



Highlighting Rural Researchers

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Dr. Michelle Lam

Faculty of Education

WHAT'S MORE

- *Michelle has over ten years of experience teaching English as an Additional Language (EAL)*
- *In 2018, Michelle created the Refugee Journeys boardgame to promote discussions of the experience of newcomers in Canada*
- *As the Director of BU CARES, Michelle has secured \$694, 306 in project funding since 2019*

GETTING TO KNOW DR. MICHELLE LAM

Dr. Michelle Lam is a faculty member in the Curriculum and Pedagogy Department, as well as the Director of Brandon University Centre for Applied Research and Education in Indigenous, Rural and Remote Settings (BU CARES). Having been the BU CARES Director for four years, she has been a part of a multitude of projects focusing on a variety of topics. Growing up in a rural Manitoba community, she did not expect that her career would focus on rural and remote community life. However, her appreciation for the connectedness of rurality and these experiences provided an understanding of the importance of community-based life and work.

RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND

Michelle received significant encouragement from family and friends to pursue teaching as a career path because her mother was a teacher as well as a principal in their home community. She began her post-secondary education journey through enrollment in an inter-cultural studies program, and in doing so, a cross-cultural internship was conducted. She then had the opportunity to teach English to children in Thailand, and while there was a steep learning curve affiliated with teaching, a significant sense of community was formed. This then inspired further education through a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Master's program.

Throughout her Master's, and alongside many personal life experiences, the importance of positionality became clear. This realization that her stories were connected with so many larger stories as a person living in what is now Canada reinforced the need to understand the systems we are all living in. This understanding of biases and personal perspectives are crucial, necessary to both interrupt the systemic patterns within our lives as well as take steps toward personal reconciliation. It has since been a priority to highlight personal positionality at the forefront of all the projects she is involved in. Michelle enjoys the inclusion of these reflections in each project, ensuring that these explorations can help researchers understand themselves a little deeper within the context of rural and remote

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I think there's something special about rural places.

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communities. This recognition to positionality has also reinforced the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This inclusivity facilitates environments in which all staff and students may feel more comfortable sharing opinions, stories, and life experiences with one another.

ONGOING RESEARCH AND CURRENT PROJECTS

BU CARES is currently conducting and supporting many ongoing projects that focus on a variety of topics. As Director, Michelle maintains many different levels of involvement for projects associated with the research centre, each of which addressing significant topics impacting communities across the country. Michelle explained that she thoroughly enjoys this project versatility and addressing these different topics of interest. One goal that Michelle emphasizes is ensuring that the research centre is giving back to the communities, and contributing to positive changes that benefit people across the country.

One example of these influential works is represented by the conclusion of the Anti-Racism project. This project focused on creating a variety of digital content exploring racism in Manitoba. One component of this project included the creation and sharing of educational films regarding racism. These films have been used as resources for other organizations and facilities around the country, and have been viewed over half a million times. The utilization of this content showcases how these efforts have become actionable even after the completion of the project itself.

Alongside the conclusion of the Anti-Racism project, the research centre is supporting Virtual Reality (VR) educational research with Myera Group through the BU Mini U program, and post-doctoral research exploring the role of education in immigration. Adjacent to these educational works, post-COVID relational divides is a recent topic of interest that has resulted from the Community Voices project.

While these action-based projects allow for the development of recommendations for community development, the research centre also ensures thorough knowledge mobilization through a variety of platforms. The Leaning In and Reaching Out podcast highlights research and lived experiences that are relevant for the field of education, and the weekly periodical Research Connections publications share ongoing projects conducted through Brandon University. This consistent knowledge sharing is crucial to achieve the goal of giving back to the communities and maintaining relationships beyond the university.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no shortage of community-based work being conducted through – or supported by – the BU CARES research centre. With countless future avenues of research, Michelle hopes to continue exploring different topics, addressing important issues and supporting action-based projects in all capacities.

The Rural Development Institute is grateful to be affiliated with a variety of communities, agencies, academics and students across Canada and beyond. These relationships have facilitated the development of unique networks allowing for collaborative projects to take form, and RDI wants to extend its appreciation to all rural researchers.