

Teaching in a Pandemic - A McDowell Foundation COVID-19 Directed Call Update

By Ellen Whiteman, McDowell Foundation Manager

The goal of the COVID-19 Directed Call is to ensure teacher-led research can contribute to the conversation as teaching and learning during the pandemic continues. While the projects remain ongoing, two of the teams are able to share some preliminary findings.



COVID-19 and Student Mental Health

The research team from the Northwest School Division focused on the mental health and resilience of students returning to a rural school. Angela Csiki and Brent Keen developed the research on the assumption that students returning to the classroom could be anxious, afraid of getting COVID-19, and hesitant about their return to school. The research team developed a number of interventions to support students through the transition including incorporating outdoor learning and mindfulness into the teaching and learning day.

Preliminary findings from surveys conducted as part of the research, as well as the observations of the researchers, are that the interventions undoubtedly supported the students. While some students were anxious, the majority of students were happy to return to school, see their friends, and feel positive about their year.

“Students thrive on the connection and comfort that school can provide them,” said Keen. “Mindfulness and outdoor activity are really just good teaching.”

“The research helped us set aside our own assumptions about students and let their voices guide us,” added Csiki.

The researchers are currently developing a webpage to share their teaching methods and findings more broadly in the province.

COVID-19 and the Impact on Refugee Students

Kirsten Cavanaugh is in the early stages of her research looking at the impacts of COVID-19 on the educational experience of refugee families. She has formed a small team of experts to support her work and will be interviewing families in the Saskatoon Public School Division.

Initial findings from this work come from conversations with those in the field working closely with the families including translators and other supports. These conversations reflect that the technological divide and economic disparity that exists between families has been exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, all the school division and school pandemic planning documents were released in English and at a Grade 12 reading level. Refugee families are struggling to understand the material even if translators are available.

Cavanaugh plans to interview the families directly over the next few weeks and looks forward to the rich dialogue and information this will provide.

The projects addressing distance learning and teacher well-being are ongoing and information will be shared from these projects as appropriate.

For more information on any of the research currently underway, please visit the Foundation website at <http://mcdowellfoundation.ca>.

This article was also published in the January 20, 2021 issue of the *Saskatchewan Bulletin*.

McDowell Salon Series Moves Online

By Ellen Whiteman, McDowell Foundation Manager



My favorite teacher in elementary school was Miss Albert who taught Grade 2. She always encouraged us to look for the positives in any situation – no matter what was going on, there was always a bright side that she helped us find. I have thought of her words and general attitude on life often over the past few months in the midst of the ongoing public health restrictions and their impact on everything we do.

For the McDowell Foundation, the bright side these past few weeks has been the need to step back and think about how we connect with and support our teacher research teams both in completing their research and in sharing it with others. How do we find opportunities to connect when face-to-face meetings are simply not possible?

While this has remained a challenge, moving to a fully online Salon Series conversation in November was a step towards reconnecting. The research team of Carly Robson Gilchrist, Pam Sawatzky, and Amber Thompson were able to not only share their research findings on *Promising Practices for Meaningful Family Engagement* but to engage in a conversation with teachers across the province on how to connect with parents and other caregivers in the midst of a pandemic. Building relationships in temporary online learning classrooms, easing parents' fears around in-class learning, and the importance of including parents, even as school access remains restricted,

were all part of the conversation. The ease of access to the online platform meant the geographical restrictions that often impact the ability of rural and urban teachers to meet and share their experiences were mitigated by technology. The bright side of all of this was the ability to support teachers to connect in a different way.

Given the success of the first online webinar, the Salon Series conversations will continue monthly starting in January when a team will share their insights on Women in Educational Leadership. Amy Korver and Amy Orth spent the past year reflecting on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in leadership positions as well as the impact women administrators have on the culture of the school. We look forward to them leading a conversation on the importance of diversity in education leadership. They are being joined by Angela Banda, Samantha Becotte, and Lori Jeschke on January 21 in the evening to share stories and continue the conversation. All are welcome to attend and more information on this event is available at <http://mcdowellfoundation.ca/women-in-educational-leadership-a-conversation/>.

We also look forward to providing research teams, who received funding through the Directed Call, with opportunities to share their preliminary findings around COVID-19 and the impacts on teaching and learning in the coming months.

In the midst of the changes and restrictions brought on by the pandemic, we hope you connect with us to hear about teacher-led research and join in our conversations. We also hope you find your own bright sides to celebrate over the coming months.

This article was also published in the December 16, 2020 issue of the *Saskatchewan Bulletin*.

An Unwavering Donor For Over 27 Years – Thank you!

By Colleen Ostoforoff, Fundraising Administrator for Donor Engagement

Thanks to committed and dedicated donors, one can argue that nothing can be as important as the education of our students. Loyal, passionate, and unwavering donors enable our research to continue. **Wendy Barker** is just that! She is one of our dedicated monthly donors whose generosity is remarkable. Her monthly donations started over 27 years ago in a monthly giving program similar to our current **Coffee-A-Month program**. As she commented, “Can it really be so long that I have been a supporter? My monthly donation is quite modest, but I guess it all adds up over 27 years and hopefully has been a factor in encouraging teachers in their endeavours to develop creative and beneficial projects for their students.”

Wendy’s years of teaching and administrating in Saskatchewan have been primarily in English Language Arts. As an enthusiastic and dedicated Grade 12 teacher who loved her career and students alike, it led her to become a Grade 12 provincial examiner for nearly 20 years and was a sub-examiner for many years too.

Barker was president of the Saskatchewan English Teachers’ Association for six years and was honoured to receive the *Joseph Duffy Award*. Wendy indicated that through the years she had so many opportunities for personal development through conferences both provincial and national, the drama association, STS committees,

teacher accreditation, and master classes. Wendy continued, “I could go on and on, but through it all, I worked with so many fine professional educators and wonderful students that my decision to spend my life in education has never been regretted. Perhaps this is why I have supported the McDowell Foundation for so long. Teaching is one of the finest careers there is. *We need to support and encourage each other, and no time is more appropriate than this, during the pandemic and economic upheaval. “This too shall pass!”*

We are deeply grateful to Wendy for her extraordinary generosity and for her leadership, vision, and support for the benefit of research in Saskatchewan.



Supporting Students' Needs Through a "Coffee-A-Month" Giving Program

By Colleen Ostoforoff, Fundraising Administrator for Donor Engagement

January shifts our focus with new resolutions and reflections, but one thing remains certain during these times; we miss our friends, colleagues, and family. Without our donors and supporters, there would not be a McDowell Foundation. Yes, COVID sucks as it infiltrates in our lives, but it is also a reality, and we are thankful that everyone is still keeping safe and healthy! There is nothing like having a great cup of coffee with a friend, donor, teacher, or educator. We really miss the coffee breaks, the lunches – the fun stuff that normally lets us easily connect throughout the year.

Our donors are the heartbeat of our organization. Your support helps provide groundbreaking educational research in our province. Have you ever thought about donating throughout the year? Did you know what an impact you could have on teaching and learning in Saskatchewan by donating the equivalent of a coffee a month? Donating the equivalent of a **coffee a month** to the Foundation supports 10 or more new research projects. Monthly giving is a great option to give without hurting your pocket book.

These are challenging times, but an easy option to request a payroll deduction to the McDowell Foundation for as little as \$5/month will continue to help support worthy research projects in our province. A monthly gift allows our donors to spread the financial impact of their giving across the entire year, lessening the financial impact on you and your family and helping donors distribute payments across the year making commitment more manageable. If you are interested, you can [donate monthly through your payroll](#).

Did you know that there is another monthly giving option available through our website? If you do not want to donate through your paycheque **or are recently retired**, we are linked to an organization called [CanadaHelps.org](#).

What one earth is that organization, you ask? It is a reliable and trustworthy monthly giving option available

to our donors through <http://mcdowellfoundation.ca/donations/>. For more than 20 years, CanadaHelps has been the trusted charity that is informing, inspiring, and connecting charities and donors with the causes they care about. In fact, CanadaHelps is vital for many charities, including the McDowell Foundation, to provide a fast and reliable donation system for Canadian donors and charities including a monthly giving platform.

Why do I talk about this organization? Well, since COVID-19 hit, our donations are down. We are currently financially sustainable, but projections for investments are uncertain. The pandemic hit many charities hard economically, but the Foundation continues to fill immediate needs for research. Not only do we feel it is vital, we feel it is crucial to keep our programming viable by not reducing our research through the Foundation. Actually, we have created additional funding, on top of our regular funding, for our Special Directed Call around COVID in the Classrooms.

You are important to our research, and we hope with your assistance, the pandemic impact will remain minimal to the Foundation over the long haul. Friends – we miss you and all the activities and events! As I pour another coffee, I hope you will join me and consider donating through our monthly payroll giving program or giving through CanadaHelps. In the meantime, I will keep the coffee hot and hope we can meet up soon. Keep safe while we move through this next phase of the pandemic and into a better 2021 for all!



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