

RESEARCH CONNECTION

Music teaching in Manitoba during the COVID-19 pandemic

By Sheelagh Chadwick, PhD, & Jordan Laidlaw



Why this research is important

This research aimed to understand how music educators have navigated such changes. Our research questions were: “How have COVID-19 restrictions in Manitoba schools impacted music educators’ professional practice?” and “How have COVID-19 restrictions in Manitoba schools impacted music educators’ well-being?”

How the research was conducted

The research took place in two phases. In Phase 1, a survey/questionnaire was distributed to Kindergarten-Grade 12 classroom music teachers in Manitoba. In Phase 2, participants were invited to participate in focus group interviews to discuss their experiences in more detail.

What the researchers found

- **Music educators have demonstrated creativity and resilience, adapting to support their students' needs.** Music educators have learned new

What you need to know

Schools have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While school divisions responded differently, music education across the province was severely curtailed or even cancelled.

In an effort to optimize physical distancing and cohorting requirements, many music rooms were repurposed as general classrooms. Indoor singing and playing wind instruments were also deemed potential avenues for virus transmission and either limited or cancelled.

technologies, instruments, and musical knowledge and spent untold hours planning for completely new ways of working with students in unfamiliar media. Music educators adapted to teaching on travelling carts or in alternative spaces (including outdoors).

- **Music educators have learned valuable new skills and pedagogies while accommodating their teaching practice during the pandemic.** Many music educators learned new technologies (e.g., online platforms) and pedagogies (e.g., guitar, percussion, music technology, history, and cross-cultural studies) to be valuable, indicating high student engagement. They have also expressed interest in continuing to use and learn new approaches post-pandemic.

- **Music educators need further professional development and increased support to sustain their evolving practices.** Many music educators received little or no professional development to support their changing practice. Instead, they relied on support from their peers and mentorship from organizations such as the Manitoba Band Association, Manitoba Orff Chapter, Manitoba Classroom Guitar Association, and Manitoba Choral Association.
- **Music educators have reported high levels of stress due to teaching restrictions, changing pedagogies, and teaching in alternative spaces.** In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, music educators have been pushed to and beyond their limits and, in too many cases, with little or no support from their schools, their administrations, or their divisions.
- **Many music educators are concerned for the future of their programs.** Seventy-seven percent of respondents have expressed concern for the future of their music program, while 56% of respondents indicated concern pertaining to future employment. Music teachers are facing decreased enrollment numbers as well as the challenge of lower musical achievement among students.
- **Morale is very low among music educators.** The challenges and concerns mentioned in the data, in conjunction with health-related stressors of working in schools during the pandemic, have led to low music educators morale across the province.

How this research can be used

These findings are important for government and school administrators as they emphasize the importance of school music programs and the need for supporting teachers through educational change.

About the researchers

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Keywords

COVID-19, music education, teacher well-being, music teaching, music pedagogy

Publication based on this research

The researchers are working on two articles—one with a focus on practice and one on well-being. The research was featured nationally on CBC's *As it Happens* as well as locally on CBC Winnipeg's *Up to Speed*, and in the Winnipeg Free Press.

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