

Developing a qualitative framework to evaluate the Catholic Family Service (CFS) Parent Child Learning Centre

Karen Unger, MPA Student
School of Public Administration
University of Victoria
November 1, 2016

Project Client:
Holly Charles, Director of Operations
Catholic Family Service, Calgary, Alberta

Supervisor: Thea Vakil, Associate Professor and Associate Director
School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Executive Summary

The Catholic Family Service Parent Child Learning Centre (Learning Centre) incorporates regular evaluation throughout all aspects of their program. Quantitative data is collected through child assessments and client surveys. The Learning Centre's current evaluation framework does not contain measurement tools to gather qualitative feedback. The objective of this project is to make recommendations, based on current findings about program evaluation and interviews with internal and external stakeholders, by exploring the following research questions:

1. Which qualitative assessment tools or approaches can be used to help the Learning Centre enhance their ability to present their outcomes?
2. How can the Learning Centre incorporate qualitative assessment into their overall evaluation framework?

Background

The Learning Centre is an accredited childcare centre for children of adolescent mothers attending Louise Dean School. On-site health care professionals screen the children who attend the Learning Centre program for developmental delays. Each mother who enrolls her child in the Learning Centre program is assigned to a key childcare worker. This staff member is responsible for building a relationship with the mother and her child and supporting them throughout their duration in the program.

The Learning Centre uses a companion model in its evaluation process where staff members sit with participants and assist them in completing pre-, interim, and post-program surveys. These questionnaires collect quantitative data to measure participants' development as parents and their increased confidence and competence with parenting and childcare skills. When they leave the Learning Centre program participants complete exit surveys to provide feedback about their experience with the program. There are four areas of focus within the Learning Centre program that are evaluated in the current conceptual framework: facility and curriculum, child development, the adolescent mothers, and parenting skills.

Literature Review

The literature review focused on broad themes of qualitative approaches to program evaluation and specific qualitative tools and methods used in studies about adolescent parenting and early childhood learning. The review included scholarly articles and professional publications as well as individual program evaluation studies and environmental scans of non-profit service delivery organizations. The first section examined reasons for using a qualitative approach within an evaluation framework. The literature highlighted arguments contrasting the benefits and drawbacks of using either

quantitative or qualitative approaches in program evaluation. The literature presented a rationale for incorporating both approaches in evaluation design.

Second, the review considered current practices and tools in program evaluation in Canadian and American contexts. One of the emerging themes was the use of a collaborative or participatory approach for program evaluation. From a program design through to its implementation a collaborative approach requires input from both internal and external stakeholders. The literature also outlined specific tools used to gather qualitative data and methods for analyzing the data for evaluative purposes.

Third, the review explored strengths and limitations to using qualitative approaches in specific studies related to parenting and early childhood learning centres. Finally, the literature review covered recommendations to enhance the credibility of program evaluation.

Methodology

The project used a qualitative research methodology and consisted of three phases of semi-structured interviews with internal and external stakeholders. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to identify participants for each of the three stakeholder groups: Learning Centre staff members, professional program evaluation consultants or monitoring evaluation managers of non-profit organizations in Alberta, and adolescent mothers currently participating in the Learning Centre program.

The primary purpose of the interviews with staff and participants was to collect feedback about current evaluation processes at the Learning Centre and to invite suggestions or recommendations to improve program evaluation. A second purpose for interviews with Learning Centre participants was to test qualitative individual and dyadic interviews as tools that could be used by the Learning Centre as an alternative to their existing written exit survey. The purpose of interviewing the professional evaluators was to understand the experience of using qualitative evaluation approaches in the context of program evaluation for non-profit organizations in Alberta.

Semi-structured interview guides were used in each phase of data collection, but the interviews were conversational in tone. Interviews were conducted in person or over the phone and lasted between 7 and 41 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded on the researcher's iPod and transcribed directly by the researcher. Content analysis was used to identify themes and unique responses within each group and to highlight themes that overlapped across stakeholder groups.

Findings

The findings summarize the responses from each of the three stakeholder groups separately and then discuss the common themes across groups. These findings include both general

feedback on program evaluation tools and approaches, as well as opinions on the current evaluation framework at the Learning Centre.

Learning Centre staff members described the Learning Centre program and their dual role within the program, supporting both the mothers and their children. They described how program evaluation is conducted at the Learning Centre, including how this process has changed over the time they have worked in the program and challenges they see with the current methods. In particular, staff members offered their concerns with the quantitative rating scale used on the Learning Centre's current evaluation questionnaires.

Professional evaluators offered an external perspective on program evaluation. They reflected on the tools or approaches in program evaluation that they have found beneficial, emphasizing the necessity of spending sufficient time planning and designing an evaluation prior to its implementation. This group also provided reasons to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as reasons to use both internal and external stakeholder input in program evaluation.

Individual and dyadic interviews with Learning Centre participants collected respondents' feedback on the most important components of the program, on their communication and interactions with Learning Centre staff, and the main benefits for children and parents who participate in the program. Each of the Learning Centre participants were also asked to compare the experience of providing their opinions about the program in an in-person interview with that of completing a written survey.

A common theme across the stakeholder groups was how to define program quality. Between the Learning Centre staff and professional evaluator groups, three overlapping themes emerged: the purposes of program evaluation, the many variables that can affect program evaluation, and the need to contextualize evaluation data when reporting the findings.

Discussion

Three main ideas arose from the interview findings. First, the findings suggest using a holistic approach to program evaluation and the importance of triangulating qualitative and quantitative data. Second, a collaborative approach to program evaluation is advantageous for securing internal stakeholder buy-in and for capturing an objective perspective from external stakeholders. Third, creative evaluation design is a key to controlling for variables in evaluating a program, particularly evaluations that include data collection from vulnerable populations.

The findings from interviews with Learning Centre staff, professional evaluators, and Learning Centre participants offered recommendations to enhance current program evaluation framework. For each of the four areas of focus in the Learning Centre's conceptual framework, questions were suggested that could be used to capture qualitative

feedback. The qualitative interview was tested in both individual and dyadic formats and showed to be a viable alternative to the Learning Centre's current exit survey.

Recommendations

Three broad categories of recommendations have been provided to the Learning Centre in order to enhance their current evaluation framework:

1. Include a wider variety of voices

Provide opportunities for Learning Centre staff members to complete program evaluation questionnaires similar to the ones given to program participants. Have Learning Centre staff members document their observations about participant growth or regression throughout the program. Introduce one-question micro-surveys as a way of routinely collecting staff opinions about the quality of the Learning Centre program.

Additionally, collect feedback about the quality of the Learning Centre program from volunteers and practicum students who work in the program, as well as the teachers at the Louise Dean Centre.

2. Leave space for open-ended responses

Strengthen the current evaluation tools used at the Learning Centre by adding open-ended qualitative questions to triangulate the data being collected from the quantitative rating scales. Open-ended questions help Learning Centre participants to evaluate their own growth throughout their participation in the program and measure their self-awareness. In addition, these questions give participants the chance to reflect more deeply on the skills they have learned from the Learning Centre program and lead to increased confidence in their parenting role. Asking participants specific open-ended questions about their experience with the Learning Centre program offers meaningful feedback that is useful to program planning.

3. Conduct in-person exit interviews

Design a new evaluation tool at the Learning Centre that gives program participants an in-person opportunity to debrief their experience as they transition out of the program. As part of the design process, bring in an external program evaluation professional to collaborate with internal stakeholders, including staff and participants.

Conclusion

The Learning Centre incorporates program evaluation into all areas of focus in their conceptual framework. Their current tools rely primarily on quantitative data collection and they do not use any formal mechanism to gather qualitative feedback. The purpose of this project was to explore qualitative evaluation tools and approaches and make recommendations about how qualitative assessment could be incorporated into the

Learning Centre's evaluation processes. Research was conducted through a literature review and through interviews with staff members, program participants, and external professional evaluators. The research findings led to three broad recommendations that will enhance and strengthen the effectiveness of program evaluation at the Learning Centre.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	ii
Background.....	ii
Literature Review	ii
Methodology	iii
Findings.....	iii
Discussion.....	iv
Recommendations	v
Conclusion.....	v
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 BACKGROUND.....	3
Conceptual Framework.....	5
3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Qualitative Approaches to Program Evaluation.....	7
Current Practices in Program Evaluation.....	8
Qualitative Evaluation Tools.....	9
Strengths and Limitations to Using Qualitative Approaches	10
Enhancing Credibility of Program Evaluation	11
Summary of Literature Review Findings	12
4.0 METHODOLOGY.....	13
Stakeholder Groups	13
Recruitment and Interview Process	14
Interview Process	15
Data Analysis	16
Limitations	16
5.0 FINDINGS	17
Learning Centre Staff.....	17
Professional Evaluators	18
Participants.....	20
Overlapping Themes.....	22
Summary of Findings.....	23
6.0 DISCUSSION	24
Themes	24
Implications	27
Summary of Discussion	30
7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	31
1. Include a wider variety of voices	31
2. Leave space for open-ended responses.....	32
3. Conduct in-person exit interviews	33
8.0 CONCLUSION.....	34

9.0 REFERENCE LIST	36
APPENDICES	39
Appendix 1: Parenting Survey.....	39
Appendix 2: Parental Expectations Survey	40
Appendix 3: Client Satisfaction of Agency Services Exit Survey	42
Appendix 4: Exit Survey.....	43
Appendix 5: Interview Guides	45

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Family Service Parent Child Learning Centre (Learning Centre) is an accredited and licensed childcare facility for children of adolescent mothers attending social, education, and health programs at the Louise Dean Centre. The Louise Dean Centre is a partnership between the Calgary Board of Education, Catholic Family Service, and Alberta Health Services, providing supports to adolescent parents. Their services include high school education, childcare, health services, counseling, parenting and life skills classes, leadership programs, and an Aboriginal program (Catholic Family Service, 2013).

Regular program evaluation for the Learning Centre is based on scores from child assessments and client surveys documented in their Program Design (Catholic Family Service, 2013). The Catholic Family Service of Calgary (Simpson & Charles, 2008) completed a Ten-year Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Mothers & Their Children that measured the program's long-term impact. The Learning Centre uses informal client testimonials to report the benefits of the program, but has no formal mechanism for capturing qualitative data within their evaluation framework. The purpose of this research project is to address this gap and provide the Learning Centre with guidance towards strengthening their annual outcome reporting.

The primary research question is:

Which qualitative assessment tools or approaches can be used to help the Learning Centre enhance their ability to present their outcomes?

A secondary question is:

How can the Learning Centre incorporate qualitative assessment into their overall evaluation framework?

Holly Charles, Director of Operations at Catholic Family Service (CFS) is the project client. Holly oversees program design, program evaluation, and analytics for all the programs funded by CFS. The Learning Centre is an autonomous program, fully funded by CFS.

The project involves discussions with Learning Centre staff and interviews with monitoring and evaluation managers and consultants for non-profit organizations in Alberta. Recommendations for the client combine research on current findings in program evaluation and evidence from testing a selection of qualitative assessment tools with Learning Centre participants.

The report is organized into eight chapters, including this Introduction. The second chapter provides additional background information about the Learning Centre's current evaluation

framework and processes. The third chapter reviews professional literature and research on tools and approaches in qualitative program evaluation, particularly in the context of early childhood learning centres. The fourth chapter outlines the methodology used in the three phases of the research project, including interviews with internal and external stakeholders, and the selection, development, and testing of qualitative assessment tools with Learning Centre participants. The fifth chapter describes the findings from data collected through the interviews and results from the testing of qualitative tools. The sixth chapter discusses the findings, situating the research within the context of current practices in program evaluation. The seventh chapter offers recommendations for the client's consideration. Finally, the eighth chapter is a conclusion, summarizing the report.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The Learning Centre serves adolescent mothers (ages 14-20) by providing enriched childcare for children aged 6 weeks up to 35 months. The centre is on site of a Calgary Board of Education (CBE) school building. Louise Dean Centre is a co-location partnership of CBE, Alberta Health Service (AHS), and CFS. All three operate financially independent of each other, but collaborate within the program offerings.

Once the children are too old to continue attending the Learning Centre, childcare staff members help mothers to transition their children to community daycare or pre-school programs. Adolescent mothers can continue to attend Louise Dean after their children have transitioned to community daycare/pre-school, as one of the aims of the Louise Dean Centre is supporting the mothers until they have completed high school (Catholic Family Service, 2013, p. 16).

The program is designed to support young mothers in the highest risk circumstances, and application into the program includes a risk assessment completed by a social worker (Catholic Family Service, 2013, p. 18). Following intake into the program, each mother and child is assigned a key childcare worker. Although all Learning Centre staff support all the children in the program, it is beneficial for mothers to have one key contact with whom to build a relationship. Intakes can happen throughout the school year, but tend to follow the school calendar with the majority of new intakes occurring in September and February.

Current formative evaluation processes at the Learning Centre include assessment of child development, measurement of parent growth, and an exit interview. The Ages and Stages Questionnaires (Squires & Bricker, 2009) is the formal tool used to monitor child health and development. Additionally, health care professionals from Alberta Health Services (including doctors, nurses, developmental specialists, Speech Language Pathologists) are regularly on-site to screen infants using the Diagnostic Inventory for Screening Children (DISC) assessment tool. Children with suspected developmental delays are referred for appropriate early intervention services (Catholic Family Service, 2013, p. 21).

Key workers help their assigned mothers to complete two surveys: a Parenting Survey developed by Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), and a Parental Expectations survey created by FCSS and modified internally by CFS (see Appendices 1 and 2). The companion model is used because it builds the relationship between the mothers and childcare workers, and allows childcare workers to assist if a mother has literacy challenges. Surveys are completed in September, January, and June. The pre-test provides baseline measurements, while subsequent interim and post-surveys reflect the growth in a mother's perception of her parenting skills. Mothers and key workers continue to complete the Parental Expectations survey at the assigned times, until the infant transitions to a community daycare/pre-school facility.

In addition to completing the post-test surveys, there are two exit surveys completed by clients when their child transitions out of the Learning Centre. The first is a satisfaction survey, asking mothers to reflect broadly on their experience with the Learning Centre as a service provider (see Appendix 3). The second survey asks questions about the child's future placement, the family's living and financial situations, the mother's satisfaction with the Learning Centre program, and the specific impact or benefit of attending the Learning Centre (see Appendix 4).

In 2008, a 10-year longitudinal study of the Learning Centre was completed, with the support of an external evaluation consultant (Simpson & Charles, 2008). The study contacted mothers who had been out of the Learning Centre program for 2 to 10 years, and measured the longer-term impacts of their participation in the program (p. 5). Data was collected through a combination of surveys and face-to-face interviews with the mothers (p. 21).

The Learning Centre receives ongoing funding from the United Way, the Public Health Agency of Canada, provincial daycare subsidies, and private donors. Annual outcomes reports are required for the United Way at the end of December, and the Public Health Agency at the end of March. Data used to complete these reports include demographic information and quantitative information collected through the aforementioned survey instruments.

Learning Centre participants are occasionally asked to give presentations to audiences of high school students or to current and potential donors. A peer support program at the Louise Dean Centre meets in the evenings to help mothers reflect on their own experiences from a narrative perspective, and to develop their stories into presentations suitable for these purposes (Simpson & Charles, 2008, p. 10). While their anecdotes are impactful, they are not collected from a formalized qualitative evaluation approach and are not meant for use in outcome reporting.

The Learning Centre has a well-developed evaluation framework. They regularly collect data about child development, parent growth, and program impact. However, there is no formal mechanism for capturing qualitative data aside from one open-ended question at the end of the exit survey asking about the benefits of the program and informal staff or mother testimonials about the program's influence. Including qualitative research will provide in-depth assessment of the strengths and impact of the program, offer more nuanced explanations for the extent to which outcomes were or were not achieved, and can identify specific implementation or policy issues that need to be addressed to improve program quality (Jarvie, 2012, p. 37). It will allow clearer articulation of the benefits mothers gain from their relationship with the Learning Centre to reach their goals and improve their ability to parent their children.

Conceptual Framework

The Learning Centre program can be divided into four areas of focus: facility and curriculum, children, adolescent mothers, and parenting. Table 1 illustrates the activities, outputs (ie. evidence of service delivery), short-term outcomes, and mid- to long-term impact for each area of focus. The Learning Centre's current indicators of success and measurement tools are also included (Catholic Family Service, 2013, p. 24).

Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes	Mid- to long-term impact	Indicators of success	Measurement tools
FACILITY/CURRICULUM Provision of quality childcare in a licensed, enriched setting for children of high-risk teen mothers attending academic, psychosocial, and health programs at the Louise Dean Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully operating childcare program in compliance with and/or exceeding the provincial licensing standards • Resources to provide clothing, toys, milk, and diapers as needed. • # of children and # of families served per year • 40 childcare spaces age 6 weeks to 35 months • # of volunteers and # of volunteer hours per year 	Parents are more familiar with what to expect from a quality care facility. Children experience quality care in an enriched and stimulating environment.	Parents will be confident making informed decisions about future childcare and/or school placements for their children.	Learning Centre meets day care licensing standards	Alberta Child Care accreditation and licensing standards
CHILD FOCUS Developmental screening provided for all children in the Learning Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members, including health professionals, who are trained to use developmental screening tools • All children receive ongoing developmental screening 	Any suspected developmental delays or health, care, or safety issues are identified and remedial intervention initiated. Parents increase their knowledge of child development.	Parents increase their understanding and ability to meet the needs of their child. Parents are able to find and access intervention and support once they leave Louise Dean.	% of children with Ages & Stages scores within the normal range	Ages & Stages + Ages & Stages Social Emotional screening

ADOLESCENT MOTHER Establishment of a supportive, informative, and nurturing relationship with the adolescent mother Individual sessions with mothers to increase their understanding and ability to meet the needs of their child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:3 ratio - one key parent/child educator assigned to three mothers • Daily contact and communication between mothers and parent/child educators 	Adolescent mothers feel supported in their role as a parent.	Adolescent mothers experience a positive adjustment to their role as a parent.	% of parents satisfied with service and say they feel supported by staff	Client Satisfaction of Agency Services Exit Survey Exit Survey
PARENTING FOCUS Modeling, support, and information for positive parenting and healthy child development, nutrition, and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops and parenting classes on topics related to best practices in parenting 	Parents increase their basic childcare skills.	<p>Parents increase their confidence as parents.</p> <p>Parents improve their parenting skills.</p> <p>Parent/child bond is strengthened.</p>	<p>% of parents with improved scores on Parental Expectations Survey</p> <p>% of parents with increased scores on Parenting Survey</p>	<p>Parental Expectations Survey</p> <p>Parenting Survey</p>

Table 1
Conceptual Model for Learning Centre Program

The project will examine the Learning Centre's evaluation processes, as outlined in the conceptual model. Research findings and recommendations will investigate ways to incorporate qualitative data collection to enhance the current indicators of success and measurement tools.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the use of qualitative approaches in program evaluation, particularly in early childhood education settings. The review will identify the purposes of including a qualitative approach in program evaluation. It will then focus on current qualitative evaluation practices and outline specific qualitative tools and methods. The next section will highlight strengths and limitations of qualitative approaches in studies related to adolescent parenting and early childhood learning. The final section presents recommendations for enhancing the credibility of program evaluation. Sources used include books, scholarly journal articles, and professional publications. Primary keywords included program evaluation, qualitative assessment, qualitative evaluation, and early childhood learning centres.

Qualitative Approaches to Program Evaluation

According to Patton (2008), program evaluation involves making judgments about the value and effectiveness of a program and providing recommendations to use evaluation findings to improve program quality (p. 5). Jarvie (2012) argues that taking a qualitative approach provides in-depth assessment of the strengths and impact of a program, offers more nuanced explanations for the extent to which outcomes were or were not achieved, and identifies specific implementation or policy issues that need to be addressed to improve program quality (p. 37).

A recurring theme in the literature is the contrast between quantitative and qualitative approaches to program evaluation. Patton (2015) refers to this as “the paradigm wars” (p. 88). Liket, Rey-Garcia, and Maas (2014) find that quantitative evaluation can overwhelm an organization with data (p. 172) that is difficult to interpret and use for strategic planning and program implementation purposes. Likewise, Newcomer and Brass (2016) note that quantitative measurements do not easily lead to information that can be used by organizations in understanding how to improve their programs (p. 85). On the other hand, a qualitative approach goes beyond asking if a program is effective or not and questions how the program works and why certain components of the program are effective (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Paikoff, 1991, p. 399; Jarvie, 2012, p. 37). Qualitative research can provide information on the specific impacts of a program across different communities and can highlight the experiences of ethnic minority groups (Jarvie, 2012, p. 39). Finally, qualitative methods can lead to practical solutions for problem solving and decision-making and produce useful program evaluation results (Patton, 2015, p. 170).

Other authors argue for incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods in program evaluation design. The use of more than one method and data source allows evaluators to triangulate their findings and give more details about their program’s quality (Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 359). Patton (2015) suggests that integrating both quantitative and

qualitative approaches, by looking at areas of convergence and divergence, provides more balanced results (p. 665). Focused interviews and targeted probing can lead to qualitative validation of the program outcomes being measured and conversely, qualitative descriptions can be coded and converted into quantitative scales (Kalafat, Illback, & Sanders, 2007, p. 139). Hoefer (2000) advocates for the use of rigorous methods in order to have confidence that an evaluation produces valid results (p. 169). However, he cautions against relying heavily on standardized instruments and test scores (p. 174) so that evaluation can go beyond simply reporting that a program is doing what it says it will do, leading also to recommendations for program improvements (p. 175). Further, Lee and Walsh (2004) argue that standardized criteria alone does not provide space for continuous reflection and program improvement among staff (p. 369).

Current Practices in Program Evaluation

Within the Canadian context, since 2001 the federal government has shifted towards results-based management and tasked the Centre of Excellence for Evaluation (CEE), under the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, with developing a set of competencies for professionally designated evaluators (Poth, Lamarche, Yapp, Sulla, & Chisamore, 2014, p. 89). The competencies include reflective, technical, situational, management, and interpersonal practices (Donnelly, Letts, Klinger, & Shulha, 2014, p. 55). However, among the Canadian evaluation community there is a wide variety of contexts and purposes for evaluation and no Canadian-specific definition for program evaluation exists (Poth, et al., 2014, p. 88). Within the Canadian evaluation context, therefore, a proxy definition that acknowledges diversity is more appropriate to describe the continuum of purposes, approaches, activities and contexts of program evaluation in Canadian organizations (p. 99).

Environmental scans included in the literature review looked at program evaluation practices across nonprofit organizations in American contexts. The smallest scan included 20 randomly selected school-based Family Resource Centres in Kentucky (Kalafat, et al., 2007, p. 139). Lee and Walsh (2004) contacted 140 organizations across the United States, looking specifically at early childhood programs serving three- to five-year olds (p. 353). In subsequent phases of their research, they reached out to 34 program evaluators of early childhood programs (p. 354) and spoke with 15 program directors and 15 teachers in three mid-sized cities in Illinois (p. 355). Hoefer (2000) surveyed 160 United Way funded non-governmental and direct service providers in Dallas, Texas (p. 169). Last, the most wide-ranging environmental scan initially spoke to 302 nonprofits across the country, followed up by interviewing 40 of these programs over the phone, and produced in-depth profiles for four other programs (Fine, Thayer, & Coghlan, 2000, p. 332).

The intended purpose of all four scans was to examine program evaluation processes, but each comes from a different angle. Kalafat, et al. (2007) look at the role of evaluation as an assessment of program implementation (p. 136), understanding the effectiveness of individual components within multi-component programs (p. 137). Lee and Walsh (2004)

stress the importance of gaining in-depth understanding of program processes and stakeholder perspectives on program quality before any meaningful evaluation can begin (p. 351). Hoefer (2000) focuses on program evaluation as a response to the need for more accountability (p. 167), asking which elements of an evaluation promote accountability (p. 169). Finally, Fine, et al. (2000) explore the role and influence of external contractors and internal stakeholders, including program staff, board members, funders, and program participants (p. 336).

A theme emerging from the environmental scans is the importance of collaboration in designing and implementing program evaluations. Internal staff members may lack both skill level and objectivity to design tools for high-level evaluation (Hoefer, 2000, p. 175). However, they have an in-depth understanding of the program's components (Fine et al., 2000, p. 337; Kalafat, et al., 2007, p. 137) and they are the individuals responsible for incorporating evaluation results into program planning and implementation (Fine et al., 2000, p. 339). Therefore, it is recommended that internal stakeholders collaborate with an outside evaluator to produce meaningful, useful, and credible evaluations (Fine et al., 2000, p. 339; Kalafat, et al., 2007, p. 146; Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 368).

The collaborative or participatory approach to program evaluation is also discussed in other literature, outside of the environmental scans. Patton (2008) uses the term "process use" (p. 108) to describe collaborative evaluation and that which is learned by those who are involved. Advocates for a participatory approach to evaluation detail its advantages, including: cooperation between managers and program staff, increased ownership of the evaluation process, improved reflexivity among staff members about their work, and evaluation findings that can lead to useful results (Liket, et al., 2014, p. 171; Lipps & Grant, 1990, pp. 427-435; Weiss & Horsch, 1998, p. 4). Similarly, Donelly, et al. (2014) recommend the use of knowledge translation approaches to encourage active collaboration that will lead to relevant results more likely to be implemented by end users (p. 38).

Qualitative Evaluation Tools

Morgan, Ataie, Carder, and Hoffman (2013) present the concept of a continuum of qualitative interviewing that includes focus groups, dyadic interviews, and individual interviews (p. 1276). Researchers use focus groups to gather a shared perspective on a topic by comparing and contrasting a group's opinions. The data collected in a focus group includes both the individual responses from participants, as well as the interaction between participants and the moderator (Ryan, Gandha, Culbertson, & Carlson, 2014, p. 329). Evaluators require training to effectively moderate a focus group and to analyze the data generated by the shared experiences and group dynamics between participants (p. 339).

Dyadic interviews are an alternative to focus groups and offer advantages over individual interviews. In contrast to a focus group, dyadic interviews require only two participants and conversations between dyads are easier for the moderator to manage (Morgan, Eliot, Lowe, & Gorman, 2016, p. 111). Contrary to individual interviews, dyadic interviews may allow

participants to feel more comfortable by having another participant present (Morgan, et al., 2013, p. 1279). The presence of another participant helps those who need more time to process questions (p. 1278) and one participant's response may stimulate an idea in the other participant that they may not have remembered to share (p. 1277). Further, dyadic interviews can be especially effective for an outside evaluator coming in to interview a population with whom there is no established relationship or rapport (p. 1280).

Two procedures for qualitative data analysis include a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) and a rapid identification of themes from audio recordings (RITA) (Neal, Neal, VanDyke, & Kornbluh, 2015). Both methods focus the data analysis to the specific evaluation objectives, summarizing the data by identifying key themes (Neal et al., 2015, pp. 119-123; Thomas, 2006, pp. 238-240). Thomas (2006) recognizes that the inductive approach is not as strong as structured data analysis approaches, including grounded theory, discourse analysis, or phenomenology (p. 246). Likewise, Neal, et al. (2014) refers to RITA as a supplementary approach to other traditional data coding analysis approaches (p. 129). However, both approaches are useful during the course of an evaluation to gather rapid feedback and arrive at findings linked to evaluation questions (Neal, et al., 2014, p. 129; Thomas, 2006, p. 246).

Case studies are another qualitative tool that has been used by Canadian policy decision-makers (Johnston, 2013, p. 21). This tool is useful when evaluating more complex social contexts, providing a mechanism for participants to share their stories with a researcher (p. 24). Recognizing individual stories is particularly useful in studies with First Nations or other communities resistant to traditional, quantitative data collection procedures (p. 28). Additionally, case studies can be beneficial in asking questions about specific components of a program that may otherwise be overlooked in a general, whole-program evaluation (p. 29). They can provide a 360-degree perspective from the vantage of multiple experiences (p. 30). However, case study methodologies have been criticized for their subjectivity, generalizability, vulnerability to biased reporting and results and costliness in terms of expense and time (pp. 24-27). In order to be a valuable tool for program evaluation, the trustworthiness of case study methodology must be carefully considered (p. 37).

Strengths and Limitations to Using Qualitative Approaches

Two studies, Sadler, Swartz, and Ryan-Krause (2003) and Sadler, Swartz, Ryan-Krause, Seitz, Meadows-Oliver, Grey, and Clemmens (2007), examine the impacts of a parent support program and school-based childcare centre in an American urban high school in New Haven, Connecticut. In both studies, adolescent mothers enrolled in the program volunteered to participate and the research took place at the school. Participants received a monetary stipend for participating. Since participants self-selected and were paid to participate, Sadler, et al. (2003) acknowledge the possible bias in their findings (p. 115). Both studies used a variety of self-report surveys, questionnaires, and child assessment tools in their evaluation design, but Sadler, et al. (2007) also conducted interviews with the participants. Through these open-ended interviews they were able to collect descriptive

information about the effects of program participation on life course expectations (ex. high school graduation), family dynamics including relationships between mothers and their children, and between mothers and their own parents (n.p.). In addition to evaluating program impact, the researchers were testing the feasibility of using their instruments for a larger longitudinal study, recognizing that a matched comparison group or using a longitudinal research design can strengthen evaluation studies (Sadler, et al., 2003, p. 3; Sadler, et al., 2007, n.p.).

Seamark and Lings (2004) and de Jonge (2001) used semi-structured interviews to gather information from women who gave birth to their first children in adolescence. Both of these studies recruited women in their 20's, whose children were no longer infants, conducting the interviews in the women's homes or community venues. de Jonge (2001) found recruiting participants from a vulnerable population to be a challenge (p. 54). This study took place in Edinburgh, Scotland and asked mothers to reflect on the supports they received as pregnant and parenting teenagers (p. 50). Interviews were done individually or in pairs (p. 53). In East Devon, England, Seamark and Lings (2004) used individual interviews to ask mothers about the experience of starting a family as a teenager and their expectations for the future (p. 813). In both of these studies, the researchers found that interview responses may be affected by a participant's perceptions of the interviewer. They may hold back because of their suspicions towards the interviewer or they may try to please the interviewer by saying what they think she wants to hear (de Jonge, 2001, p. 54; Seamark & Lings, 2004, p. 817). While Seamark and Lings (2004) recognize the limitation that findings from a qualitative research study cannot be generalized across programs or contexts, they conclude that one of the strengths of their study was the level of detail obtained through the in-depth interviews (p. 817). This conclusion acknowledges one of the roles that qualitative methods can play in program evaluation.

Hodgson, Papatheodorou, and James (2014), is a case study exploring the participatory monitoring and evaluation framework used by a training centre for early childhood education staff in KwaZuluNatal, South Africa. The study collects both quantitative information using checklists and qualitative information from open-ended questionnaires and interviews (p. 145). Data is collected from the training staff, trainees, parents, and children involved in the program, though language and cultural barriers presented a challenge to collecting reliable data (pp. 145-146). One of the recommendations from this study is the importance for an evaluation to be methodical about how data is collected while maintaining flexibility so it can be used within the context of a particular program (p. 147).

Enhancing Credibility of Program Evaluation

The literature provides recommendations for enhancing the credibility of program evaluation processes. First, it is important for stakeholders to articulate a clearly defined purpose for any evaluation. This informs what will be evaluated, how it will be evaluated, and how evaluation results will be used (Liket, et al., 2014, p. 185; Thomas & LaPoint,

2005, p. 7). Second, an organization needs to consider who will conduct the evaluation. Budget constraints may lead to program managers or internal staff members taking on the responsibility of program evaluation (Liket, et al., 2014, p. 172). However, organizations benefit from training their staff to conduct evaluations so that results will be more credible and are more likely to have sustained influence on the organization (Newcomer & Brass, 2016, p. 93; Weiss & Horsch, 1998, p. 6). Where external evaluators are engaged, they need to spend time understanding and engaging with a program and its participants before drawing conclusions from evaluation data (Sandall, Smith, McLean, & Broudy-Ramsey, 2002, p. 133; Weiss & Horsch, 1998, p. 5).

In qualitative methods for program evaluation, findings and results represent subjective perceptions, so credibility is dependent on the authority of the researcher and how accurately the data is presented (Krefting, 1991, p. 214). Patton (2015) suggests systematic analysis strategies, especially using a variety of triangulation processes to enhance credibility and utility of qualitative studies (pp. 660-661). He stresses the importance of considering and emphasizing context in all stages of evaluation design, implementation, and analysis (p. 659). Krefting (1991) advises that the researcher spends sufficient time within the program context to understand and identify patterns, values, and reoccurring themes (p. 217). As well, she advises continual reflexive analysis of biases and perceptions that may affect the researcher's interpretation of evaluation findings (p. 218).

Summary of Literature Review Findings

The literature included individual program evaluation studies, environmental scans of large numbers of non-profit service delivery organizations, and articles about general approaches and specific tools used in qualitative program evaluation. Advantages and limitations of both qualitative and quantitative approaches are presented throughout many of the articles. Qualitative evaluation is recommended when the purpose of evaluation is to understand program implementation, including which aspects of a program lead to outcomes and for whom is the program having an impact. Another effective practice is the importance of a collaborative and participatory approach to program evaluation. Where external evaluators are engaged, there is a need to secure buy-in from internal staff members and program participants, where possible. Internal stakeholders have a better understanding of the program and will be impacted by the results of the evaluation. Finally, the literature on program evaluation highlights the value in establishing clear objectives before designing or implementing an evaluation. Having a focused approach leads to more meaningful, credible results.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

This project used a qualitative research methodology from a utilization-focused evaluation perspective (Patton, 2008, p. 37). The focus of the project is to provide concrete recommendations to the client in order to enhance their evaluation processes. Specifically, the project is looking into the use of interviews instead of the currently used survey to provide qualitative program evaluation data. The specific and pragmatic nature of the research questions lends itself to a utilization-focused approach.

The research included three phases of short, semi-structured interviews with internal stakeholders and external professional evaluators. In the first phase, individual in-person interviews were conducted with Learning Centre staff. The next phase included individual interviews in person or on the phone with program evaluation consultants or monitoring and evaluation managers of non-profit organizations in Alberta. The final phase involved testing the interview as a qualitative program evaluation tool with Learning Centre participants.

Stakeholder Groups

Three stakeholder groups were identified to provide a comprehensive view of the program to inform future considerations regarding evaluation processes at the Learning Centre. A purposeful sampling strategy was used focusing the research on participants who are invested in the topic of program evaluation generally, or evaluation of the Learning Centre specifically (Patton, 2015, p. 264).

Learning Centre staff members are internal stakeholders who help collect program evaluation data in the existing evaluation process. The goal of conducting one-on-one interviews with this stakeholder group was to inform the researcher about the understanding of these staff members about current program evaluation practices at the Learning Centre. Gaining an in-depth understanding of the present context is an important, foundational step for evaluation (Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 370). In the interview staff members were provided with a forum to provide their input on suggested evaluation processes. This involvement of internal stakeholders increases the likelihood of their buy-in to proposed changes (Fine et al., 2000, p. 337).

An external perspective was gathered through interviews with professional evaluators presently engaged in program evaluation of non-profit organizations in the Alberta context. These external voices were beneficial because they brought expertise about program evaluation in the local context that supplemented the findings from the literature review. The stakeholder group included monitoring and evaluation managers involved in their own organization's internal program evaluation and program evaluation consultants working as external evaluators for community-based organizations. One of the consultants was an external evaluator who does regular work with the project client at Catholic Family

Service, so her responses included further insight about the Learning Centre's current processes.

Learning Centre participants were the second internal stakeholder group interviewed for this project. The purpose of this phase was two-fold. First, interviews were conducted both individually and in pairs with Learning Centre participants in order to test the interview as a tool that could be used in addition to the surveys that the Learning Centre currently employs, to gather qualitative feedback for the purpose of program evaluation. Second, follow-up interviews were conducted one-on-one with each of the participants to gauge their understanding of the current evaluation process and their suggestions to improve this process. Similar to the interviews with internal staff, the responses of Learning Centre participants can improve the recommendations for future evaluation design (Fine et al., 2000, p. 337).

Recruitment and Interview Process

Phase One: Staff

On February 11, 2016 the researcher presented at a Learning Centre staff meeting to introduce the study and invite them to consider being interviewed. The Learning Centre Program Manager selected six interested staff members, two from each of the Learning Centre rooms, to participate in the study. Participating staff members had been working at the Learning Centre between 3 and 18.5 years. All interviews were scheduled for Friday, May 6 in the afternoon. Learning Centre participants pick up their children early on Fridays, so these interviews did not conflict with staff members' work responsibilities. One staff member had to leave the Centre early so her interview was rescheduled for the following Monday before the Centre opened. All interviews were held in a small meeting room at Louise Dean. The interviews lasted between 9 and 22 minutes and were audio-recorded on the researcher's iPod.

Phase Two: Professional Evaluators

The researcher generated a list of personal contacts that have program evaluation experience with non-profit organizations in Alberta. The project client added other contacts to that list. A total of four participants were invited to participate and agreed to be interviewed. Two interviews were conducted via the phone, one was in-person at the participant's office, and the other was in-person at a meeting room at Louise Dean. These interviews lasted between 25 and 41 minutes and were audio-recorded on the researcher's iPod. They were scheduled between May 6 And June 3, 2016.

Phase Three: Participants

The Learning Centre Program Manager visited Louise Dean classrooms and introduced the research project to students who had children attending the Learning Centre program. Interested participants had to be 18 years of age or older, which limited the number of

Learning Centre participants eligible to participate. Six participants were interviewed from June 6-8, 2016 in the afternoons. This was the week before Grade 12 diploma exams, so the students were pulled from study sessions or after classes had ended for the day and did not miss class in order to participate. Participants were told that the purpose of the research project was to look at current program evaluation processes at the Learning Centre, including their use of a written exit survey (Appendix 3). They were invited to participate in the project in order to test the interview as an alternate tool for collecting qualitative data for program evaluation. The researcher used two different interview formats: four of the participants were interviewed individually and two participants were paired up for a dyadic interview (Morgan, et al., 2013, p. 110). Learning Centre Interviews lasted between 7 and 21 minutes and were audio-recorded on the researcher's iPod.

Interview Process

Semi-structured interview guides were prepared for each phase of data collection (Appendix 4). Respondents from each group were asked the same questions in largely the same order but probing or follow-up questions were added to keep the tone of the interviews conversational (Patton, 2015, p. 438). Many of the questions for phases one and two came from Lee and Walsh (2004)'s research on evaluation with program evaluators and early childhood practitioners (p. 352).

Learning Centre staff members described the Learning Centre program, their understanding of the purpose for program evaluation, their experiences with program evaluation while working at the Centre, and their recommendations for how the current evaluation process could be improved.

Professional evaluators outlined their experiences with program evaluation, their opinions on quantitative and qualitative data collection and their preferred methods for collecting data, their challenges in conducting evaluations, and their experiences with using internal and external stakeholders. Each of these participants was also asked to reflect on one specific program evaluation they had done, explaining their evaluation design and the criteria they used to evaluate the quality of that program (Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 355).

In order to test the interview as a qualitative program evaluation tool that could be used at the Learning Centre, interview questions for the Learning Centre participants were taken directly from their current exit survey (Appendix 3). These questions asked participants to reflect on their satisfaction with the Learning Centre program, evaluate their interactions with staff at the Learning Centre and provide feedback on the benefits they and their children gained from attending the program. In the follow-up portion of the interview, participants reflected on the use of surveys versus in-person interviews as a way of commenting on their experiences at the Learning Centre. They were also asked about their experience of giving feedback to an external evaluator, as opposed to an internal staff member.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all responses were kept confidential and none of the participants are identified in this report. The University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board reviewed the level of risk and harm and concluded that the project posed minimal risk to participants.

Data Analysis

Interviews and responses were transcribed directly by the researcher. Content analysis involved reviewing transcripts from each phase of the data collection. For each stakeholder group, the responses were coded to identify patterns of similar responses and common themes and to highlight unique responses or perspectives. A second level of analysis identified the overlapping and distinctive responses across stakeholder groups. Research questions were used as a reference point to ensure that the themes corresponded with the purpose of the project.

Limitations

Working within the timeline of the school year posed challenges to the timeline of data collection and analysis as all interviews with Learning Centre participants had to be completed before the end of the school year. The findings from interviews with Learning Centre staff and professional evaluators included information about a variety of qualitative program evaluation tools, but individual and dyadic interviews were the only tools tested with Learning Centre participants. Setting the criteria to include only participants over the age of 18 simplified the process of obtaining informed consent, but also limited the pool from which Learning Centre participants could be drawn. Only six participants participated in the project rather than the ten that were initially proposed. Because of the small sample size, only one dyadic interview was conducted which limits the conclusions can be drawn from this tested method of data collection.

5.0 FINDINGS

Each of the three phases of research used a different set of interview questions. In the first phase, six Learning Centre staff members were interviewed. The second phase consisted of interviews with four professional evaluators. In the third phase, interviews were conducted with six participants from the Learning Centre program. This chapter summarizes the findings from each phase individually and then summarizes general themes that crossed over between interview groups in a fourth section.

Learning Centre Staff

The first three questions in the interview with Learning Centre staff asked about their role at the Centre, the core components of the program, and how they would describe a high quality early childhood education program. These questions contextualized the rest of their responses and staff members responded with several similar ideas. Three respondents stated that the Learning Centre is not a daycare. These staff members described their role as providing quality care for the babies, while also working to support the teenage moms and teach them about parenting. In four of the interviews, staff members referred to themselves as “role models” working together with the moms, guiding but not judging them, providing parenting education but following the lead of the moms. Four respondents identified the staff as a core component of the Learning Centre program, describing the team as highly trained, qualified, educated, knowledgeable, dedicated, and passionate. In defining a high quality early childhood education program, three respondents talked about the importance of offering professional development opportunities for staff members.

Learning Centre staff members were asked to reflect on their experiences with program evaluation at the Centre and changes they had observed during the time they had worked there. All of the respondents talked about the parenting questionnaires filled out by Learning Centre participants and four of them referred to the exit interview. Three staff members described “tweaks” that have made to the survey over time: the questions have been simplified to make it user-friendly, the number of times the moms are surveyed throughout their participation in the program has decreased, and staff members now sit with the moms to fill out the surveys with them. Two staff members were positive about the current parenting questionnaire. One indicated it is effective in tracking areas of progress or regression for each of the moms. Another referred to the parenting questionnaire as a tool for building a relationship between the staff member and the mom.

In four of the interviews, staff members commented on the 1-10 scale used on the parental expectations survey (see Appendix 2) to rate parenting competence and its ability to accurately portray the impact of the program on the Learning Centre participants. These are some of their comments:

- “If you don’t sit down and go through each question with them, they tend to just tick off [...] those number 10 boxes.”

- “I feel like sometimes they write 9 or 10 just so that they won’t get scrutinized.”
- “When we get the girls at the beginning and they think they know a lot about parenting and they have it all covered, we give them a form in which they are going to say ‘ooh, this I do it well so 9, this I perfectly 10, 9, 10, oh yeah 9, 10, bam, done!’ [...] Four months down the road, or six months down the road, they are going to leave and you give them the same form and by then, they have seen the challenges [...] they think twice before, ‘Ok, that’s no longer a 10, I think that will be a 5 in there.’”

Learning Centre staff listed other variables they perceived as impacting the effectiveness of the current tool, including the age of the child, the mood of the participant on the day the survey is completed, or how much the participant likes her current caregiver.

The interview questions asked Learning Centre staff about any challenges they see with the current program evaluation tools and approaches, as well as recommendations for other ways to evaluate the Centre. The challenge of timing was brought up in three interviews. These respondents talked about the importance of taking enough time to go through each of the questions with the participants to capture all the data and get an accurate reading from the moms. A fourth interviewee referred to the challenge of meeting the organization’s timelines for having all the data collected. Two staff members expressed confusion about what is done with the surveys once they have been submitted and who reads the results. Three interviewees explained that getting honest answers from the moms is a challenge. One mentioned that multiple stakeholders, including social workers, are collecting similar data from the moms using similar forms, which can be frustrating or redundant for them.

A recommendation was made in three of the interviews that Learning Centre staff members have an increased role in the program evaluation process. One individual commented that the current process primarily collects data from the moms, but that as staff members they should be evaluating the program too. Three interviewees suggested a role for staff members to help explain or interpret the data to funders. Another recommendation made by two respondents was involving Learning Centre volunteers in program evaluation.

Professional Evaluators

The interviews with professional evaluators asked them to reflect on program evaluation from both a general lens and their specific personal experiences. Two respondents indicated that program evaluation is not just summative but should involve collecting data, monitoring results, and implementing changes, as they are needed. All four evaluators emphasized the importance of planning or pre-work, for a variety of reasons:

- to define the key evaluation questions and understand the program outcomes
- to understand clearly what the stakeholder expects in terms of qualitative and quantitative data collection

- to get staff involved and engaged in the process
- to ensure that the scale of the evaluation is feasible, considering the expertise of the staff at the organization
- to assess risk factors before finalizing the evaluation design

One question asked professional evaluators to discuss their preferred program evaluation tools and approaches. Two evaluators spoke of taking a holistic or developmental approach to evaluation, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. Three interviewees mentioned the importance of adapting the tool or approach to the program being evaluated and for the stakeholders requesting the evaluation. All four respondents mentioned surveys, focus groups, and interviews as the most frequently used tools. Two other tools were identified. One evaluator described micro-surveys, or one-question quantitative surveys given to staff regularly to track their in-the-moment opinions of program components. Another talked about creating a forum with visual, interactive displays to generate conversations with at-risk youth and gather their qualitative feedback about a program.

Professional evaluators discussed the roles of qualitative versus quantitative data in program evaluation and all four respondents gave reasons to use both. Their responses are summarized in Table 2.

Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easier to pull trends • blunt instrument that shows if a program is working or not or indicates significant changes • useful for outputs and frequency data • provides baseline data • does not give enough information to make decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • digs into the trends to answer “so what?” • provides nuanced feedback • captures heart and emotion of the program being delivered • records the direct experience of staff or clients • explores root causes, context, and risks, barriers

Table 2
Reasons to use quantitative and qualitative data

Another question asked evaluators to reflect on the importance of internal versus external stakeholders. While all four respondents gave reasons to get internal stakeholders involved, two respondents called this the most critical part of the evaluation process. Two evaluators talked about the importance of building ownership by getting staff to think more deeply about the program. Two others referred to the fact that staff know the program best and can provide context. All four evaluators identified similar reasons for involving external stakeholders, including their objective lens and the ability to ask new questions or point out

anomalies. Two evaluators spoke about the opportunity of getting community stakeholders involved because they can provide a broader perspective of a program's impact.

Participants

In order to test the interview as a tool for collecting qualitative data, Learning Centre participants were asked to describe core components of the program, to comment on their interaction with program staff, and to list the benefits of participating in the program. The responses from all interviews were positive. Participants used strong adjectives to describe the program, including: amazing (6), great (3), outstanding (2), wonderful (1), really neat (1), and top notch (1). For Learning Centre participants, one core component of the program is the relationship built between the staff and the babies. There were five comments from participants about the care and attention and constant interaction staff provide for the children. Two spoke about the small ratios of staff to babies, although one individual commented that the program could be improved with lower ratios. Another core component for four participants was the focus on brain development at the Centre and the educational or developmental focus of the activities planned by staff.

When asked about communication with staff, all six participants responded that it was either very good, really good, or great. Three participants commented that staff members are good with reporting to the moms about their child's progress and development. Two people expressed that it is easy to talk to staff members and ask questions about any issues they are having with their child. Another three respondents said staff members take time to listen and support the moms without being pushy. One participant referred to the staff members as another set of grandparents for her child because they show a real interest in the babies and are excited to celebrate their developmental milestones. There was one comment made that communication from staff members could be improved during incidents, such as outbreaks of contagious illness in the Centre.

In terms of feeling respected by staff members for their parenting, five individuals rated this as good, great, or very high and one respondent said it was pretty good but sometimes frustrating. One respondent indicated that she appreciates that staff members put the needs of the babies before the needs of the moms and that they are willing to make suggestions if have concerns about one's parenting. Only one individual reported having an incident with staff members, saying that she did not always feel she had the right to say what she wanted to say about her baby. However, when she reflected about this incident she called it a learning opportunity and was satisfied with how it had been resolved.

All six participants described the main benefit of the Learning Centre is having childcare on site so they can attend and complete their high school education, while still seeing their child regularly. One specifically stated she would not have returned to school if the Learning Centre did not exist. Another individual spoke of the importance of the subsidy program to allow her to pay for the childcare program. Two participants indicated they feel they have a stronger bond with their child because of the break they get from parenting

during the day to focus on their schoolwork. However, one individual felt that the program does not allow her enough opportunities during the day to spend time with her baby. Three people indicated that by attending the Learning Centre program they were learning how to put in routines to help with transitioning out of the Learning Centre program. Another two participants explained that the staff members were available to help them find a new daycare after they finished at the Centre. One mom spoke about how she appreciated that staff members from the Learning Centre were also working with the father of her child, saying “just cuz the dad isn’t here [at Louise Dean School] doesn’t mean he’s not there [at home].”

The primary benefit for the babies, as described by five of the participants, is the socialization with other children and staff members. One participant expressed she did not think her child would be as outgoing or as independent without having attended the Learning Centre program. Another expressed that it is easier to go through the evening routine of making dinner and putting her child to bed, knowing that her child is happy and tired after being occupied with playing all day at the Centre. Two other participants also commented about how happy their babies are at the Learning Centre.

Once participants had answered the interview questions about program satisfaction, they were invited to provide feedback on the use of a survey versus an interview as a tool to give their opinions about the program. Two indicated a preference for surveys. One individual stated that as an introvert she prefers expressing herself on paper. The other explained that a survey allows her time to think instead of having to answer on the spot. Four participants said they preferred the in-person interview. Two of them explained that an interview is more personal and individualized. Another mentioned that interviews allow the participant to ask for clarification about what a question actually means instead of having to guess. Four respondents said interviews allow them to express their feelings in more detail without being constrained to a limited number of choices (ex. answering “yes” or “no” to a survey question). One person who preferred the interview acknowledged that surveys might be a better tool if you want to collect information from a larger number of participants.

The two participants who were interviewed together were positive about the experience. One indicated that it was positive because she was comfortable with the other participant who was being interviewed with her. However, she explained she might have been quieter in the interview if she did not know the other participant as well. The other individual appreciated reflecting on someone else’s responses and felt that another person’s point of view helped clarify what the interview questions were asking, and helped her remember to talk about things she may not have mentioned on her own.

Finally, participants were asked about giving program feedback to an external person as opposed to a Learning Centre staff member. Four participants felt they could be more honest with someone outside of the program. Two said they have a personal and emotional relationship with staff members, which makes it more difficult to talk about concerns. One felt that staff members have preconceptions or biases about the program and it is harder to

be honest with them. One individual indicated she would feel more comfortable giving feedback to an internal staff person because they are more familiar with the program. One individual said it would make no difference to her whether she were speaking to someone internal or external to the program.

Overlapping Themes

Although the interviews with each stakeholder group consisted of different sets of questions, all three groups reflected on the idea of program quality. The four professional evaluators talked about quality from a general perspective. All four evaluators identified outcomes—whether program outcomes, client outcomes, or developmental outcomes—as criteria they have used to measure program quality. Learning Centre staff members and participants were asked, more specifically, to define what they would expect to find in a high quality early childhood education program. Both groups mentioned three areas: resources (ex. food, supplies), qualified and dedicated staff, and educational or developmental activities. Two Learning Centre participants interpreted the concept of “quality” as synonymous with “high-class” or “privatized” education and did not see quality as a desirable trait for a program. As one of them explained, “I wouldn’t want to send my child to a high quality [program].”

Both Learning Centre staff and professional evaluators discussed the purposes of program evaluation. Four staff members said reporting to funders was the purpose of evaluation; similarly, two of the professional evaluators answered that the purpose of evaluation is accountability to funders or to the specific stakeholders requesting the evaluation. Respondents in both groups mentioned two other purposes of evaluation: discovering how to improve the program and measuring what impact the program is having for clients. Additionally, two of the professional evaluators answered that program evaluation should ask whether the program is producing outcomes and whether these are the outcomes stated in the program’s design.

Learning Centre staff members and professional evaluators also outlined challenges to program evaluation. Both groups spoke about the many variables that can affect data collection. Learning Centre staff members explained that collecting data from participants could be affected by the mood or attitude of the participant on that day and the current state of the staff member’s relationship with the participant. One staff member talked about the challenge of convincing the participants of the importance of answering all the questions on the evaluation surveys honestly. Two of the professional evaluators discussed the challenge of getting staff members on board with the importance of collecting evaluation data. One individual referred to the anxiety that staff members can hold towards program evaluation processes unless they know that the ultimate goal of evaluation is to help them and the program.

Both Learning Centre staff members and professional evaluators brought up another similar challenge, that those involved with the evaluation bring their own agendas to the process.

Two of the professional evaluators discussed the need to provide a forum outside of the evaluation process for staff members to vent their frustrations. In so doing, evaluations can stay focused on the evaluation questions. One Learning Centre staff member expressed the concern that if a participant has positive experiences overall during their time in the program but have one experience that does not meet their expectations, the feedback they provide may not reflect the whole program.

A final theme that emerged in discussions with both staff members and professional evaluators was the need for context in helping stakeholders understand program evaluation data. Three Learning Centre staff members articulated the importance of explaining the numbers and results to funders or donors, including why a participants' rating on the 1 to 10 scales may not have changed or that there are changes that have occurred that are not shown through the numbers. One of the professional evaluators expressed this same idea that some outcomes are difficult to quantify and measure, which makes it difficult to report on these outcomes to stakeholders. Three of the professional evaluators also talked about the challenge of sharing evaluation data results back to staff members in a way that is helpful to their implementation of the programs.

Summary of Findings

Interviews with the three stakeholder groups provided both general perspectives on tools and approaches used in program evaluation and specific comments about the evaluation processes at the Learning Centre. Interviews, both in individual and dyadic formats, were tested as qualitative assessment tools for gathering feedback from Learning Centre participants.

6.0 DISCUSSION

Findings from the interviews with Learning Centre staff, professional evaluators, and Learning Centre participants speak to the research questions by looking at qualitative assessment tools and approaches that could enhance the Learning Centre's current program evaluation process. The interview responses confirm the importance and usefulness of including qualitative data in program evaluation and suggest a number of qualitative tools and approaches. Additionally, the findings provide internal and external perspectives of the Learning Centre's current program evaluation processes and propose ways in which this process could be improved. This chapter considers three themes that emerged out of the interview responses, in light of the literature review results. The next section considers the implications of the findings to the Learning Centre, within the context of the conceptual framework.

Themes

Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

There are complementary roles for qualitative and quantitative data collection in program evaluation. Two of the professional evaluators referred to their current practice of using both quantitative and qualitative tools as a holistic or developmental approach to evaluation. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data enhances the credibility of an evaluation (Lee and Walsh, 2004; Patton, 2015).

Quantitative program evaluation tools, like the Parenting Survey and Parental Expectations Survey used at the Learning Centre (see Appendices 1 and 2), provide snapshots of the progress of the participants. This kind of outcome-oriented evaluation tool does not allow for exposition of the non-quantifiable outcomes (Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 363). For example, Learning Centre staff members identified self-awareness as one outcome they observe in the participants. Self-awareness is not an outcome that is measured in the Learning Centre's surveys. For those program outcomes that are difficult to quantify and measure, it was suggested by Learning Centre staff members that they could increase their role in the evaluation process, providing additional context for the participants' survey responses. Integrating staff member observations of participant progress or regression and comparing these findings with the survey results is one method of triangulating quantitative and qualitative methods (Patton, 2015, p. 663).

Four of the Learning Centre staff members expressed their dissatisfaction with the 1-10 rating scaled used in the current surveys. The absence of a qualitative dimension in the surveys leads to an incomplete or inaccurate reflection of the program's benefit for Learning Centre participants. Adding a mechanism to capture qualitative data from participants would help to contextualize the quantitative results. It would encourage more in-depth reflection on the part of the Learning Centre participants if they were asked to

explain why they chose to rate themselves at ‘9’ or ‘10’ (Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 369). The quantitative results demonstrate whether or not the program has an impact on participants, but a qualitative dimension provides feedback on the implementation of the program (Newcomer & Brass, 2016, p. 85). For staff members, gaining an understanding of why participants are rating themselves as ‘4’ or ‘5’ would provide insight about how to tailor the program more specifically for individuals. Finally, linking the qualitative and quantitative data would enhance the findings as reported to funders by explaining the relationship between implementation and its impact on the program’s outcomes (Jarvie, 2012, p. 42).

Collaboration

Another theme arising from interview responses was the need to build ownership of the evaluation process among staff members and program participants. A collaborative or participatory approach can lead to an evaluation process that will generate useful findings to those involved in the program (Liket, et al., 2014, p. 172). Further, this kind of stakeholder engagement promotes learning from the evaluation process itself, instead of focusing solely on the results or findings coming from the evaluation (Patton, 2008, p. 109).

The professional evaluators emphasized the benefit of including internal stakeholders, including both staff members and program participants, in the planning process prior to beginning program evaluation. At the Learning Centre, engaging internal stakeholders in the evaluation design process could mitigate two of the challenges brought up in interviews with staff members. Program participants with a clear understanding of the evaluation process would recognize the purpose of having them provide feedback. Instead of feeling scrutinized by the survey questions, they would be encouraged to provide honest responses in the surveys (Seamark & Lings, 2004, p. 817). If staff members were involved in the design process, they would more clearly understand the rationale behind data collection timelines and know what happens to the surveys once they are submitted. Focusing on process use (Patton, 2008, p. 108) shifts evaluation from a summative, results-oriented procedure to a formative, iterative process (Kalafat, 2007, p. 145).

Interview responses from the three participant groups also noted the importance of collaboration with external stakeholders as a way of adding objectivity to the evaluation process. Two Learning Centre staff members suggested that collecting data from other stakeholders, such as program volunteers, could generate more comprehensive evaluation findings. Another staff member made the observation that similar evaluation data is being collected from program participants by social workers and this may be redundant. Collecting and comparing data from external stakeholders could be an additional process of triangulation across a variety of sources as a way to look for consistency in the information that is gathered from the same participant (Patton, 2015, p. 661).

Controlling for Variables

The challenge of controlling for variables in program evaluation, particularly when working with vulnerable populations, emerged as a theme in the interviews. Learning Centre staff members and professional evaluators discussed the variables involved in collecting program evaluation data from program participants. The professional evaluators also brought up variables involved in using a qualitative approach to program evaluation.

A participant's behaviour is influenced by his or her context and it is the role of the evaluator to represent this accurately in the evaluation findings (Krefting, 1991, p. 214). Learning Centre staff members identified variables that can impact the evaluation process, including the participant's mood on the day they are completing the survey and the relationship they have with the caregiver going through the questions with them. They also commented that sometimes they think participants give the answers they think the caregivers want to hear. Participants may hold back in their responses because of suspicion towards the interviewer (de Jonge, 2001, p. 54).

Creativity in designing an evaluation for this demographic is one solution for mitigating some of these variables. For example, a tool described by one professional evaluator involved a room set up with interactive displays meant to start conversations with youth participants. The purpose of such a method was to create a comfortable and relaxed setting for participants to share their feedback about a new program. In the interviews, both Learning Centre staff members and participants spoke about the potential for the evaluation tools to be used as an instrument for building relationships between staff and clients. Adapting the current evaluation process could be instrumental in increasing the relationship-building value of the tools.

Using a qualitative approach to evaluation requires judgment calls to be made in order to balance the subjectivity inherent in the approach with the richness of data that can be collected (Seamark & Lings, 2004, p. 817). Two of the professional evaluators cautioned that participants, referring both to staff and program participants, might bring their own agendas to an evaluation. The challenge for the researcher is to tease out the data that is useful for addressing the specific evaluation questions. One solution is to provide a forum for participants to vent outside of their participation in the program evaluation. For example, an ongoing monitoring tool could be implemented for staff or participants to voice their opinions about topics falling beyond the scope of the evaluation. A flexible, but systematic, approach to monitoring and evaluation is useful to the organization and allows them to collect the data that is needed for their purpose of program evaluation (Hodgson, et al., 2014, p. 147).

Implications

Qualitative Assessment Tools and Approaches

In this study, the interview was tested as a qualitative assessment tool for collecting program evaluation data from the Learning Centre participants. There is richness to the data that can be collected through a qualitative interview (Seamark & Lings, 2004, p. 817). Participants who said they preferred in-person interviews to surveys indicated that they liked having freedom to express their opinions, rather than being constrained to limited choices. For example, rather than answering yes or no, Learning Centre participants were able to provide nuanced responses containing anecdotes or examples. In several instances, a participant would begin an answer with “Really great!” and then proceed to qualify their response with contextual information that gave constructive program feedback. One participant commented that she appreciates that in an interview she can process the questions or ask for clarification rather than guessing at what a question means. In this study, for instance, two of the participants interpreted the concept of “high quality” to mean privatized education. The in-person interview format allows for ambiguous vocabulary in the questions to be defined for participants.

The two Learning Centre participants who were interviewed together outlined a number of advantages to the dyadic interview format. Having another person in the room made these two participants feel more comfortable in the interview setting (Morgan, et al, 2013, p. 1279). Listening to the responses of one participant allowed the other to have more time to process the question (p. 1278) or to be reminded of something she wouldn’t have remembered to comment about (p. 1277). However, one participant noted that she might not feel as comfortable expressing her thoughts if she did not know the other participant very well. From the perspective of the researcher who had no relationship with the participants, interviewing two of them together was an effective method of gathering feedback (p. 1280).

Other qualitative assessment tools could be explored further at the Learning Centre. Case studies (Johnston, 2013) could be used to report in detail individual experiences at the Learning Centre. Open-ended micro-surveys could be used with either Learning Centre staff members or participants to track their perspectives on a single topic over time.

In response to the pressures of reporting and accountability in an outcomes-based funding environment, quantitative data collection tools are an effective approach to program evaluation (Jarvie, 2012, p. 36). However, it is evident from the interviews that including qualitative assessment can be beneficial in contextualizing the evaluation findings. The responses from Learning Centre staff and professional evaluators articulated that program improvement is one of the purposes of evaluation and this is one role for qualitative assessment findings (Patton, 2015, p. 170). Qualitative assessment focuses on linking program implementation with outcomes (Jarvie, 2012, p. 42). This kind of holistic

perspective moves beyond monitoring only whether or not a program is meeting its stated outcomes; instead, it highlights how, why, and to what extent outcomes are reflected in the experiences of individuals within the program (p. 39). Qualitative feedback also provides opportunities for staff members to reflect more deeply on their own service delivery and program quality (Lee & Walsh, 2004, p. 369).

Incorporating Qualitative Assessment in the Learning Centre Framework

Incorporating qualitative assessment into the evaluation framework begins in the evaluation design phase. Interviews with the professional evaluators emphasized the importance of this pre-work stage of an evaluation, ensuring that the evaluation questions are determined before data collection begins. A proposed evaluation framework should link the program's outcomes, the purpose of the evaluation, and the specific evaluation questions to be answered. From there, suitable data collection methods (quantitative or qualitative) can be identified to inform the overall process (Liket, et al., 2014, p. 172). Qualitative assessment tools should be integrated into evaluation in order to answer concrete questions (Patton, 2015, p. 170).

Based on the Conceptual Model of the Learning Centre program, Table 3 summarizes possible enhancements to their evaluation framework for each of the four areas of focus in the Learning Centre program.

FACILITY/CURRICULUM	
Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are more familiar with what to expect from a quality care facility. • Children experience quality care in an enriched and stimulating environment. • Parents will be confident making informed decisions about future childcare and/or school placements for their children.
Purpose of Evaluation:	Ensuring the Learning Centre program is a quality care environment.
Specific Evaluation Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the Learning Centre comply with Alberta Child Care accreditation and licensing standards? 2. Does the Learning Centre teach parents how to identify a quality care environment?
Data Collection Methods:	<p>Current measurement tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Child Care accreditation and licensing standards <p>Questions to capture qualitative feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What components of the Learning Centre program make it an enriched environment? • How do internal and external stakeholders define program quality? • Why would internal and external stakeholders recommend the Learning Centre program to others?
CHILD FOCUS	
Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any suspected developmental delays or health, care, or safety issues are identified and remedial intervention initiated.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents increase their knowledge of child development. Parents increase their understanding and ability to meet the needs of their child. Parents are able to find and access intervention and support once they leave Louise Dean.
Purpose of Evaluation:	Ensuring that children attending the Learning Centre reach developmental equivalency with their peers.
Specific Evaluation Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do children at the Learning Centre who have developmental delays receive appropriate intervention services? Does the Learning Centre teach parents how to recognize typical/atypical developmental milestones? Does the Learning Centre teach parents how to access community resources if they have concerns about their child's development?
Data Collection Methods:	<p>Current measurement tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ages & Stages Ages & Stages Social Emotional screening <p>Question to capture qualitative feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After program participants leave the Learning Centre, where do they say they will access information if they have questions or concerns about their child's development?
ADOLESCENT MOTHER	
Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adolescent mothers feel supported in their role as a parent. Adolescent mothers experience a positive adjustment to their role as a parent.
Purpose of Evaluation:	Ensuring that the Learning Centre staff members respect and support adolescent mothers in the program.
Specific Evaluation Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Learning Centre program support and respect the adolescent mothers who register their children in the program? Do Learning Centre program participants leave the program feeling more positive about their role as parents?
Data Collection Methods:	<p>Current measurement tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Client Satisfaction of Agency Services Exit Survey Exit Survey <p>Questions to capture qualitative feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do Learning Centre participants describe the level of respect shown to them regarding their role as parents? How do Learning Centre participants describe the greatest benefits they received as a result of attending the program?
PARENTING FOCUS	
Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents increase their basic childcare skills. Parents increase their confidence as parents. Parents improve their parenting skills. Parent/child bond is strengthened.
Purpose of Evaluation:	Ensuring that Learning Centre participants reach equivalency to other parents in terms of their parenting and childcare skills.
Specific Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Do Learning Centre participants learn or improve their parenting/childcare skills over the course of their program attendance?

Questions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Do Learning Centre participants leave the program feeling more confident in their parenting/childcare skills? 3. Do Learning Centre participants have a stronger bond with their child as a result of their participation in the program?
Data Collection Methods:	<p>Current measurement tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental Expectations Survey • Parenting Survey <p>Questions to capture qualitative feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At intake, what skills do Learning Centre participants hope to learn or improve while attending the program? • When leaving the program, how do Learning Centre participants compare their present parenting/childcare skills with the skills they had when they completed the intake questionnaires? • How do Learning Centre participants describe the skills they learned over the course of their program attendance? • What improvements have the Learning Centre staff members observed in the parenting skills of program participants?

Table 3
Possible enhanced evaluation framework for the Learning Centre program

Summary of Discussion

The findings from the interviews with Learning Centre staff, professional evaluators, and Learning Centre participants explored three themes, including the need to triangulate quantitative and qualitative evaluation results, the benefit of a collaborative evaluation process, and the challenge of controlling for variables in program evaluation. The interview responses provide useful feedback about specific qualitative assessment tools and approaches that could be incorporated into the Learning Centre's program evaluation framework.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the literature review and interview responses, this chapter outlines three categories of recommendations for the client to consider. They are intended to respond to the research questions that ask how the Learning Centre can enhance their evaluation framework with a formal mechanism to capture qualitative data. The first two categories make recommendations that build on the Learning Centre's existing evaluation processes. They are suggestions that are intended to be easily implemented at minimum costs. The third recommendation would require a more substantial investment of time and resources to implement as it involves developing a new evaluation tool.

1. Include a wider variety of voices

The majority of program evaluation data is currently collected from Learning Centre participants. The following recommendations identify ways that the Learning Centre can triangulate these findings by collecting evaluation data from staff members and other stakeholders.

- a) Learning Centre staff members would complete a questionnaire similar to the Parental Expectations Survey and Parenting Survey. Their findings would reflect their perception of the participant's skill level and the growth or regression they observe over the duration of the participants' time in the program.
- b) Learning Centre staff members would record ongoing anecdotal records of skill areas where they have observed participant growth and areas where participants seem to require additional support. This feedback would be compared to the responses provided by program participants about their parenting and childcare skills in the Parental Expectations Survey. These findings would be helpful for individualized program planning. Staff members leading parenting skill sessions would be able to identify which specific skills to focus on with each mother.
- c) One-question written micro-surveys would be introduced every three to six months at Learning Centre staff meetings to record staff opinions on a variety of program quality topics, including:
 - What components of the Learning Centre program make it an enriched environment?
 - How do you (staff members) define program quality?
 - Why would you recommend the Learning Centre program to others?

This tool would give Learning Centre staff members the opportunity to regularly provide their perspectives on program quality at the Centre.

d) Learning Centre volunteers and practicum students completing their education requirements in the Centre would complete an exit interview when they finish their time with the program. Teachers at Louise Dean would be given annual surveys to collect their opinions about the quality of the Learning Centre program. These three external stakeholder groups interact with, but are not embedded in, the day-to-day realities of the program. Their feedback on program quality would provide an objective view of the Learning Centre.

2. Leave space for open-ended responses

Three of the program evaluation tools currently used by the Learning Centre gather only quantitative data. The following recommendations identify open-ended questions that strengthen each tool by triangulating qualitative responses and quantitative findings.

Parenting Survey

- a) At intake, the Parenting Survey pre-test (Appendix 2) would include a question about the mother's parenting goals or what she hopes to learn about parenting and childcare while her child is attending the Learning Centre. When the post-test is filled out, Learning Centre participants would be given the opportunity to contrast their responses with those on their pre-survey. Including self-evaluative goals would allow participants to reflect on their initial goals and whether or not they were able to learn what they hoped they would.
- b) The Parenting Survey post-test would include open-ended perspective-taking questions to capture the participant's growth in their parenting and childcare skills. For example, participants would be asked to compare their present parenting skills with the skills they had when they first started in the Learning Centre program. This would also measure their self-awareness as a result of participating in the program.

Parental Expectations Survey

- a) The Parental Expectations Survey (Appendix 3) would incorporate open-ended questions that allow participants to provide anecdotal evidence of their parenting and childcare skills. For example:

- How can you tell if your baby is hungry? (#3)
- Can you think of a time when you showed good judgment in deciding how to care for your baby? (#14)
- Can you describe your baby's nighttime routine? (#16)

These questions would help participants reflect more deeply on their competence with parenting skills by elaborating on their progress or regression throughout the duration of their participation in the program.

- b) Each time the Learning Centre participants fill out the Parental Expectations Survey, they would be asked to list the skills they have learned since the previous time they

answered the questions. This would allow participants to tangibly see growth in their parenting competence over time and lead to growth in confidence in their role as a parent.

Client Satisfaction of Agency Services Exit Survey

The Client Satisfaction of Agency Services Exit Survey (Appendix 4) would replace the generic comment section with a more directive open-ended question for participants, such as: “Would you recommend the Learning Centre program to others? Why or why not?” Including focused evaluation questions, as opposed to a blank section up to the interpretation of the participant, would generate feedback that is useful to guide planning or decision-making about the program.

3. Conduct in-person exit interviews

Introducing a new in-person exit interview would provide the Learning Centre with rich qualitative information to benefit the program. An external program evaluation professional would work with the Learning Centre to design a new qualitative exit interview. The evaluation design process would include staff members and program participants to promote buy-in from internal stakeholders. Decisions that would be part of the evaluation design include:

- a. Is it feasible to bring in external evaluators to conduct the interview? Alternately, what kind of training would be necessary for an internal staff member to take on the responsibility of conducting the interview, interpreting and reporting the findings?
- b. Should interviews be conducted individually or in dyadic pairs?
- c. Would it be beneficial to make the exit interview mandatory for Learning Centre participants? Should participants have the option to complete a written exit survey if they do not want to take part in an interview?
- d. What specific evaluation questions are most suitable for an exit interview?

Every June, or whenever they transition out of the Learning Centre program, participants would have an opportunity to provide qualitative feedback about their experience at the Centre. This evaluation data would be useful for program planning purposes in all four areas of focus.

8.0 CONCLUSION

There were two objectives for this research project. The first was to explore qualitative assessment tools and approaches that could help the Learning Centre enhance their ability to present outcomes. The second was to make recommendations for how the Learning Centre could incorporate qualitative assessment into their overall evaluation framework. The research included a literature review and interviews with Learning Centre staff members, Learning Centre participants, and professional evaluators. In applying the research findings, the project makes suggestions to expand the Learning Centre's conceptual framework by adding methods to capture qualitative feedback.

There is an ongoing debate about the advantages and limitations of quantitative versus qualitative methods in program evaluation. The research findings point to the benefits of triangulating quantitative data with findings from qualitative data in order to enhance the overall credibility and utility of an evaluation (Patton, 2015, p. 661). The evaluation tools currently used at the Learning Centre collect quantitative data from participants to measure growth and development in their parenting skills and to assess their satisfaction with the program. By inserting opportunities for open-ended responses into their current tools, the Learning Centre will gain a richer, more nuanced understanding of the program's impact on its participants.

Research findings also indicate that program evaluation is improved when it is a collaborative process and includes feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. At the Learning Centre, the majority of program evaluation data is collected from program participants. Increasing the role for Learning Centre staff members in designing and implementing program evaluation tools will allow them to become more invested in the process (Fine et al., 2000, p. 339). With more buy-in from staff members, evaluation results will become more meaningful to them and they will become more motivated to incorporate evaluation findings into their program planning. Additionally, encouraging participation from a broader range of stakeholders, including volunteers and practicum students, to bring an objective, will bring an external perspective to program evaluation at the Learning Centre.

Learning Centre program participants tested the interview as a qualitative evaluation tool that could be implemented to augment the program's current evaluation process. The research findings note the richness of data that can be collected in an interview, reflecting the narrative of each individual's experience with the program (Jarvie, 2012, p. 39). Adding an in-person exit interview would provide participants with an opportunity to offer their specific feedback about how the Learning Centre program could be improved. Due to the small sample size of Learning Centre participants that engaged in this project, further testing of individual and dyadic interviews would be valuable. Other qualitative program

evaluation tools, including micro-surveys and case studies, would also benefit from future examination.

Once qualitative assessment is introduced into their evaluation processes, the Learning Centre will benefit from further work in combining their quantitative and qualitative methods. As a qualitative data set is accumulated, thematic analysis can be done to identify trends that might be tested or measured with a modified quantitative tool. Learning Centre staff will benefit from continued training on statistical analysis and content analysis so they are able to harmonize the quantitative and qualitative data that is collected.

By implementing the recommendations, the Learning Centre will institute formal mechanisms by which to gather qualitative data, addressing the gap in their current evaluation framework. This will lead to stronger measurement tools, more meaningful data, and ultimately improve their program quality.

9.0 REFERENCE LIST

Catholic Family Service. (2013, January). *Program Design: Louise Dean Centre. Dr. Clara Christie Learning Centre.*

Chase-Lansdale, P. L., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Paikoff, R. L. (1991, October). Research and programs for adolescent mothers: Missing links and future promises. *Family Relations*, 40(4), 396-403. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/584896>

Crean, H. F., Hightower, A. D., & Allan, M. J. (2001). School-based child care for children of teen parents: Evaluation of an urban program designed to keep young mothers in school. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 24(3), 267-275. doi:10.1016/S0149-7189(01)00018-0

de Jonge, A. (2001, October). Support for teenage mothers: a qualitative study into the views of women about the support they received as teenage mothers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 36(1), 49-57. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.2001.01942.x

Donnelly, C., Letts, L., Klinger, D., & Shulha, L. (2014). Supporting knowledge translation through evaluation: evaluator as knowledge broker. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 29(1), 36-61. doi:10.3138/cjpe.29.1.36

Fine, A. H., Thayer, C. E., & Coghlan, A. T. (2000). Program evaluation practice in the nonprofit sector. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 10(3), 331-339. doi:10.1002/nml.10309

Hodgson, S., Papatheodorou, T., & James, M. (2014). Monitoring and evaluation of an early childhood development programme: Implications for leadership and management. *Management in Education*, 28(4), 144-148. doi:10.1177/0892020614550465

Hoefer, R. (2000). Accountability in action? Program evaluation in nonprofit human service agencies. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 11(2). doi:10.1002/nml.11203

Jarvie, W. K. (2012, November). Qualitative research in early childhood education and care implementation. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 6(2), 35-43. doi:10.1007/2288-6729-6-2-35

Johnston, A. L. K. (2013). To case study or not to case study: Our experience with the Canadian government's evaluation practices and the use of case studies as an evaluation methodology for First Nations programs. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 28(2), 21-42. Retrieved April 20, 2016, from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/1512382551?accountid=14846>

Kalafat, J., Illback, R. J., & Sanders Jr., D. (2007). The relationship between implementation fidelity and educational outcomes in a school-based family support

program: Development of a model for evaluating multidimensional full-service programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 30, 136-148. doi:10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2007.01.004

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of Focus Groups: The importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 16(1), 103-121. doi:10.1111/1467-9566.ep11347023

Krefting, L. (1991, March). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3), 214-222. doi:10.5014/ajot.45.3.214

Lee, J. & Walsh, D. J. (2004). Quality in early childhood programs: Reflections from program evaluation practices. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 25(3), 351-373. Retrieved March 4, 2016, from <http://aje.sagepub.com>

Liket, K. C., Rey-Garcia, M., & Maas, K. E. H. (2014). Why aren't evaluations working and what to do about it: A framework for negotiating meaningful evaluation in nonprofits. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 35(2), 171-188. doi:10.1177/1098214013517736

Lipps, G., & Grant, P. R. (1990, August). A participatory method of assessing program implementation. *Evaluation Review*, 14(4), 427-434. Retrieved March 19, 2016, from University of Victoria library <http://erx.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/>

Morgan, D. L., Ataie, J., Carder, P., & Hoffman, K. (2013). Introducing dyadic interviews as a method for collecting qualitative data. *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(9), 1276-1284. doi:10.1177/1049732313501889

Morgan, D. L., Eliot, S., Lowe, R. A., & Gorman, P. (2016). Dyadic interviews as a tool for qualitative evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 37(1), 109-117. doi:10.1177/1098214015611244

Neal, J. W., Neal, Z. P., VanDyke, E., & Kornbluh, M. (2015). Expediting the analysis of qualitative data in evaluation: A procedure for the rapid identification of themes from audio recordings (RITA). *American Journal of Evaluation*, 36(1), 118-132. doi:10.1177/1098214014536601

Newcomer, K., & Brass, C. T. (2016). Forging a strategic and comprehensive approach to evaluation within public and nonprofit organizations: Integrating measurement and analytics within evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 37(1), 80-99. doi:10.1177/1098214014567144

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Poth, C., Lamarche, M. K., Yapp, A., Sulla, E., & Chisamore, C. (2014). Toward a definition of evaluation within the Canadian context: Who knew this would be so difficult? *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 29(1), 87-103. doi:10.3138/cjpe.29.1.87

Ryan, K. E., Gandha, T., Culbertson, M. J., & Carlson, C. (2014). Focus group evidence: Implications for design and analysis. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 35(3), 328-345. doi:10.1177/1098214013508300

Sadler, L. S., Swartz, M. K., & Ryan-Krause, P. (2003, May/June). Supporting adolescent mothers and their children through a high school-based child care center and parent support program. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 17(3), 109-117. doi:10.1067/mph.2003.10

Sadler, L. S., Swartz, M. K., Ryan-Krause, P., Seitz, V., Meadows-Oliver, M., Grey, M., & Clemmens, D. A. (2007, March). Promising outcomes in teen mothers enrolled in a school-based parent support program and child care center. *Journal of School Health*, 77(3), 121-130. doi:10.1111/j.1746-1561.2007.00181.x

Sandall, S. R., Smith, B. J., McLean, M. E., & Broudy-Ramsey, A. (2002). Qualitative research in early intervention/Early childhood special education. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 25(2), 129-136. Retrieved March 4, 2016, from University of Victoria Library <http://jei.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/>

Seamark, C. J., & Lings, P. (2004). Positive experiences of teenage motherhood: A quantitative study. *British Journal of General Practice*, 54, 813-818. Retrieved February 21, 2016, from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

Simpson, B. & Charles, H. (2008, May). *Ten-year longitudinal study of adolescent mothers and their children*. Catholic Family Service of Calgary at Louise Dean Centre.

Squires, J., & Bricker, D. (2009). *Ages and stages questionnaires: A parent-completed child monitoring system* (3rd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.

Taut, S. (2007). Methodological and conceptual challenges in studying evaluation process use. *The Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, 22(2), 1-19. Retrieved April 20, 2016, from

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/220807546?accountid=14846>

Thomas, D. R. (2006, June). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246. doi:10.1177/1098214005283748

Thomas, V. G., & LaPoint, V. (2005). Blending evaluation traditions: The talent development model. *The Evaluation Exchange*, Vol. X, 4. Retrieved March 4, 2016, from <http://www.hfrp.org/>

Weiss, H., & Horsch, K. (1998). Learning from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's evaluation grants program. *The Evaluation Exchange*, Vol. IV, 2. Retrieved March 4, 2016, from <http://www.hfrp.org/>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Parenting Survey

Program: _____ Pre: _____ Post: _____

First Name: _____ **Last Name:** _____

Date of birth: month _____ day _____ year _____ Gender: F / M

Test date: month _____ day _____ year _____

1. How often do you praise your child(ren), by saying something like "Good for you!" or "What a nice thing you did!" or "Thank you!"?(ppar1)	Never(1)	Less than once a week(2)	About once a week(3)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(5)	Several times each day(6)	Many times each day(7)
2. How often does your child(ren) really irritate you or get on your nerves?(ppar 2)	Never(7)	Less than once a week(6)	About once a week(5)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(3)	Several times each day(2)	Many times each day(1)
3. How often do you physically punish your child(ren), for example, by spanking, pinching, slapping his or her hand?(ppar 3)	Never(7)	Less than once a week(6)	About once a week(5)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(3)	Several times each day(2)	Many times each day(1)
4. How often do you and your child(ren) laugh together?(ppar4)	Never(1)	Less than once a week(2)	About once a week(3)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(5)	Several times each day(6)	Many times each day(7)
5. How often do you hug or snuggle with your child(ren)?(ppar5)	Never(1)	Less than once a week(2)	About once a week(3)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(5)	Several times each day(6)	Many times each day(7)
6. How often do you get angry or annoyed and yell or speak in a very loud voice to your child(ren)?(ppar 6)	Never(7)	Less than once a week(6)	About once a week(5)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(3)	Several times each day(2)	Many times each day(1)
7. How often does your child(ren) see an adult in the house do something kind, friendly, or very much appreciated by another adult in the house?(ppar 7)	Never(1)	Less than once a week(2)	About once a week(3)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(5)	Several times each day(6)	Many times each day(7)
8. How often does your child see adults or teenagers in your house physically fighting with or hitting or otherwise trying to hurt each other?(ppar 8)	Never(7)	Less than once a week(6)	About once a week(5)	About 3-4 times a week(4)	About once a day(3)	Several times each day(2)	Many times each day(1)
9. How often does your whole family eat supper together?(ppar9)	Never(1)	Less than once a week(2)	About once a week(3)	About twice a week(4)	About 3-4 times a week(5)	Almost every day(6)	Every day(7)
10. How often does your child(ren) go to bed at a particular time, known as his or her bedtime?(ppar10)	Never(2)	About once a week(3)	About twice a week(4)	About 3-4 times a week(5)	Almost every day(6)	Every day(7)	There is no official bedtime(1)
11. How often does your child(ren) get "grounded" for longer than a week?(ppar11)	Never(7)	About 1-3 times a year(6)	About 4-6 times a year(5)	About 7-9 times a year(4)	About 10-12 times a year(3)	About 1-2 times a month(2)	More than twice a month(1)

Appendix 2: Parental Expectations Survey

Mother's Name: _____

Child's Name: _____

Service Provider: _____

Session: Pre ____ Interim ____ Post ____

Today's Date (mm/dd/yy): _____

Please place a check in the box under the number that most closely describes how you feel about yourself in relation to parenting. Because these are statements about beliefs, there are no right or wrong answers.

	I Cannot Do										Moderately Certain I Can Do			Certain I Can Do		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10						
1. I can manage the feeding of my baby.																
2. I can manage the responsibility of my baby.																
3. I can tell when my baby is hungry.																
4. I can deal effectively with the baby when he/she cries for "no reason".																
5. I can tell when my baby is sick.																
6. I can tell when to add different food items to my baby's diet.																
7. I can manage my household as well as before, meanwhile caring for the baby.																
8. When I think the baby is sick, I can take his/her temperature accurately.																
9. I can give my baby a bath without him/her getting cold or upset.																
10. I can work out my concerns about being at school/work or not being at school/work now that the baby is here																
11. I can keep my baby from crying.																

	I Cannot	Do	Moderately Certain I Can Do				Certain I Can	Do		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. I can meet all the demands placed on me now that the baby is here.										
13. I can easily be able to get the baby and myself out for a doctor's visit.										
14. I have good judgment in deciding how to care for the baby.										
15. I can make the right decisions for my baby.										
16. I can get the baby on a good nighttime routine.										
17. I can give the baby the attention he/she needs.										
18. I can hire a babysitter when I need one.										
19. I can tell what my baby likes and dislikes.										
20. I can sense my baby's moods.										
21. I can show my love for my baby.										
22. I can calm my baby when he/she is upset.										
23. I can support my baby during stressful times such as at the doctor's office.										
24. I can stimulate my baby by playing with him/her.										

Appendix 3: Client Satisfaction of Agency Services Exit Survey

Date (mm/dd/yy): _____

*Please put a check (✓) in only one of the five boxes beside each of the statements below.
Your information helps us with on-going changes to Agency services.*

I strongly agree ₍₁₎	I agree somewhat ₍₂₎	I'm not sure ₍₃₎	I disagree somewhat ₍₄₎	I strongly disagree ₍₅₎
------------------------------------	------------------------------------	--------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

1. I was seen within a reasonable time after I first called for an appointment.

2. The Service Provider listened to me and encouraged me to express my views.

3. The Service Provider helped me achieve my goals.

4. I trusted the Service Provider.

5. I received enough service.

6. The service was helpful.

7. I learned of various community resources and now access them.

8. If I need more help in the future, I would return to this program/agency.

9. I would recommend this program/agency to my friends.

Comments: _____

Appendix 4: Exit Survey

Mother's Name: _____ Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy): _____

When I leave this Program, I will be placing my child in:

Daycare Day Home Private Care Other: _____

Please complete the following questions about your current activity and situation:

1. Daytime Activity:

Attending School Working Full Time Training

Working Part Time At Home Parenting Full Time Other: _____

2. Living Situation:

Live on own with child Live with friend or roommate

Live with parents or grandparents Live with husband or boyfriend Other: _____

3. How many times have you changed addresses since your baby was born? _____

4. Financial Situation:

Student Finance Working Social Assistance

Supported by husband or boyfriend Supported by parents Other: _____

5. Did you breastfeed your child? Yes No

If yes, for how many months did you breastfeed? _____ Still breastfeeding

6. If this program was not available to me, I would:

Find alternate care for the baby and continue school/training/working.

Stay at home with my baby and take correspondence courses.

Stay at home with my baby and parent full time.

Other: _____

7. Please rate the Program for the following areas:

	Poor 1	Fair 2	Average 3	Good 4	Excellent 5
1. Care provided by staff or caregiver					
2. Environment for children					
3. Convenience					
4. Support provided to parents					
5. Communication with staff or caregiver					
6. Respect for your parenting skills					

8. What are the main benefits you feel you have received from this program?

9. Please provide comments or suggestions for improvement:

10. Overall, how would you rate your level of satisfaction with the service you received?

1

2

3

4

5

Very Dissatisfied Somewhat Dissatisfied Uncertain Somewhat Satisfied Very Satisfied

Appendix 5: Interview Guides

Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews with Learning Centre Staff

1. Please describe your role at the Learning Centre.
2. What can you tell me about the Learning Centre program?
Probing question: What do you feel are the core components of the program?
3. Thinking about Early Childhood Education programs, such as the Learning Centre, how would you define “program quality”?
4. What experiences have you had with program evaluation at the Learning Centre?
Probing question: Has the process changed over the time you’ve worked at the Learning Centre?
5. From your perspective, what are the purposes of program evaluation at the Learning Centre?
6. One of the purposes of program evaluation data is to report to funders how well an organization is meeting their outcomes. Based on your understanding of the current process, how effective are the Learning Centre’s current evaluation tools or approaches?
7. Do you see any challenges to program evaluation at the Learning Centre?
8. Reflecting on the current evaluation process, can you think of other evaluation approaches or tools the Learning Centre could use to report on their outcomes?
9. What role, if any, do you see for staff in the program evaluation process at the Learning Centre?
10. What role, if any, do you see for students in the program evaluation process at the Learning Centre?
11. Are there other stakeholders you would invite to participate in program evaluation at the Learning Centre?

Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews with Monitoring and Evaluation Managers

1. Please describe your experience with program evaluation.
Follow up question: Please describe your experience with program evaluation in Early Childhood Education settings.
2. From your perspective, what are the purposes of program evaluation?
3. In your experience, what tools or approaches have you found to be most effective in collecting data for program evaluation?
4. What roles, if any, do you see for quantitative data in program evaluation?
5. What roles, if any, do you see for qualitative data in program evaluation?
6. Choose a program evaluation you felt most proud of and use this evaluation as the basis for response:
 - a. Describe the evaluation design.
 - b. What was the objective for this program evaluation?
 - c. What were the criteria you used to define program quality?
 - d. What were the strengths of using these criteria?
 - e. What were the weaknesses of using these criteria?

7. Do you see any challenges to program evaluation?
- Follow up question, if involved in an Early Childhood Education setting:** Do you see any unique challenges for program evaluation in an ECE setting?
8. What benefit, if any, do you see for involving internal stakeholders in the program evaluation process?
 9. What benefit, if any, do you see for involving external stakeholders in the program evaluation process?
 10. Finally, are you willing to share any sample tools you have used to collect qualitative data in program evaluation?

Phase 3: Semi-structured Interview with Learning Centre Participants

1. What can you tell me about the Learning Centre program?
 2. What do you feel are the most important parts of the Learning Centre program?
 3. Thinking about Early Childhood Education programs, such as the Learning Centre, what would you expect to find in a high quality program?
 4. How would you describe your communication with staff at the Learning Centre?
- Probing question:** What in your mind would be an ideal way of communicating with staff?
5. How would you describe the Learning Centre's level of respect for your parenting skills?
 6. What would you say are the main benefits you and your child have received from the Learning Centre program?
 7. How is the Learning Centre preparing you and your child (or, how did it prepare you and your child) for the transition out of the program?
- Probing question:** How, if at all, would you change the program to help do a better job to prepare you and/or your child for that transition?
8. Can you tell me how the Learning Centre program could be improved?

Debrief Interview

1. Right now the Learning Centre uses surveys to collect information from Learning Centre participants about how well they feel the program is going. To what extent do you think the survey allows you to give useful information about your experience with the program?
2. An interview like the one I have done with you is a different way of collecting information. To what extent do you think an interview like this allows you to give useful information about your experience with the program?
3. What, if anything, did you find beneficial about having someone who doesn't work at the Learning Centre asking you questions?
4. Are there other topics you wish would have been part of the interview?