



Towards Interfaces for Equity in Education

By Marlene Atleo

Nine years ago, I received an email that said the University of Manitoba was looking for faculty in the area of adult and higher education. I was interested, and so I investigated the position, the faculty, province, and Aboriginal community in which I was considering making my home so far away from my grandchildren.

Although the highway can be dark, damp, and dreary, especially in winter, I felt a look-see couldn't hurt. The February interview was on a cold, windy day. In Manitoba, Aboriginal issues are amplified by a history, geography, climate, and socio-political reality that are daunting. Manitoba seemed to be at the cusp of an educational movement, and I felt it was an environment in which my experience and education could support emergent social change through education. And as a bonus, the people were friendly!

According to the Elders, it is a cornerstone of Indigenous learning to participate in changing socio-economic environments. Knowing one's socio-cultural pathway over time and space is about understanding one's cultural orientation. My research interest has been about developing sound foundations and infrastructure for educational preparation, recruitment, retention, completion, career establishment, career advancement, career change, and institutional succession, not only as part of individuals' lifelong learning, but also as intergenerational knowledge transmission.

From this vantage point, learning is a function of an integrated identity that can adapt to environmental change.

The following four interrelated aspects of my work are particularly important:

1. supporting teacher candidates in understanding education over the lifespan across cultures
2. mentoring graduate students in their self-expression and research projects across disciplines
3. supporting faculty, community, provincial, and national initiatives in adult education, technologically supported learning, cross-cultural competency, and infrastructure development
4. conducting research into the role of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous language, and Indigenous storywork in the development of successful Aboriginal educators.

In particular, I have looked at the interface between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems, how Aboriginal people participate in educational institutional development, how non-Aboriginal allies participate with Aboriginal educators, and how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators decolonize themselves with a view to developing institutional equities in education.

My time in Manitoba has been personally and professionally gratifying. It is my greatest joy to be able to work with graduate students who pour themselves into their work, struggling with themselves and their own search for integrity. I have had the opportunity to participate with organizations that do the "good work" in communities of teachers and learners, and with networks and committees in planning and promoting new ideas and ways of being and doing. As we move from the mechanically bound educational vision of yesterday to a more quantum-based, sustainable, 21st-century vision, Treaty peoples are in reciprocity with one another in "Manito-Abe." Indeed, this is a place where the Creator sits. The story, the knowledge, and the languages are all still here and in place.

There is much yet to be done for a new sustainable vision of education to include equitable participation of Aboriginal people and learning over the lifespan. Understanding our own histories as educators is foundational to our continuing personal and professional development over our lifespan. As we engage with change in our lives, our workplace, and our families, we work to attune our critical personal narrative that is the basis for teaching and mentoring. Non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people alike can share privilege and deconstruct racism together, starting with their own praxis in the educational system.

Profile **Marlene Atleo**

Marlene Atleo, ʔeh ʔeh naa tuu kwiss, is an L2 English and L1 German speaker and a member of the Ahousaht First Nation in British Columbia. After a career in the West Coast salmon fishing industry, Marlene completed a Home Economics degree, and then completed her Master's degree in Family Science-Family Resource Management. Atleo was a director of Umeek HRD Inc., and executive director of the Ahousaht Holistic Society. Her work with First Nations Elders with regard to the Nuu-chah-nulth "Provider" Umeek resulted in her dissertation receiving the Thomas Greenfield Award from the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration.

As an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, Dr. Atleo currently teaches Aboriginal and cross-cultural education in the Bachelor of Education program and adult and post-secondary education in the Master of Education and Ph.D. programs.

