The REIL Model - An Engagement and Learning Tool for Marginalized Learners in Non-Formal and Formal Learning Settings

By

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We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

ABSTRACT

Through my work as an educational consultant with community and government organizations, I became aware of the impact non-formal learning programs could have on marginalized learners as flexible, self-selective spaces that learners co-create with learning facilitators. For this project, I developed an engagement and learning model to support marginalized children and youth. I've named it the REIL model. REIL stands for Rapport, Engage, Imagination & creativity, and Learners. It can be used in non-formal or formal learning settings. Rapport is the ongoing practice of being interested and engaged in all learners. It is the central focus of the model. Rapport is the capacity to support, not manage learners. Engagement happens when learning facilitators provide a flexible, co-created, learner-centered environment in which learners initiate tasks and lead activities. Imagination and creativity allows learners to create alternate possibilities beyond the rigid stereotypes or oppression they may face in their day to day lives. It allows learners to be self-expressed and empowered. Finally, Learners is about knowing your learners. It is the ability to welcome families and communities into your program or the capacity to go out into the community to meet families where they are. It is the courage to acknowledge and discuss structural inequities your learners may face.

This paper highlights ways in which non-formal learning approaches can strengthen connections, opportunities, voice, and ultimately empower marginalized learners.

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Finally, to the song in me that creates melody before I know the words and to those who sing harmony and remind me of the magic of music.

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PART ONE

Introduction and Orientation to the Project

I grew up in a large extended family. Every Sunday, after attending church, we would meet for lunch at my grandparents' house. I did not grow up marginalized in the ways connected with race (I'm white) or socioeconomic status (my family was upper middle class). I did however grow up female in a patriarchal and misogynistic family. At mealtimes, the women and girls served the men their meals. I was exposed and subjected to verbal abuse, inappropriate touching, and alcoholism. My experience of being alone as a child, and the oldest of 16 cousins for whom I was the designated caretaker, has led to my desire to design and create spaces to engage and support marginalized children. By marginalized, we often mean children who experience one or more of the following: social exclusion, discrimination, or poverty (Razack, 2009). For the purposes of my project, I will extend the list to include children who are exposed to substance abuse/misuse, verbal, physical or sexual abuse, and neglect. These children are also commonly referred to as "at-risk", "disadvantaged", or "vulnerable". I prefer the term marginalized as it denotes a structural inequity versus an individual's problem. This project involves creating a tool to increase engagement and decrease isolation for marginalized children.

My Experience on the Front-Line

For 25 years, I worked as a social worker and as a teacher with marginalized children and youth. I worked in non-formal learning settings, such as community centres as a youth leader and as an after-school leader. In addition, I worked as a children's counsellor at a women's shelter with children who had been exposed to or witnessed abuse. As a teacher, I worked in formal learning settings, schools, where I taught grades Kindergarten through grade nine. I also worked as a family and youth support worker at a specialized school for children with severe emotional,

social, and behavioral challenges. I have worked with Indigenous students, students who lived in poverty, students who were differently abled, and students who lived in abusive homes.

Learning Settings and Approaches

Learning settings are different depending on whether they are formal, non-formal or informal (Selman, 1997). For the purposes of this project, I was interested in how non-formal learning settings can positively impact and benefit marginalized children. I used Selman's (1997) definitions of formal, non-formal, and informal learning settings. Although Selman describes these settings within the context of adult education, I will use them in the context of children and youth as they are applicable with young learners too.

For Selman, formal learning happens at an educational institution, such as a school or university. It is accredited and has a fixed curriculum. Non-formal learning, on the other hand is not accredited and does not operate with a set curriculum. Here the learner can co-create the curriculum. Non-formal learning occurs outside of institutional settings, such as in community settings and incorporates different formats for learning such as workshops, nature walks, and experiential learning. Finally, informal learning does not rely on a facilitator to guide or moderate the process. It occurs 'unintentionally' through engaging in day to day life. An example of informal learning would be sitting down to read a book and, in the process, learning something about its topic. Learning in informal settings happens independently of any instructional process (Selman, 1997). However, having said this, formal, nonformal and informal education and learning are not absolute. An example is an after-school program which runs at a formal setting, a school, with a non-formal instructional process, namely a co-constructed curriculum which emphasizes choice and empowerment. The program I'm referring to here is called the After-School Sport and Arts Initiative (ASSAI). Between 2011 – 2013, and from

February 2018 to August 2019, I was the Community Engagement Liaison for the After-School Sport and Arts Initiative, a provincially funded program for children with "barriers to participation". The ASSAI runs in school districts across British Columbia. After-school art and sport programs are offered to Indigenous children, immigrant or refuges children, children from low socioeconomic status, female children, and LGBTQ+ children. This initiative got me thinking about what formal education systems can learn from non-formal learning approaches.

Context of the Project

The context of this project is non-formal learning settings and approaches. More specifically, nonformal learning programs which happen outside the 9 – 3 school day and incorporate learners' interests and choices. The intent of my project is to validate the work done in non-formal learning programs operating in the community or on-site at schools which support marginalized children and youth. Often these programs are deemed inconsequential at best. My project aims to validate the significance of non-formal learning programs, such as after-school and summer programs, particularly for marginalized learners. Non-formal programs, with their focus on fun, experiential, and creative learning provide a voice and empowerment to marginalized children. By doing so, non-formal programs bridge gaps in learning and in connecting with others. Educators, working in formal learning settings, may also be interested in my project to explore ways to reach and support their marginalized students.

Statement of a Problem

Before beginning this project, it was important to note one of the problems to which the after-school programs might be able to be a solution. Critical education theorists have for decades highlighted many of the difficulties I experienced teaching in the system decades later (e.g. Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1983; Grace, 2006). One in particular, and that which frames my

project, is the fact that formal education systems are all too often designed to propagate the status quo. In other words, as Regnier (1995) argues "formal systems do not critique or counter hegemony" (p. 25). He goes on to state that the curriculum is meant to reinforce those in power, not to question the experiences of the oppressed. He refers to the curriculum as a "tool of domination" (p. 32). A second challenge is that most formal school education does not encourage critical consciousness (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1983). As a teacher, I was guilty of this. I was often tired and overwhelmed by having to meet the numerous learning, social and emotional needs of my students. Classroom discussions of structural inequity happened sporadically. Regretfully, I did not hold a "critical consciousness" around power and knowledge, looking critically at power differentials, including whose knowledge and perspectives are deemed important and whose are not (Ng, 1995). I have wondered why topics of injustice and oppression are not taught in education faculties? Why are critical theories of education and other theoretical frameworks such as feminist theories, not discussed? Unfortunately, this lack of education around critical consciousness, equity, oppression and empowerment are not limited to my teachers' training experience. These gaps in knowledge are well documented in teacher education programs across North America (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1989).

A third challenge noted by critical scholars within the existing formal school structure is the over-reliance on authoritarian models of teaching and learning. Many scholars point out that despite years of discussion, hierarchical power structures remain entrenched in formal education systems (Grace, 2006; Zyngier, 2008). There exists a power differential between teacher and learner. Regnier (1995), again in his article *Warrior as pedagogue, pedagogue as warrior,* describes how formal education systems attempt to assimilate Indigenous students through authoritarian classroom management and through curriculum which omits or distorts the history

and voices of Indigenous peoples. Further, there continues to be a plethora of textbooks and training available on the topic of "classroom management". This term "management" purports that learners are in need of being "managed". An alternate term is that learners need to be "controlled" or "disciplined". In my experience as a teacher, I noticed that any student which resisted being "managed" was described as having challenging behaviors. For the past 8 years, I have facilitated training for educators and recreation leaders who work with children with challenging behaviors. I have used the term "challenging behaviors" in my trainings because it is so easily understood by participants. Zyngier (2017a, b) has conducted several studies looking at how informal and non-formal learning settings can support children with challenging behaviours. He defines a child with challenging behaviour as one who challenges authoritarian systems still used in many schools today based on "not enough choice, active participation, engagement or empowerment" (p. 13). I like this definition as it re-positions the behaviour as a natural response to outdated, authoritarian teaching which, from my experience, does not serve the teacher or the learner.

Purpose and Objectives of the Project

The purpose of my project was to design a model that would outline the key elements of facilitating a creative and meaningful learning experience that engages marginalized children and youth. To that end the objectives of my project were:

1) To create a model that would encourage teachers, henceforth referred to as learning facilitators, to think about diverse ways to engage marginalized children and youth and their importance to learning;

2) To give learning facilitators a model to help them to understand ways they can bridge inequities for marginalized children and youth;

3) To invite learning facilitators to think about the importance of arts, the imagination, and creativity in non-formal education as outlined in the model; and

4) To use a model as a way to illustrate the importance of non-formal education to empower those who have fallen through the educational system cracks.

What Comes Next?

This project consists of four parts. Part one, this introduction is an orientation to the project. In part two, I reviewed the literature on non-formal learning settings and programs for marginalized children and youth and provide greater detail around critical theories of education. Part three included outlining my project method, namely creating an engagement and learning model for marginalized learners. In this section, I also discuss what I mean by a model and outline the key elements of the REIL (Rapport – Engage – Imagination & creativity – Learners) model I created. In addition, I describe my approach to finding, selecting and analyzing articles I used in my research. Finally, part four presents the model I've created, my reflections on the process, and how the model can be used in the future.

Significance of this Project

The engagement and learning model, also known as the REIL model is a tool to support marginalized learners in non-formal and formal learning programs. I have designed the model to be accessible for use in community-based programs, such as youth programs, and after-school and summer programs, and in school settings, such as alternative learning programs, or on-site after-school programs. This project further validates the meaningful learning that happens when programs use non-formal learning approaches.

Part Two

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In this part, I look at formal education through a critical theory lens. I chose to use this lens because it highlights the "centrality of human agency and struggle while simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be" (Giroux, 1983, p. 36). This statement resonates with me for two reasons. One is how critical theory focuses on human agency. Secondly, how critical theory delineates appearances and reality. From my perspective, the distinction is key to naming and bridging inequities. Critical theory names and addresses power imbalances, and inequities due to race, gender, and poverty. For these reasons, I chose to use critical theory as my theoretical framework when looking at how the formal education system is failing marginalized learners. Failings include inflexible practices and policies such as the use of a rigid, exclusionary curriculum, incorporating authoritarian models of teaching and learning, and continued reliance on what Freire (2000) calls a banking model pedagogy.

In my literature review, I focus on ways scholars take up non-formal learning in terms of meeting the needs of marginalized learners, including creative, student-centred curriculum, flexible approaches to learning, and integrating responsive and culturally relevant pedagogies. I also discuss scholars' different approaches to non-formal learning and key areas to engage marginalized learners including staffing, design elements, the arts and program content. But first, I look to the limitations of formal education.

The Limitations of Formal Education

According to Giroux (1983), "critical theory openly takes sides in the interest of struggling for a better world" (p. 19). Adopting a critical theory for this project was easy. As a teacher I experienced the rigidity, exclusionary practices, and authoritarian expectations with a heavy heart. Working within the system was oppressive for all of the above reasons, plus the fact that there was no language or critique for what I, other educators, and students were experiencing. One critique of formal education is that it focuses on individual learning, not on society as a whole. As Cunningham, a well-known social justice and equity researcher, states "formal education gets stuck in reading the words, not reading the world" (1992, p. 4). What she is arguing here is that formal education too often strives to improve the minutiae, namely an individual's capacity to read in this instance, versus building learners' capacity to analyze and reflect upon the world within which they live. Schools have yet to adopt processes to build awareness and discuss structural inequities. I know and have worked with individual teachers who use a critical pedagogy, but they are not necessarily the norm. As a result, issues of discrimination and power imbalances go unspoken and the classroom tends to confer "privilege to those members who are the dominant group" (Ng, 1995, p. 145). What is taught in classrooms is too often tainted by this lack of awareness of power, privilege, and dialogue. Curriculum ends up being one-sided with hidden biases (Regnier, 1995). For example, Regnier describes how Indigenous voices have been marginalized in formal learning curricula in Canada due to an unspoken or "hidden" cultural bias which omits or distorts indigenous voices and history. Zyngier (2016a), a researcher and advocate of critical pedagogies, argues that a cultural bias encourages "teachers, administrators, and the public to believe that some students are just more 'able' than others" (p. 3).

Another limitation of the formal school system is a reliance on authoritarian models of teaching and learning. Formal learning systems rely on, as stated earlier, what Freire (1972) called the "banking model" pedagogy. This model denotes learning as a factual filling up where the teacher imparts knowledge and the student banks that knowledge. Learning thus happens uni-directionally from teacher to student. In this model, the student has nothing to contribute. This assumption validates a non-consultative approach. Within this model there is no need to consider or consult students' thoughts or interests. Students are products to be filled with information, not participants engaging in their own learning. The teacher is the expert and their role is to supervise and discipline the students. This model does not pay attention to human agency or empowering learners. Fortunately, there are alternatives when it comes to learning settings and approaches.

The Possibilities of Non-Formal Education and Learning Approaches

In school contexts, non-formal education and learning occur outside of the traditional 9 – 3 program time. Nonformal programs are organised and run for a period of time before or after the school day. In school language, these are known as out-of-school programs, after-school programs, or out of school time programs. In the 1980s and 1990s, these after-school hours received renewed attention as many children were going home to empty houses between the hours of 3 – 6pm when their parents came home from work (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez & Brown, 2004).

Within these programs, many of these children were identified as 'at risk' due to a lack of adult oversight during these hours (Abdallah, 2016). For Halpern (2002), after-school programs have defined themselves in terms of "protection, care, opportunity for enrichment, and play while simultaneously defining themselves in terms of socialization, acculturation, training and

problem remediation" (p. 179). He found in his studies that after-school programs, have the potential to play key roles in the lives of children, particularly those from low- and moderate-income families, by providing learning opportunities not available in schools. Halpern goes on to describe after school-programs as a "different kind of child development institution, one that mostly avoids pathologizing low-income children and one that can identify gaps in children's lives and try to fill them" (2002, p. 179). Although Halpern's focus is on socioeconomically marginalized children, this statement holds true for all marginalized children. Much of non-formal education relies on this capacity to meet the child where they are and to approach learning in a flexible, responsive, and learner-centered way.

Approaches to Non-Formal Education Sites

Many of the rigidities found in formal learning systems do not apply to non-formal and informal approaches. This is not to say that all non-formal education is flexible or always responsive to learners' needs but, more often than not, choice and flexibility are understood as key to engaging marginalized learners by offering "more opportunities for bi-directional learning and provide more choice and flexibility" (Zyngier, 2016a, p.176). Whether this involves a flexible curriculum or the capacity to consult with learners around their interests, a greater engagement in the learning process occurs (Gee, 2015). When I worked at a specialized school for children with social, emotional, and behavioural issues, many of the students struggled with reading. On one occasion, I was working with a student who refused to look at any books. Initially, I picked a variety of books and placed them on the table. He dismissed each one. I then decided that I would focus on the child's interests as a way of engaging him. I knew from past conversations that the student loved airplanes. I went and gathered any and all books I could find on airplanes. The following day, we sat down and I laid the airplane books down on the table.

After a couple of minutes, he opened several books and began to talk about the pictures. This is a common practice for beginning readers to interact and discuss images and make connections with their lives. This experience highlights one of the factors involved in non-formal learning: using a consultative approach. Gee (2015) argues that understanding who the children are in your program requires being interested and engaged with them, their cultural background, community, family and day-to-day lives. Indeed, "non-formal education programs….use learner-centered (sic) approaches that engage students with materials relevant to students' own individual backgrounds and social contexts" (p. 208).

Non-formal education in the literature focusses on the importance of connecting with learners and using a variety of strategies to engage them. These include offering a choice of activities, learning in nature, small group sessions, experiential learning, focus on fun, and the importance of rapport with the learning facilitator. Luschei and Vega (2015) looked at how non-formal learning circles in Colombia supported marginalized learners living in the contexts of homelessness, displacement, and war. They describe learning circles as "relatively small size", flexible and with an emphasis on "student well-being that allows tutors to provide personalized attention and adapt to the needs of children" (p. 51). They go on to say that the teacher's role or in this case the tutor's role is to support the learners. As one student put it, "the [tutor] is really kind and doesn't punish us like a teacher I used to have" (p. 51). Due to the hierarchical nature of teaching in formal education systems, the teacher can be the designated the person to maintain order. Their job being to supervise and control children's behaviour. This doesn't leave much room for connecting and supporting children. Which brings me to the question of pedagogy or what is the purpose or raison d'etre of teaching? Is it to fill a need for childcare while parents

work or is it to support the development of children having their own voices, thoughts, and critical analysis of the world in which they live?

Keys to Engaging Marginalized Learners

Staffing

In my literature review, staffing was key to working with marginalized learners. Whether it was hiring competent and caring staff or having staff of a similar gender or cultural background, supportive relationships with adults were key (Gee, 2015; Greene, Constance & Hynes 2013; Luschei & Vega, 2015). For Abdallah (2016), "the quality of human relationships in schools and youth service programs may be more influential than the specific techniques or interventions employed" (p. 12). In my experience, if rapport with children and youth is not present, no amount of training or technique will make the difference. By rapport I mean being interested and engaged with all of the children in your program. This does not mean liking all children. It is a structured approach which commits to being open and invested in learning about and working with all children. Abdallah in her research around best practices for "at-risk" youth found that after-school programs offer "greater emotional and developmental support….than do traditional school settings" (p. 12). The question becomes: is this because after-school staff value and pay greater attention to the social-emotional wellbeing of the children or because of the different role expectations of a teacher being to supervise and that of an after-school leader being to support? In my experience, the rigid role expectations of teachers limits their capacity to connect with their students on an interpersonal basis.

Design Elements

The antidote to formal education's rigidity is flexibility, as noted above, and it is one of the key design aspects in non-formal programs. Interestingly enough, this does not mean that no

structure or framework exists. Luschei and Vega (2015) conducted a study looking at how to reach marginalized learners in Columbia, who due to poverty, war, and displacement, were not having their needs met in the formal schooling system. They looked at how "learning circles" could impact programming due to a "flexible yet highly structured [plan] in terms of routines, agreements and accountability" (p. 52).

Another key aspect in designing non-formal programs is considering how to engage and have children participate. The term "engagement" is readily used and yet people have different understandings of what it means. One familiar definition is "the extent to which youth enjoy, are interested in, and concentrate on program activities" (Greene et al., 2013, p. 1558). In the trainings I facilitate with recreation leaders, this definition is commonly used to indicate participant engagement. At the level of appearances, this definition works. Yet, through the lens of critical theory, the cracks begin to show. One way to look at engagement in a more systemic, empowering form is through Hart's ladder of engagement (Tisdall, Gadda & Butler 2014, p. 9). The ladder consists of rungs indicating the level of engagement. Lower rungs include "decoration", "tokenism" and "manipulation", all considered "non-participation". The upper rungs include degrees of how much youth participants are informed, consulted, initiate action, and share or lead decision-making (Tisdall et al., 2014, p. 10). As you move through the rungs, children have a greater opportunity to make decisions, which I would argue is intimately tied to increased engagement and empowerment. Lastly, in the literature, there is the simple yet formidable power of fun. As Eisner (2002) argues, formal learning systems often forget that learning, when facilitated in a dynamic and creative way, should be engaging and fun. Fun includes creative or imaginative play, such as role plays where taking another's role increases perspective. It allows children to imagine "alternate possibilities" (p.12).

The Arts, Learning and Creativity

Building on fun and imagination, many scholars focus on the arts. For Eisner (2002), for example, "the sense of vitality and the surge of emotion we feel when touched by one of the arts can also be secured in the ideas we explore with students, in the challenges we encounter in doing critical inquiry, and in the appetite for learning we stimulate" (p. 14). As a singer-songwriter, I understand the vitality and emotion Eisner speaks of. The arts provide an avenue to express one's truth through song, dance, or a poem. Marginalized learners experience being disempowered and the arts provide a bridge to being heard, sharing one's truth, being connected with others and working to change structural inequities. Eisner, in his article *What Can Education Learn From The Arts*, highlights four key learnings the arts provide. The first is the promotion of self-initiated learning. Here the learner's interests guide the learning process. The learning facilitator supports the learner in uncovering and exploring topics of interest. The second is the pursuit of alternative possibilities, which includes exploring realms beyond the constraints of oppression. What possibility exists in the learner's mind which may not be apparent in the world. Eisner argues not for more standardized tests as a way to gage education's success, but for connection with one's creative self as the true gage of success. Thirdly, Eisner speaks to intrinsic satisfactions through using one's mind. He reinforces that the arts facilitate intrinsic satisfactions as arising through qualitative experiences, not extrinsic rewards, such as point systems or the use of incentive rewards commonly used in schools. Finally, Eisner speaks to stimulating and developing thinking for the real world. What he means here is that the arts provide a different way of thinking about and being in the world and can support voice and empowerment to those who are marginalized. "The arts and creative approaches have an impact on children and young people's well-being by providing them with an opportunity to express

themselves in ways meaningful to them and have a real voice" (as cited in Vettraino, Linds & Jindal-Snape, 2017, p. 81).

I would add a fifth: that the arts connect us with others through creative means. Marsh (2012) found that music programs used with immigrant children and youth in Australia "contributed to fostering social and group cohesion and helped overcome perceived separation and marginalisation" (as cited in Vettraino, Linds & Jindal-Snape, 2017, p. 80). It is valuing the imaginative more than the factual that offers space for marginalized learners to work at their own pace, to invent possibilities that rigid stereotypes don't allow, and to feel an inner satisfaction that is not connected with how one is perceived.

Program Content

There is no limit to what can be included as content when designing after-school programs. Common programming activities include sport, arts, and academic enrichment activities. Research shows that homework clubs are not engaging as sport or arts programs (Greene et al., 2013). Green et al (2013) argue that "the most common reason young people do not participate is because the content is boring" (p. 1557). I have already advocated for including arts programming and will now turn to pedagogies which support engagement and empowerment. By pedagogy, I mean what is taught and perceptions about teaching and learning. From my perspective, pedagogy impacts how programs are designed and the content by which they are configured. Two ideas of pedagogies that provide a framework for building content include being engaging and empowerment. These include transformative pedagogy and culturally-relevant pedagogy.

Transformative Pedagogy

Transformative pedagogy relies on reciprocal relationships where teaching and learning happen between the learning facilitator and the child and vice-versa. The child is valued as a participant in his/her learning. Knowledge is produced not deposited (Zyngier, 2016a). Here content is determined collaboratively by asking for in-person or survey feedback around program ideas and activities. In addition, children are given opportunities to lead activities, not to simply follow the directives of staff. In the After-School Sport and Arts Initiative (ASSAI), as described in part one, "non-school" activities were of greater interest to participants than the typical group sports offered through the physical education curriculum, such as soccer or basketball. Non-school activities included skateboarding, cross-country skiing, dance, and slam poetry, to name a few.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

A culturally-relevant pedagogy is "committed to collective, not merely individual empowerment" (Zyngier, 2016a, p. 177). This pedagogy addresses the importance of culture. Program activities involve considering who the participants are and include inviting the broader community into the program. In the ASSAI, this sometimes involved incorporating Indigenous elders and artists into all aspects of the program design and delivery. This community participation significantly increased indigenous children feeling welcomed and included in after-school programs. Seeing themselves represented in the program meant that they were more likely to participate.

Final Thoughts

If non-formal learning programs are going to get the credit they deserve, there needs to exist a pedagogical space, a structure defining how learning and teaching happen. It does not

need to be rigid or formulaic, more like a vision for who will be hired as staff, how programming will be designed and how content will be decided and delivered. Non-formal learning settings already understand the importance of flexibility, co-creating curriculum, and responding to learners' needs. "To move beyond the "better than nothing" provision for out of school children requires committed educational approaches and planning that positively seek to reduce and eradicate marginalisation" (Morpeth & Creed, 2012, p. 203). On this note, I turn to my own project.

Part Three

Project Method

For my project, I developed a model of youth engagement and learning based on a literature review and my personal experience working as an educator and as a social worker with marginalized children for 25 years. In this section I discuss what a model is, and the key elements of the model I designed. In addition, I'll describe my approach to finding, selecting, and analyzing articles I used by reviewing where I found my information, and what key search terms and questions I applied in gaging the relevancy of the research. To begin, I will define what I mean by a model and some of the key elements I used in designing the model.

Defining a Model of Engagement

Marshall and Rossman define a model as a tool to present data in a "readable and accessible form" (2016, p. 265). Other tools, such as graphics, charts, figures and models are all ways to share findings in an accessible format with other researchers, practitioners and policymakers. Models are "user-friendly representations of findings [which] can be implemented by others" (p. 266). For my project, I chose to create a model because of its' capacity to be accessible, user-friendly, and easily implemented into practice. I designed a model for practical versus theoretical uses (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). Although theoretical concepts of models are discussed in the literature, I found few practical, visual representations.

In my search, I focused on educational models, learning models, and models of creativity and imagination. Overall, I did not find clear definitions of any of these. That being said, I did come upon a few explanations which I have collectively used to guide the development of my engagement and learning model. McKenny and Reeves (2012) put forward one type of model which influenced my design called educational design models. These models are also known as

frameworks and visual models. For them, educational design models have a design or an instruction focus. Design models are intended to shape the process, and instruction models focus on what is taught. One example of a design model is the Circle of Courage®. This empowerment model shows four key elements needed for youth to be emotionally healthy. The key elements include belonging, mastery, independence and generosity.

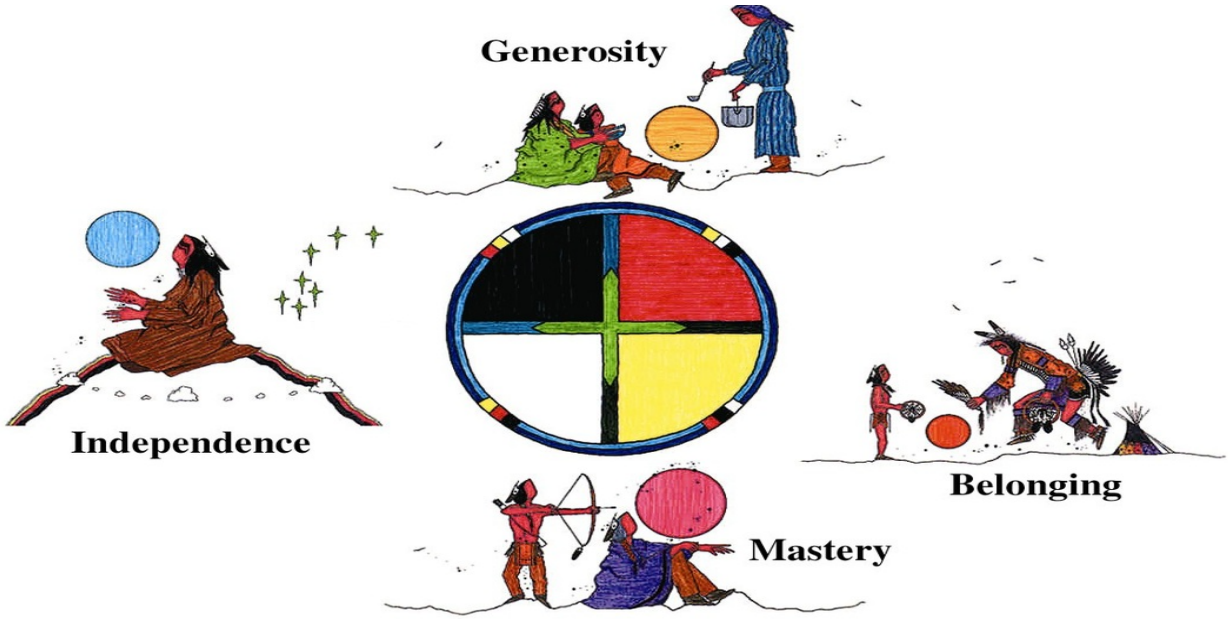

Figure 1 -- Circle of Courage

The model was created in the 1980s and is still relevant today for several reasons. From my perspective, the model's relevance lies in the accessible language of the four elements and the appeal of the visual images. In addition, the model has different versions, with varying levels of detail. In the above version, the model is primarily a visual tool. This version offers what McKenney and Reeves call a "lower level of specification" (p. 7). That is, the model offers less detailed direction and is more open to being customized by the end user. Other versions of the Circle of Courage® consist solely of images, and a final version includes images, key elements,

and a written description of each element. For this project I will produce one iteration of an engagement and learning model. In the future, however, I plan to create different versions.

Another type of model I referenced is called learning models. Nurudin, Riyadi & Subanti describe a learning model as a "structural framework that is student centered" (2018, p. 2). From my perspective, any learning process needs to involve active participation and decision-making based on the learners' needs and input. Maginess (2017), in *Crossin' (sic) the Bridge: A Participatory Approach to Filmmaking* describes how flexibility is crucial for student-centered learning. Maginess (2017) states that "flexibility ensures greater levels of participation and retention" (p. 43). In terms of the design of my engagement and learning model, flexibility is key.

In addition to educational design models and learning models, I researched models of creativity and imagination. Interestingly, most of the creativity models referenced were from the early to mid 1900s, such as Wallas' creative model (as cited in Sadler-Smith, 2015, p. 342). Wallas' creative process model consists of five distinct stages including "preparation, problem identification, incubation, illumination, and elaboration/verification" (p. 114). Such didactic, rigid stages are of limited use to me in the design of my model. Instead, I am interested in how creativity and imagination can be tools of expression and social justice. Greene (1995), researcher and author of *Releasing the Imagination*, describes how the "imagination is the most important of the cognitive capacities for learning in that it gives credence to alternative realities" (p. 3). Unlike other researchers who rigidly define creativity and imagination as a series of distinct steps or stages, Greene asks that we consider the imagination as a tool "for a richer and more fully human education" (as cited in Heath, 2008, p. 116). This idea that imagination and creativity are ways to expand what's possible and more fully connect with our own humanity is

inspiring to me. I'm interested in how learning facilitators can "release the imagination to promote valuable learning in all of their students, particularly those who are marginalised by standard curriculum" (p. 116). In summary, my working definition of an engagement and learning model is a visual, learner-centered framework which can be easily implemented, gives credence to alternative realities and provides connections to creativity and the imagination.

Considerations for Design

In designing the model, I took into account several considerations. These included a visual framework, accessible language, a non-linear design and being practical. One of the main reasons I chose to create a model was that it uses a visual format to communicate ideas and processes. Like the Circle of Courage® model seen above, the visual imagery and simple text make it easy to understand and to integrate. In terms of accessible language, I did not want to create a tool only understood by educators. Although, I am interested in having educators in formal learning settings use the model, my primary focus, as noted earlier in this project, is to provide a resource for learning facilitators in non-formal settings. For this reason, I looked for adjectives, verbs, and nouns that could resonate with learning facilitators in community and school settings. I focused on language used in studies and programs supporting marginalized children and youth. Words such as "flexibility", "choice", and "voice".

Some models, specifically linear models can present a process as static and prescriptive. One example of a linear model is a scientific model with "inputs" and "outputs". An example of a scientific model is the ideal education system characteristics model found below.

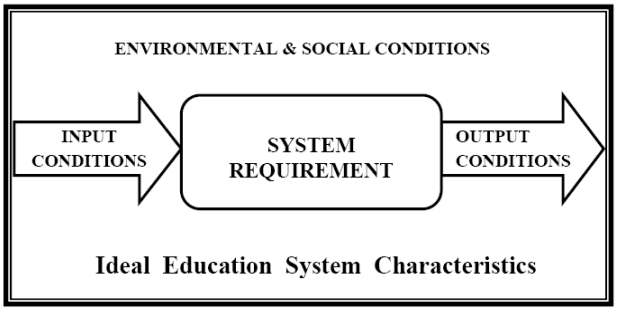

Figure 2 – Ideal Education System Characteristics

Although this model is simplistic, it demonstrates how linear, input/output models operate. What you add to the system at the beginning of the process or program has an impact on what you get out of the program. This strikes me as a disengaged approach and is not one I want to replicate. In designing my model of engagement and learning, I wanted to understand the limitations of models in order to not repeat them. My model does not have a strict starting point with 'inputs', followed by a number of steps leading to a certain result. Instead, the learning facilitator decides where to engage with the model and does so in ways s/he sees fit. Finally, in designing the engagement model for marginalized learners, I wanted to create a practical tool, one which could be implemented in daily practice. This meant incorporating ideas and suggestions that could be easily integrated into practice.

Literature Review

While conducting my research, the primary site I visited was the University of Victoria's library database to access a wide selection of academic journals and books free of charge. Other sites I visited included Google Scholar and ERIC, a free online digital library of educational research.

To help focus my research, I created categories. These categories grouped central ideas and concepts together. The final list was types of learning, critical theories of education,

marginalized learners, after-school programs, and arts programs. Within each category numerous search terms were used. The first category was ‘types of learning’. Key search terms included: formal, non-formal, and informal learning; formal, non-formal, and informal education; formal, non-formal, and informal settings; formal, non-formal, and informal learning approaches; and finally, learning frameworks. Although my research focused on non-formal learning approaches, it was important to understand the entire learning spectrum, including distinctions between the three types of learning. The second category I used was ‘critical theories of education’. Key search terms included: critical theorists, failings of formal education, limitations of formal education, critical theories of education, and limitations of formal education systems. My project arose in response to formal education failing marginalized learners. I chose critical theories of education as my conceptual framework to help me understand those failings. The third category I used was ‘marginalized learners’. Key search terms included: marginalized, marginalized children, marginalized youth, marginalized children and youth, marginalized learners, at-risk, at-risk children, at-risk youth, marginalized children and non-formal learning, marginalized children and learning programs, marginalized youth in Canada, and David Zyngier, a prominent researcher in the area of marginalized learners. In my literature review, different terms were used to describe children who are socially excluded and discriminated against. Some used the term marginalized, others at-risk. To capture all applicable studies and ideas, I too used the different terminology in my searches. I specifically searched for articles by David Zyngier as I was familiar with his work supporting marginalized learners from past trainings and workshops I’d designed. The fourth category I used was “after-school programs.” Key search terms included: after-school programs, out of school programs, and out of school time. As a result of my experience with the After-School Sport and Arts Initiative (ASSAI), as described in part one, I

wanted to further explore what the research said around the impact of after-school programs for marginalized children and youth. Lastly, was the category of 'arts programs', 'imagination' and 'creativity'. Key search terms included: arts programs and marginalized youth, arts programs and at-risk children, arts programs and imagination, arts programs and creativity, imagination and learners, and creativity and learners.

In addition to the above-mentioned categories and search terms, I had several guiding questions which helped me determine an article's relevancy. These questions supported my process of designing an engagement model for marginalized learners. The first question I asked was, Does the article/project/study/program have practical applications? That is, does the article include key learnings that could be readily used and implemented. If the article was solely theoretical, with no practical application, I discarded it. If the article's terminology was unclear, I did not use it. Given the brief timeline of the project, I focused on research that was practical and accessible. The second question that guided this project was: Does the research include best practices or recommendations? I sought out best practices and recommendations as the diverse ways that researchers discussed impact and suggestions for change. Thirdly, I queried if or how the article addressed aspects of program design, pedagogy, creativity, art or imagination? These were areas of interest to me in designing the model. Lastly, Does the article/project/study/program address issues of empowerment and agency? From my perspective, empowerment and agency are central concepts to creating an engagement model for marginalized children and youth. I did not dismiss articles which did not discuss these terms, but I paid greater attention to articles that did.

In part four, I'll present my engagement and learning model, along with reflections, a discussion of findings and recommendations for future research.

Part Four

Engagement and Learning Model for Marginalized Learners

In this section, I present my engagement and learning model for marginalized learners based on the research I've done over the past six months and personal experiences working with marginalized learners for 25 years. I discuss the key elements of the model, and how the model can be used by community, government, and school districts across British Columbia (BC). In addition, I put forward some reflections on the process of creating the model. First however, I outline why I created an engagement and learning model.

Why Create an Engagement and Learning Model?

As discussed earlier in this project, there exists a gap in meeting the needs and empowering marginalized learners in the formal education system. Through my experience working with the After-School Sport and Arts Initiative (ASSAI), and with recreation and youth-serving organizations across BC, I noticed distinct design and delivery methods that were meeting the needs of marginalized learners. I became curious as to what was happening in these non-formal programs. As a result, my Master's project was creating an engagement and learning model based on non-formal learning approaches.

My primary objective was to design a model that would be accessible and easy to implement. As stated in Part One, my main audience for the model are non-formal learning facilitators. Although they are my primary audience, having been an educator, I was interested in how the model could be of use to educators within the formal school system. Educators, such as those teaching in alternative learning programs, learning-support teachers, educational assistants working one-on-one with learners with special needs, and finally classroom teachers.

A secondary objective was to add to the research validating meaningful learning opportunities that non-formal programs, such as after-school and summer programs offer. At times, these non-formal learning programs can be dismissed as "fluff", or simply as fun, recreational activities that offer no meaningful learning experience. The assumption that non-formal programs which focus on flexible, co-created learning are somehow not significant learning opportunities is unfounded. Through my research and experience with the ASSAI, these non-formal programs are indeed rich learning environments. To dismiss these programs ignores the pedagogy that many non-formal learning facilitators use. They may not call it pedagogy, as this term is primarily used in formal educational settings. However, I use it here to strengthen the idea that it is not exclusive to formal learning systems. Although non-formal learning facilitators may follow a different course in designing and delivering learning, we need not dismiss the value of the learning. Non-formal learning approaches deserve our attention in that they bridge gaps currently found in formal settings. Not only that, they support and empower marginalized learners.

The REIL Model

Engagement is often cited as key to supporting marginalized learners (Zyngier, 2007). What differs in the research, and I'd argue in practice, is how engagement is defined. Zyngier (2007) describes how engagement can become narrowly defined as a "willingness to become involved in teacher-initiated tasks" (p. 97). As described in Part Three, I am interested in engagement beyond simply following directions. I'm referring to engagement that co-creates and facilitates learning opportunities relevant to learners, and engagement that acknowledges structural inequities and how racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism impacts learners' lives.

Through my research and personal experience, I found four areas that impact the engagement and learning of marginalized learners. These areas are: Rapport, Engage, Imagination and Creativity, and Learners. Together they form the anacronym REIL. From this point forward, I will refer either to the engagement and learning model or to the REIL model.

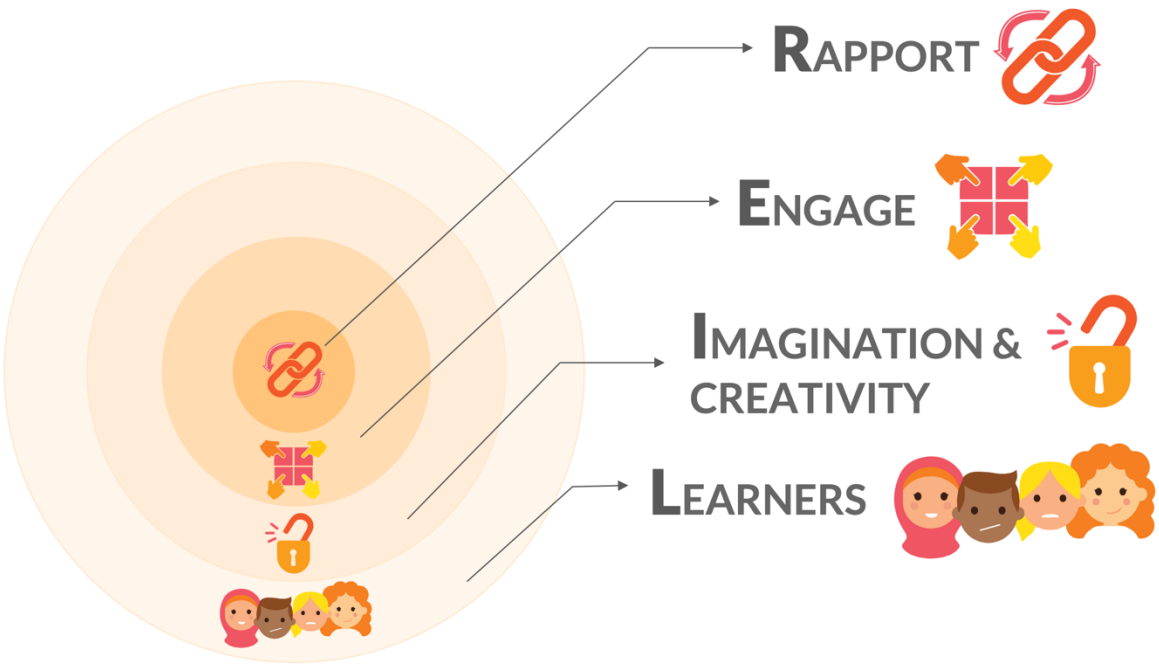

Figure 3 –The REIL model

Key areas of the REIL model

Rapport

Rapport is the central aspect of the model. In trainings I do across British Columbia with recreation leaders and educators, I describe rapport as the "ground we walk on". If rapport is present, the ground is stable, and support is available. If rapport is not present, no technique or strategy will work, no matter how skilled you are. By rapport I mean being interested and engaged with all children and youth in your program. It takes practice, patience and time. Rapport is not to be confused with "liking" all children. Rapport is an ongoing practice; liking is

a preferential choice. Rapport involves ongoing support. Rapport is not managing behaviors, it is not overseeing discipline. Finally, rapport is not feeling pity for a child or youth because of the life experiences they have had. While some participants' life experiences can be sad or upsetting, to pity someone is not rapport. The act of pitying another, can take away their voice and agency. From my perspective, pity is the antithesis of empowerment.

Engage

As discussed in the introduction of this section, engagement has many definitions. For the creation of the model, I was interested in engagement that exists beyond interest, enjoyment and participating in activities. This is not to say that these cannot be places to start, we simply don't want to stop there. Engagement is youth having a voice in what learning activities happen, and in leading activities. Engagement involves co-creating activities. I imagine this idea of co-creating activities could be unsettling for some leaders. Many of us become used to being "the one" in charge. Co-creating involves consulting and integrating learners' interests and suggestions into activities. This type of engagement offers learners a choice of activities, a flexible approach, opportunities to design the learning plan, and incorporates teaching and learning practices which include learners' families and cultures. To engage with learners is to acknowledge and discuss structural inequities. This is the type of engagement that empowers learners.

Incorporate Imagination and Creativity

"Most of the things that are interesting, important, and human are the results of creativity" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, as cited in Clinton & Hokanson, 2012). As stated in part three, incorporating imagination and creativity into programming allows marginalized learners to imagine alternate possibilities beyond structural inequities and oppressive stereotypes. In

addition, imagination and creativity fosters inventiveness, increases human connections and empathy, and supports dynamic problem solving. It is for these reasons that I have included imagination and creativity as one of the key elements of the REIL model. I want to highlight here that incorporating imagination and creativity into your design need not be limited to arts programming. All sorts of different activities beyond arts programming can include imagination and creativity. Such as, having learners use their imagination to move across the room as different animals in a physical activity program. Learners could choose their favorite animal and could then use their imagination to move as that animal. Nurudin, Riyadi & Subanti (2019) investigated how creativity could positively impact students' geometry skills. They found that "creativity requires creative thinking", and that through the process of problem-solving geometry questions, creative thinking was activated (p. 2). What this means is that creativity requires practice in problem-solving. For Clinton and Hokanson (2012) "creativity is understood to be the generation of ideas that are both novel and useful, usually in response to a problem that needs to be solved" (p. 112). From my perspective, creativity is not limited to being a problem-solving tool, however, creativity has practical uses and in fact, has a pragmatic side. However, there are many things that can hinder creativity. Clinton and Hokanson, for example, describe the following limits to creativity: "arbitrary rules, expectations of one's work being evaluated, or being watched as one works" (p. 114). To counter these hindrances, it's important that learning facilitators co-create expectations with the children and youth in their program, or at the very least inform participants of what the expectations are. In general, non-formal learning is free of a rigid curriculum, and evaluation practices. However, I'd recommend, if for any reason, evaluation is needed, use self-evaluation. Self-evaluation allows learners to provide feedback on their own work. This way, learners maintain their voice and agency.

Learners – Know Your Learners

Central to non-formal education is knowing your learners (Gee, 2015; Zyngier, 2017a). As I created the engagement and learning model, it became clear that the different areas share a great deal of overlap. I have separated them, to call out the key areas, yet crossover exists between all of the areas. Knowing your learners is closely tied with having rapport and engaging your learners. One way to know your learners is to understand their family and cultural background. This may involve inviting families into your program, or alternately, going out to meet families in the community. Many years ago, I was teaching at a school where the parents lined up at the fence at the edge of the school ground at the end of the day. They never came inside to meet their child. I wondered what was happening, but soon figured out that for these Indigenous parents being in a school was not a positive experience. In fact, several of them later told me that being inside the building reminded them of the oppression and discrimination they had endured as children. In order to meet the learners' parents, I walked to the edge of the school ground every day for months. I knew that if I wanted to learn about my students, I would need to meet their parents where they were comfortable and it worked for them.

Who Could Use the REIL Model?

Before sharing the REIL model widely, I plan to ask a small group of colleagues to review and provide feedback on the tool. I am interested in whether the language is clear and is the tool relevant to your practice? Once this vetting has happened, I will distribute the REIL model to colleagues in recreation, community and school organizations, and invite them to share the model with their networks.

I plan to share the REIL model with community organizations, such as recreation associations, youth organizations including the YM/WCA and the Boys & Girls Club, and

indigenous organizations across BC and Canada. I will also share the model with the Ministry of Education in the areas of indigenous education, inclusive education, and curriculum and assessment. Through contacts made through the ASSAI, I plan to share the model with school district and school contacts I have across British Columbia. Finally, I will be presenting my research on the engagement and learning model to community and school audiences as part of the University of Victoria's Speakers' Bureau.

How Could the Model be Used in the Future?

The finalized version of the model will be an online tool. Each of the four areas will have a hyperlink to more detailed information. Learning facilitators will be able to read more about areas of interest. For instance, when you click on the "Engage" area, you'll be brought to a list including information about recommended pedagogies, such as culturally-relevant and transformative pedagogies.

Reflections on the Process

Creating the engagement and learning model required perseverance and patience. According to the First Peoples' Principles of Learning, "learning involves patience and time". Over the course of this project, I have developed patience in finding my voice in academic writing, reviewing relevant research, discarding irrelevant research, and being alone writing for many months on end. The research and writing followed a circuitous route, at times interesting, and at times, frustrating. It helped to have a clear schedule including a timeline for when each part of the project was due. Additionally, I found it helpful that the project was broken down into four sections. This allowed me to celebrate the completion of each part before I moved on to the next. It also helped me to focus my attention on a smaller, more manageable parts of the research. My supervisor, Dr. Clover provided clear, thoughtful feedback. In addition, her high expectations

kept me on my game throughout the writing process. I am grateful for her support on this project. This has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life.

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