch, and laugh at, together. Stevens provided the innovative drama unit to all Catholic school board arts teachers.

"The idea is get students laughing all across the city," Stevens said.

She said Short's book, "I Must Say: My Life As a Humble Comedy Legend," the comedian writes

See **RECREATING**, page 5



Lynn Doyle photo

Arts teacher Kelly Stevens with her laptop and comedian Martin Short's autobiography - a couple of the tools she used to bring fun and laughter to learning from home.

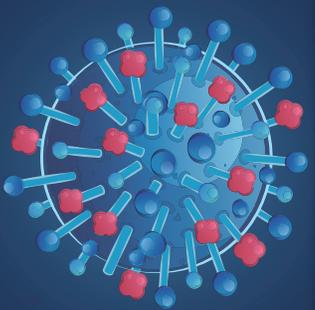
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RECREATING THE SOCIAL COMPONENT IS VITAL

Continued from page 3

"humour was what kept us sane" in difficult times.

"That encapsulates this whole project," Stevens said.

Bringing fun and social connection into the new reality of learning and teaching was also on Katarina Krivankova's mind when she decided to produce her own weekly videos for her Dundas Valley Secondary School Grade 9 drama and Grade 11 media arts students.

"I'm trying to make sure the kids have fun," she said. "It's not an easy situation to be in."

She understands anyone can be frustrated stuck at home and isolated from friends, but for young people, it may be even tougher.

"I am trying to give them some laughs. Maybe they'll be more willing to do the assignment," Krivankova said. "If I'm funny or silly, it's OK, and they're more open to it."

In each video, she explains assignments for the week, demonstrates how to do them and introduces concepts they are to incorporate into their own projects. Students make their own videos and post them to the school board's online class hub.

"It makes me happy to see them and see they are OK," Krivankova said, of



Katarina Krivankova photo

DVSS teacher Katarina Krivankova, also known as Ms. K, on the set of one of her weekly videos combining fun, social contact and creativity with provincial curriculum.

her students.

She goes through a weekly production process, similar to the steps her students will follow.

"I start with ideas, creating assignments and aligning them with curriculum expectations," Krivankova said. "During pre-production I plan my sets, and try to learn a new video effect by watching YouTube tutorials."

Filming takes a day, post-production another full day. Her 18-year-old son, Jakub, provides technical support and operates the camera.

"It is a lot of work but I enjoy creating these lessons, hoping that my videos bring a smile, make my students happy and help them engage in their assignment," Krivankova said.

She hopes to show students that artists respond to tough times by doing their best work, because they are creative.

Marc Trotta, principal at St. Augustine Catholic Elementary School, said the challenge for teachers and students is recreating the social component of learning as much as possible.

"We know that a big part of learning is learning together, and giving and receiving feedback is very important," Trotta said. "Feedback in a virtual classroom is happening, and we are finding creative ways to communicate with our students."

That new way of communicating with students was a change for Dundas Valley Secondary School teacher Pieter Toth, recipient of a 2018 Prime Minister's Teaching Award of Excellence.

"My philosophy is about creating a safe environ-

ment where they're willing to take risks," he said.

Toth's goal has been to create collaborative learning where students share their voice, explore their thinking, and build on their ideas together. He's done that with team-building, creating trust and the common moments developed through face-to-face contact.

"When you put in distance learning, it's harder to build in that rapport," Toth said.

He had to remind himself the core goals are the same, he's just using differ-

ent tools — in this case, a variety of online tools — to achieve them.

But for Toth, confusing and challenging times are what put people in a position to learn.

In the physical classroom, he'd have students sit in a circle facing in. One student spoke at a time, then would decide who would speak next to add something. Students took leadership.

"You can replicate that with video conferencing software," Toth said.

He sends students topics and questions. After they've had time to research, they participate in virtual group discussions, using software provided by the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

"The key, for me, is the process," Toth said. "In this current situation, with so many new variables and uncertainties, it was thinking about the process that has allowed me to work through my own discomfort to focus on finding ways to make meaningful connections with students using the tools we have available to us."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With teachers and students isolated at home, we were wondering how educators and learners are responding to a new way of teaching and learning.

KAREN LILJA

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