

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## The sticky bits: Lessons learned from teaching during the pandemic

By Jacqueline Kirk, PhD, & Natasha Ofwono



### Why this research is important

Teaching during the pandemic was difficult. In March 2020, teachers shifted quickly to an online environment and supported students and their families with learning, with technology, and with the stress of surviving the pandemic. When they returned to the classroom in the fall of 2020, the conditions were far from normal.

Furthermore, the guidelines were in constant flux. Examples of the challenges experienced by participants included teaching classes spread between two rooms to ensure that the social distancing guidelines were in place, periods of remote learning that lasted for several weeks, and teaching via telephone with Kindergarten students when connectivity was an issue. The teachers will remember the difficult experiences, but it is also important for them to be able to reflect back on the good parts or the

### What you need to know

When forced to shift to remote learning in the spring of 2020, Southwest Horizon School Division asked the BU CARES Research Center to help them gather data regarding online teacher discussion groups. The school division identified positive changes in teachers' practices. They wanted to record and share this professional growth to ensure that teachers could reflect back on these moments when the pandemic was over. Essentially, the question became, "What did we learn from teaching during the pandemic that should continue when it is over?" Affectionately, we tagged those take-aways "the sticky bits."

sticky bits that were born of these challenging situations. This research captures the professional learning that emerged from teachers working together to overcome the obstacles presented by teaching during a pandemic.

### How the research was conducted

The data for this phenomenological study included document analysis of records that were compiled by the school division during the online meetings, interviews with eight teachers, and interviews with the facilitator of the online groups, and the superintendent. The interviews were conducted during January and February of 2021 via

Zoom. The transcriptions were analyzed using N-Vivo and sorted into 61 codes that were later compressed into 21 themes and finally resulted in 12 sticky bits that the teachers felt would continue to be regular parts of their practice following the pandemic.

### What the researchers found

Teachers in the study helped the researchers to identify 12 promising practices that emerged as part of their work in the unusual circumstances they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Teacher collaboration is important.
2. Increase home-school communication and support.
3. Be more concise.
4. Speak in language that students understand.
5. Focus instruction.
6. Daily feedback provides information for teachers.
7. Technological tools make a positive difference in teaching and learning.
8. Make learning materials accessible for students and families.
9. Record student progress to show growth and expose challenges.
10. Learning face to face, hands-on, and in groups is better.
11. Pay attention to the social-emotional wellness of students.
12. Teacher mental health needs to be a priority.

### How this research can be used

Educators and educational researchers can use this research because it identifies promising practices that could, and perhaps should, be considered by educators to improve their practice. Secondly, this research captures an important moment in the history of education. The lived experiences of the teachers are interesting and important. This study is a way to look back and to understand how

teachers in the Southwest Horizon School Division experienced those beginning days of the pandemic.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

pandemic teaching, teaching practice, teacher growth

### Publication based on this research

The authors are currently engaged in sharing this research through a book chapter about online teaching from Kindergarten to graduate school by the Canadian Association of Teacher Education. The authors have also submitted it for conference presentations, and they plan to send an article to the Canadian Association of Principals Journal.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the leaders and teachers of the Southwest Horizon School Division who invited us to learn vicariously through their experiences. In addition, we sincerely appreciate the ten individuals who agreed to participate in interviews that contributed to the data for this research.

Research Connection is a periodical publication intended to provide information about the impact of Brandon University's academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice.

This summary is supported by the Office of Research Services, the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, and the federally funded Research Support Fund.

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