

May 20, 2019

Dear members of the selection committee,

It is my pleasure to write a letter support for Dr. Cristian Zaelzer's nomination for the Dana Foundation's Science Educator Award. I formally met Cristian at the beginning of this year when he invited me to *Convergence's* 2019 Black Box Neuroscience and Arts Talk, but frankly, I have been admiring his interdisciplinary initiatives for over a year. As a science communicator who also dabbles in the arts, I am passionate about engaging the general public in science through creative ways, particularly at the intersection of art and science. *Convergence* struck a chord with me not only because I am a former behavioural neuroscientist, but because the organization was daring greatly and pushing the envelope in the realm of education and outreach.

Cristian's vision to support meaningful cross-disciplinary exchanges was something I resonated with and needless to say, I jumped at the opportunity to get involved. I happily took up his invitation to audit the course that both he and Bettina Forget had co-developed for both art and neuroscience students at Concordia University. From the moment I stepped into their classroom, I was immediately in awe of their unconventional teaching approaches that incorporated a mix of neuroscience, science communication and art knowledge. I saw students from science and art backgrounds opening their respective disciplines to one another and engaging in thought-provoking conversations about science, art, education and society. Not only was this course able to provide in-class tools and resources, Cristian and Bettina took it upon themselves to go beyond the classroom environment. Field trips to art galleries and lab visits both in and outside of the university were also arranged and provided students yet another unique learning opportunity. These are the kinds of interactions we should be fostering in educational institutions, if we are to empower young people to take action in our society and truthfully, this is where traditional academic lectures fall short.

The dedication and passion that Cristian has put into growing *Convergence* is nothing short of inspiring. For young scientists, artists and science communicators (like myself), he has paved a foundation where we can be innovative and push the boundaries to create change in science and society. Having seen him bring together collaborators into his network that would not have otherwise worked together (from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University to the Integrative Program in Neuroscience at McGill University) is encouraging because it shows that these interdisciplinary collaborations are possible.

By providing an opportunity for me to be involved in *Convergence*, Cristian is helping me to contribute to the science communication literature, particularly in strengthening the case for arts-based science communication. This is of great importance in this day and age, given that traditional means of communicating science are not always effective. We need different perspectives to come together to solve problems in healthcare and beyond. This is where I believe the intersection of art and science can play a crucial role.

Cristian is making this happen with *Convergence* by teaching the next generation of neuroscientists to think differently about how they can communicate their research to the general public. He is encouraging them to go outside of their comfort zone and equipping them with the tools to not only become leaders in their field, but also educators and active citizens in their community. In addition to this, Cristian has been able to increase the accessibility to neuroscience by engaging the public through a series of talks. These events create an open environment where the audience not only has a chance to learn and share knowledge, but an opportunity to initiate potential collaborations.

Cristian is without a doubt, a trailblazer for the neuroscience and science communication community. He is an exceptional individual who is more than worthy of recognition for his efforts in demonstrating the impact of cross-disciplinary collaborations. I, for one, am honored to be working with him, and can think of no one more deserving of the Dana Foundation's Science Educator Award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Lau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Catherine" being more prominent than the last name "Lau".

Catherine Lau  
Knowledge Translation Coordinator, CHILD-BRIGHT Network  
Program Evaluation Officer, Art the Science