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Exploring the Impact of Wyoming's Pathways to Professional Development Program on Childcare Providers and Quality Early Childcare

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Childcare programs that provide high quality care can strengthen children's early development. One component of a quality program is having providers who are knowledgeable in child development; however, despite the understanding of these known predictors of child development, Wyoming does not require childcare providers to complete any training before beginning to work with children. Guided by the constructivist theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner, this objectives-based program evaluation investigated the Pathways to Professional Development program to determine participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the program. A researcher-produced survey was created based on the objectives of the program and consisted of open-ended and Likert scale questions. This survey was completed by 35 childcare providers who completed the 3 modules of the Pathways program. Data analysis began by identifying potential categories, comparing and contrasting emerging themes, and looking for emerging patterns in participant responses. Key results indicated that the participants of this program gained knowledge about child development and developmentally appropriate practice. The implications for social change from this research are directly related to the early childcare providers, children, and ultimately the communities of Wyoming. By increasing the knowledge of childcare providers, higher quality care can be provided, leading to positive relationships, stimulating learning experiences, and to a greater likelihood of children reaching their full potential.

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my Dad who would have been proud of me for not giving up.

Acknowledgments

There have been a lot of people who played a part in my doctoral journey and I have been blessed to have many supporters. I would like to thank my Walden University committee members, Dr. Crosby, Dr. Braden, and Dr. Bail, URR, for their encouragement and support. I would also like to thank all of my Walden professors who gave me the knowledge I needed to keep moving forward and helped me believe that this would be possible. But I owe the most gratitude to my husband Travis, my sons Joe and John, and my Mom, who have encouraged me to pursue my dreams and hung in there with me from beginning to end.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Quality early childcare programs influence children's early development in favorable ways. A component of a quality program is having providers who are knowledgeable in child development (National Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). Wyoming does not require childcare providers to complete any training before beginning to work with children; this lack of higher education hurts Wyoming's children and has economic and social repercussions for our communities (Heckman, 2011). The Pathways to Professional Development Program (Pathways) was created as a quality entry-level community based training for childcare providers in Wyoming.

Background of the Problem

Childcare providers are expected to have the skills needed to engage children even though they may not have had any formal training. In programs that provide high quality care, the staff will supervise children and manage the way they behave, take care of their basic needs, create an atmosphere that is secure, teach listening, speaking, reading, writing and social skills, and form relationships with the children (Ivy & Schreck, 2008). The numbers of workers needing childcare has increased; but, there is a lack of well-prepared workers. This is having an adverse effect on the amount and the quality of care that is available.

A lack of adequate training and career development opportunities are factors that contribute to lower staff retention rates and a lower quality of care for the children. When

staff are prepared through education and training, they experience higher job satisfaction, which relates to higher retention rates and higher quality of care (Curry, Eckles, Stuart, & Qaqish, 2010). The childcare profession has historically been a low paying profession despite the research emphasizing how critical it is to provide quality care for young children. If a program's staff lack experience they will not be able to provide quality training and support to new employees. When compared to workers in other similar professions who care for and educate young children, childcare workers appear to be at a disadvantage. This profession will continue to deal with a shortage of workers and low quality ratings unless some changes are made (Choy & Haukka, 2010).

Childcare programs that provide high quality care impact children's early development in favorable ways (Heckman, 2011). A component of a quality program is having providers who are knowledgeable in child development. Low pay and low employee retention rates influence the quality of childcare (Smith & Baughman, 2007).

The amount of formal education that employees in an early childcare setting have is a strong predictor of their ability to provide and engage in positive developmentally appropriate activities; knowledgeable childcare providers are also less likely to obstruct children's activities and disregard inquiries made by children (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011, p.1).

It is a physically and mentally demanding job that may never pay providers a livable wage with benefits. Wyoming does not require childcare providers to complete any training before beginning to work with children in a childcare setting.

In the state of Wyoming, the average annual income for a fulltime, year round childcare provider is $20,720, which is less than the national average of $20,940 (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011). The 2009-2010 Poverty Guidelines stated that the threshold for poverty begins at $10,830 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). The Wyoming Child Care Finder (2010) collected statistics from childcare providers throughout the state. According to the data, hourly pay for some employees is less than $6.00 per hour. Wyoming has a basic minimum wage of $5.15 per hour. This makes Wyoming one of only five states with a minimum-wage rate lower than the federal level (United States Department of Labor, 2011).

The Child Care Finder (2010) also compiled data about the levels of education of staff in centers. The types of centers were divided into categories, and for the purpose of this study, the results from three of those categories are discussed: Child Care Center, Family Child Care Center, and Family Child Care Home. Staff positions were organized into six groups: director or sole provider, associate director, teacher director, teacher, assistant teacher, and classroom assistant.

Twenty-seven percent of the director or sole providers had only a high school diploma or GED. Of that same group, 3% had completed their Child Development Associate Credential (CDA), 10% had a bachelor's degree that was child-related, and 3% had a master's or PhD degree that was child-related. Twenty percent of associate directors had only a high school diploma or GED, 10% had completed their CDA, 13% had a bachelor's degree that was child-related, and none of the associate directors had a

master's or PhD degree that was child-related. Of the teacher or directors, 12% of these employees had only a high school diploma or GED, 3% had completed their CDA, 38% had a bachelor's degree that was child related, and 5% had a master's or PhD degree that was child related. Thirty-five percent of the teachers had only a high school diploma or GED. Seven percent had completed their CDA, 14% had a bachelor's degree that was child-related, and less than 1% had a master's or PhD degree that was child- related. Forty-seven percent of assistant teachers had only a high school diploma or GED. Twelve percent had completed their CDA, 5% had a bachelor's degree that was child related, and less than 1% had a master's or Ph.D. degree that was child related. Sixty-four percent of classroom assistants had only a high school diploma or GED. None of the classroom assistants had completed their CDA, 2% had a bachelor's degree that was child-related, and no classroom assistants had a master's or Ph.D. degree that was child-related.

The lack of higher education of the childcare providers hurts Wyoming's children and has had economic and social repercussions for the communities. When children are exposed to a program that provides high quality care, they have better academic outcomes, have lower rates of unemployment, and are less likely to commit crimes between the ages of 18 and 25 (Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, Steinberg, & Vandergrift, 2010).

Although a greater percentage of graduates are now attending and graduating from college, an even greater percentage is dropping out. Seventy-five percent of American youth who apply to enter the military are rejected. One of the reasons is low cognitive capacities; 20% of the work force in the United States has such a low literacy

rate that they are unable to understand the instructions on a medicine bottle (Zigler, Gilliam, & Barnett, 2011). Ability gaps start to appear at a young age in the lives of young children; but, if intervention happens early enough, it can raise the cognitive and social emotional abilities of children. For many skills and abilities, later intervention may still be possible; but, it is much more costly than earlier intervention to achieve a higher rate of adult performance. The rate of return to investment on human capital is highest with children in the first five years of their lives (Zigler et al., 2011).

Purpose of the Study

In 2010, the Early Childhood Sub-Committee of the Wyoming Early Childhood Partnership created a program called Pathways to Professional Development. This program was meant to increase the education levels of professionals who care for and educate young children and to enhance the quality of the care that they provide. (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2013).The program consists of three learning modules and each module requires a total of 40 hours of instruction. Pathways was also designed to meet the education criteria for a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). "This is a competency-based, nationally recognized credential awarded by the Council for Professional Recognition" (Council for Professional Recognition, About the Child Development Associate Credential, 2013, para. 2). Individuals wanting to earn the CDA can apply the module hours from Pathways towards meeting those requirements.

Participants must be currently working in a Wyoming licensed childcare center and they are eligible for the program only if they have not already earned a bachelor's degree in any area. A stipend of $400 is paid to each participant at the completion of each

module (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2011). If Pathways is found to be effective, it may have an impact on the participants and the care they are providing to the children of Wyoming.

According to Spiker (2012), program manager of the Early Childhood Program in the SRI International Center for Education and Human Services, it is crucial to conduct program evaluations to ensure that intervention programs are successful, and that all of the knowledge about how to provide a high quality early learning experience is actually being put into practice. In November of 2003, the National Association for the Education of Young Children stated in a position statement, along with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in state Departments of Education, " that all early childhood education programs should undergo regular evaluations that are then used to improve the program" (p. 1).

The professionals in early childhood programs need training in order to implement high quality curriculum, and it is these very same programs that should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. Goals of the program need to be clearly defined (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003). "The curriculum should be evidence based and relevant to those who will experience the curriculum and a comprehensive program should also encompass critical areas of child development, including motor, social and emotional development, language, and cognitive development" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003, p. 2).

Rationale

In 2014, the Wyoming House defeated a proposal that would have created a $1 million

grant program to be used by nonprofit organizations and school districts to create,

enhance, or sustain prekindergarten programs. The Wyoming Department of Education

would also have been given $500,000 to supplement the collaboration efforts between

public and private groups working to provide early childhood education programs. It also

required the development of a long-term state strategic early childhood education plan

(Brown, 2014). One representative stated that a few states have spent millions of dollars

on similar programs and in the end concluded there were no substantial benefits to them.

He went on to say that these programs are expensive, spend a lot of money that does not

actually accomplish anything, and that parents are in charge of their kid's education in the

early years - not the government (Brown, 2014). This was despite the statement from the

Joint Education Committee that high quality early childhood education programs work,

would benefit children and their families, and are cost effective, which would save the

state money in the long run (Brown, 2014).

The population of children in Wyoming is exposed to many risk factors. In 2012,

for every 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 19, almost 3% of them gave birth

while unmarried. This number is actually down 30% from 2007 (Hancock, 2013).

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2014), 16% of Wyoming

children live below the poverty level and of that group 19% are children younger than 6

years of age. Children who are living in poverty are at risk for diminished physical

health, are more likely to become parents as teenagers, and are less likely to finish school.

Sixty percent of those Wyoming children living in poverty also live in a single parent home (Southwell, 2009).

Children who are born to teenage mothers or are living with single mothers and are living in low socioeconomic settings are at heightened risk for illicit substance use later in adolescence, and extremely low socioeconomic status puts children at even greater risk that they will use substances even before the age of 13 (Hussong, Burns, Solis, & Rothenberg, 2013). In 2012, Wyoming had the highest suicide rate in the country (Roerink, 2013). From 2002-2011 Wyoming had a total of 76 suicides committed by people under the age of 19 (Forslund, Braund, & Hotle, 2012). Several characteristics have been identified as risk factors for youth suicide: substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, parental loss and family disruption, family characteristics, impulsiveness and aggression, and ready access to lethal methods, such as guns (Davidson & Linnoila, 2011). In 2002, 62.8 % of Wyoming households owned a gun and the gun death rate per 100,000 was 16.32 which placed Wyoming in the top five states with the highest gun death rates (Okoro, Nelson, Mercy, Balluz, Crosby, & Mokdad, A., 2005). Fremont County is the second largest county in the state, and according to the recent Wyoming Kids Count Data Report, (2012):

> Fremont County ranked last out of the 11 counties that have 81 % of the state's total child population, on 12 key child well-being indicators. Trends within the county showed that between 2001 and 2011 children who qualified for free and reduced lunch at school increased by 23% (para. 4). The child death rate, which measures deaths per 100,000 children age 1-14 increased by 61% (para. 11),

while births to unmarried mothers increased by 30 % and the teen birthrate

increased by 25% (para.9). The teen death rate increased by 76% (para. 11).

If a low income child is placed in a childcare environment, but their parents or

caregivers have a limited amount of resources available for the home, then a stimulating

and responsive childcare setting may be especially beneficial and quality childcare can

have a positive impact on a child's well-being. A high quality program can provide

experiences that facilitate positive social and emotional growth which leads to an increase

in self-regulation. When children learn to have more control over their own behaviors and

emotions they can then begin to accept rules and requests, as well as being able to get

along with their peers. (Votruba-Drzal, Coley, Maldanado-carreno, Li-Grining, & Chase-

Lansdale, 2010).

Definition of Terms

CDA: "Child Development Associate Credential, the most widely recognized

credential in early childhood education, based on a core set of competency standards,

which guide early care professionals as they work toward becoming qualified teachers of

young children" (Council for Professional Recognition, 2012, para. 1).

Childcare: "A service for families provided on behalf of children and their

parents, and designed to supplement daily parental care" (Wyoming Department of

Family Services, 2012, p. 2-2).

Childcare Center: "Any business operated by a private person, partnership,

association, or corporation that is operating a business for profit or otherwise, in a

building used solely for commercial purposes, where 16 or more children receive care for part of the day" (Wyoming Department of Family Services, 2012, p. 2-2).

*Directo*r: "Any person who applies, is qualified for, and is issued a Child Care Center or Family Child Care Center License" (Wyoming Department of Family Services, 2012, p. 2-3).

Early Childhood Education: "The term frequently applied to the education of young children from birth through age eight" (Bredekamp, Knuth, Kunesh, & Shulman, 1992, para 1).

Family Childcare Center: "A childcare facility in which care is provided for a maximum of 15 children for part of the day, which may be in a residential or commercial type structured care" (Wyoming Department of Family Services , 2012, p. 2-3).

Family Childcare Home: "A licensed childcare facility in which care is provided for no more than 10 children in the primary residence of the provider" (Wyoming Department of Family Services, 2012, p. 2-3).

Program Evaluation: "A systematic, objective process for determining the success of a program. Addresses questions about whether and to what extent the program is achieving its goals and objectives" (Gilliam & Leiter, 2003, p. 6).

Significance of the Study

Shonkoff (2011) believed that a large proportion of professionals working in early care had limited education, constrained work experience and high rates of depression. He attributed high rates of staff turnover to these components and also felt that they led to problematic behaviors in children, increased use of prescription medication for

controlling behaviors in young children, and larger numbers of children being expelled from preschool.

Duncan and Magnuson (2013) reported that "experiences in the earliest years of life have an impact on the brain architecture that will shape the child's future cognitive, social emotional, physical, and mental health" (p. 109). Other researchers have reached similar conclusions, finding that quality childcare settings for young children can enhance their social and emotional development and are also associated with better cognitive and academic outcomes (Vandell et al., 2010).

Pianta (2011) demonstrated the positive impact that professional development had on child outcomes and the practice of early childcare providers. The critical components of the professional development were defined as a clear focus on the specific practices that are effective and a way to make the connections between the professional development and the practice. Pianta (2011) went on to state that there should also be extensive opportunity to observe high quality interactions between adults and children. Pathways was created as a quality entry-level community based training for childcare providers in Wyoming (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2010). By gathering feedback from the participants of Pathways, one can analyze the impact the program is having on the participants, and on their interactions with children. The implications for social change from this research are directly related to the early childcare providers, children, and ultimately the communities of Wyoming. By increasing the knowledge of childcare providers, professionals can provide higher quality care that provides

opportunities for building positive relationships, and stimulating learning experiences, which increases the chances that children will reach their full potential.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

Pathways was designed specifically for early childcare providers in Wyoming, with the intentions of improving their knowledge and skills. The goal of Pathways is to "support those who actively pursue ongoing educational opportunities and professional commitments to the field. The program provides adult learning experiences that promote quality care for children" (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2010, p.1). The research questions and the program evaluation design will lead to the discovery of whether or not this program has successfully met the stated objectives by collecting data in the form of survey responses from the participants about the program. The theoretical assumption is that the program is successful in doing that. However, there may be key variables that are having an affect not only on the participants but on the actual program itself. The level of previous early childcare experience may affect the impact the program is having on the participants. Adults seek out learning that is relevant to them. But workplace learning tends to happen for short periods of time and changes according to need. Although adults may have the opportunity to apply their learning in a work environment, they may not have the experiences available to them to scaffold their learning.

In some workforce trainings, the people delivering the program may have little or no formal training in how to teach adult learners (O'Toole & Essex, 2012). Another variable to consider is whether or not the information being delivered to the participants is current, accurate, and research based. An examination of the curriculum used for the

Pathways was needed to answer these questions and the study also investigated how the

information is delivered to the participants. These are the research questions relating to

Pathways:

1. After completing the Pathways Program, did the participants feel they
    were more knowledgeable about process quality?

2. Did the participants change the way they interacted with children after
    completing the Pathways Program?

3. Did the financial incentive of a $400 stipend for each completed module
    have any influence on the participant's decision to participate in the
    Pathways Program?

4. How would the participants rate the Pathways Program on a scale of 1 to
    5?

5. How would the participants rate the Pathways Program instructors on a
    scale of 1 to 5?

6. How beneficial were the instructional strategies used in the program?

7. Do the participants have any suggestions to improve the program?

   Zepeda (2012) believed that collaborative inquiry was important in professional

development for educators and that the training needed to be ongoing. Tienken and

Stonaker (2007) revealed how changing the delivery system of professional learning

opportunities changed the culture of one school system. They discovered that the teachers

learned best when they were outside of the constraints of large group workshops, because

the smaller group settings facilitated communication and learning. Learning was an

outcome of the teachers demonstrating mutual respect and participating in personal interactions. When the teachers felt they were part of a community of learners, they became motivated to participate as well as create and share knowledge.

DeMonte (2013) explained that when teacher development is short-term, episodic, and disconnected it is unlikely that teaching instruction will be influenced. A sustained investment of time is needed to improve classroom instruction and in order to increase learning these trainings should include a minimum of 14 hours of instruction. The delivery system of Pathways is one where the group stays together as a cohort throughout the three modules, which may be a very effective environment that promotes learning.

Review of the Literature

Several educational databases were searched to find resources for this study. ERIC is a database that provides articles, books, reports and policy papers and allows a search for peer reviewed materials. Education Research Complete includes education journals and by utilizing Sage access was gained to education research journals. ProQuest Central is a multidisciplinary database that also provides access to education research journals (Walden University Library, 20012). Three Wyoming libraries were also utilized: the Riverton and Dubois Public Libraries as well as the Central Wyoming College Library. A few resources were also found using the search engine Google Scholar. Saturation has been reached within the review of the literature. The search for information originated from several perspectives. Using search terms that included childcare, early childhood education, preschool and early care resources were found that provided information about early childhood education. Investigating what quality early

childhood education and care looked like led to resources about quality programming and

benefits of quality programming. The information found using these terms led to more

resources about childcare professionals, the educational levels of early childhood

professionals, early childhood workforce wages and turnover, professional organizations

and professional development for early childhood professionals. This led to an

investigation of the Child Development Associate Credential, The Pathways to

Professional Development Program and specific research about adult learning and

program evaluation. Next began the search for resources about research design and

methods. After an extensive search of all these key phrases and ideas, the resources are

all stating very similar viewpoints to the cited references already used, and the search is

no longer providing new information. After collecting and analyzing the data, it was

necessary to go back to the literature review based on those results. The limited resources

related specifically to the Pathways to Professional Development Program stem from the

fact that it is a relatively new program in Wyoming and at this time there is no

professional literature written about the program.

Quality Early Childcare Environments

One way to help achieve a quality early childcare environment for the children of

Wyoming is to train providers, helping them to improve their knowledge and skills. For

the purposes of this study, "process quality refers to the experience of children within the

care environment including their interactions with others, materials, and activities" (The

University of North Carolina Child Development Institute, n.d, para.1). The University of

North Carolina Child Development Institute (n.d.) noted that "process quality consists of

the interactions that occur between children and adults as well as the interactions that

children have with the materials and activities in the environment" (para.1). Space,

scheduling, and materials are used to support these interactions.

> Process quality has been found to be to be a more accurate prediction of child
>
> outcomes than such indicators as staff to child ratios, group size, cost of care, and
>
> even the specific type of care (center-based as compared to a family childcare
>
> home setting). In order for an early childcare setting to provide the care and
>
> educational experiences that will permit children to experience a higher quality of
>
> life and fully develop their abilities, a quality program must provide protection for
>
> the children's health and safety, opportunities for building positive relationships,
>
> and stimulating learning experiences (The University of North Carolina Child
>
> Development Institute, n.d, para.1).

Educational programs that address these issues are a critical component because the

education levels of the providers play a large part in meeting these requirements of a

quality program.

Child Care Facilities

According to the Wyoming Department of Family Services Early Childhood Division

(2012) in the state of Wyoming childcare is a "service designed to supplement daily

parental care" (p. 2-2) and a childcare center is defined as "any business operated by a

private person, partnership, association or corporation that is operating a business for

profit or otherwise, in a building used solely for commercial purposes, where sixteen or

more children receive care for part of the day" (p. 2-2). A childcare facility refers to "any

business, for profit or non-profit, which provides care for children at the request of the

parents, legal guardians or an agency that is responsible for those children" (Wyoming

Department of Family Services Early Childhood Division, 2012, p. 2-2).

In the state of Wyoming, it the responsibility of the Wyoming Department of Family

Services to issue licenses for these businesses. These regulations cover childcare centers

as well as preschool programs.

      In many Wyoming programs, the childcare providers do not have any more

training than what is required by the Department of Family Services for licensing

purposes (Child Care Finder, 2010). The basic training requirements include:

6 hours of orientation that includes health and fire safety, cardio pulmonary resuscitation,

blood borne pathogens, and recognition of child abuse. An additional training registry

requirement stipulates that every 2 years "a provider must participate in 1 hour training in

the following areas: Health, Nutrition, and Safety, The Active Learning Environment,

Guidance and Discipline, Child Growth and Development, Family Relationships,

Program Management, Uniqueness, and Cultural Awareness" (Wyoming Department of

Family Services Early Childhood Division, 2012, p. 8).

      Any staff administering medication must also have training in how to administer

medications and anyone providing care to infants must have eight hours of "specialized

training in the care of infants" (Wyoming Department of Family Services Early

Childhood Division, 2011, para. 3) . These required training hours may be earned through

professional development programs or by utilizing the lending library of books and

videos (Wyoming Department of Family Services, 2011). Pathways seeks to expand on the knowledge that childcare providers have, going beyond these basic requirements.

 Early Childhood Education

According to the State Preschool Yearbook (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011) the number of children attending a state funded preschool program such as Head Start continued to rise, however, these programs only reached about 10% of 3 and 4 year olds. Wyoming is among the 12 states that do not invest in state preschool program initiatives, although some state supplemental funding is provided to programs.

In 2012, the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies published a summary of childcare data for the state. They found that "37,268 children in Wyoming were under the age of 5 years old and that 27,938 of those children were being served by the 860 licensed childcare providers in the state" (p. 1). According to the National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (2009) "nearly all states had created or were building professional development systems for providers. These systems included strategies for helping childcare providers enter the workforce and grow professionally as well as helping stakeholders organize existing professional development efforts" (p. 2-1).

Professional Development

In the 1970's, a group of early childhood educators wanted to find ways to "improve the quality of early childcare and education" (Council for Professional Recognition, History of Child Development Associate Credential, 2013, para. 1), and the Child Development Associate Credential (CDA) was created as a result of that process. "Funding for the CDA initially came from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (Council for Professional Recognition, History of Child Development Associate Credential, 2013, para. 1). The first CDA was awarded in 1975. The Council for Professional Recognition partners with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and acts as the administrator of the CDA credential. "An applicant can specialize in preschool (center-based), infant toddler (center- based), family childcare, or home visitor" (Council for Professional Recognition, History of Child Development Associate Credential, 2013, para. 1).

The CDA requires completion of well-defined competencies, which act as a framework for early childcare professionals as they progress towards gaining more knowledge about early childhood education. The CDA is a nationally recognized credential that was created to improve the standards of quality childcare and professional development (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013).Competency standards are outlined in the requirements for completion of a CDA and training courses are required to cover the following goals in order to be recognized by the Council for Professional Recognition:

Goal I. To establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment.

Goal II. To advance physical and intellectual competence.

Goal III. To support social and emotional development and to provide positive guidance.

Goal IV. To establish positive and productive relationships with families.

Goal V. To ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant's needs.

Goal VI. To maintain a commitment to professionalism (Council for Professional Recognition, CDA Competency Standards, 2013, para. 4).

In order to apply for the CDA credential, a total of 120 hours of formal early childhood training must be obtained through an agency or organization that can provide an official transcript, certificate, or letter verifying completion of their program. A formal observation must then be completed by a CDA advisor. In addition, the applicant must create a professional resource file of reference materials related to the coursework (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013). A questionnaire is then sent to the parents of the children with whom the applicant is currently working to solicit their opinions about how the applicant works with their children. The final requirements of the CDA are a 2-hour exam and oral interview that are administered by a CDA advisor. The council committee reviews the documentation and makes the final decision whether or not to award the credential (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013).

The state has made improvements in the educational opportunities offered to early childcare providers. In Wyoming, there are seven community colleges and one university.

Of the community colleges, six of them offer an associate degree in early childhood as well as a four-semester certificate program designed for students wanting to care for children in early childcare settings (Wyoming Community College Commission, 2015). All of the community colleges have course offerings that can be applied to the Child Development Associate Credential (Universities.com, 2011). The University of Wyoming offers many courses in early childhood education to prepare students for positions in early childcare centers, as well as an Early Childhood Birth to Eight Endorsement and Early Childhood Birth to Five Endorsement for the Elementary Education degree (University of Wyoming, 2011). Courses taken in these programs can also be applied to the CDA; however, institutions that offer a CDA training program "develop their curriculum independent of the council's participation or endorsement" (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013, p. 1). College courses from the elementary education programs can also be used to meet the education stipulations of the CDA. At this time, there are no degree programs in Wyoming that include the CDA courses in their required coursework towards a degree.

College courses can be important learning opportunities for educating people working in early childcare settings. Technology also makes these courses available to students, regardless of where they live because the colleges now offer many distance outreach centers and online classes (Parker, Lenhart, & Moore, 2011). However, these classes may be cost prohibitive to some students. Over the past 20 years, tuition and fees at public universities have increased by nearly 130% (Cafferty, 2011).

Pathways was created as a quality entry-level community-based training program for childcare providers in Wyoming, incorporating the CDA into its curriculum. Pathways was formulated around three main ideas: (a) to increase the quality of childcare (b) to provide a financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education, and (c) to increase the retention of staff and providers who work directly with children (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2010).

Research in the field of early childhood supports these important ideas. Efforts to measure changes in the early childhood education workforce suggested that the capabilities of center-based workers have not changed very much or have declined (Bassock, Fitzpatrick, Loeb, & Paglayan, 2012). There is disagreement about what defines quality early childcare and the specific factors involved. Staff ratio, staff training and qualifications and parent participation all play a role. But the people who are working with the children are the critical piece that brings all of the other factors together. Their level of education and professional development directly correlate to the educational and developmental outcomes for the children in their care.

Even though it has been established that quality childcare directly influences children and their development, there are no definitive answers as to what training methods are most likely to change professional practice. The strength of the link between the level of education of early childhood practitioners and child outcomes has been questioned, causing Buysse, Winton, and Rous (2009) to question the effectiveness of professional development programs for teachers. They stated that there is no clearly defined protocol for training professionals to work with young children. As a result there

is not a common focus that guides the creation, organization, and implementation of training programs for early childhood professionals. This led to the creation of their six key assumptions about professional development:

1) The term *professional development* encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities including training that results in college credit or degrees as well as less intensive programs that do not yield credits or degrees. Some may involve formal coursework, but others may be more informal and situated in practice.

2) The early childhood workforce is made up of a group of professionals who are widely diverse with respect to their roles, organizational affiliations, qualifications, education, experience, ethnic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and linguistic characteristics. They serve diverse young children who also vary widely in these same areas.

3) Families of young children play an important role in all aspects of early education.

4) The role of learners in professional development is to actively engage in learning experiences that lead to increasing their knowledge and skills as well as the application of this knowledge into practice.

5) The roles of providers in professional development are to organize and facilitate learning experiences that respond to the actual experiences of the providers, by promoting practices that are evidence based and recommended by the early childhood field.

6) Quality professional development takes into account who is being educated, what the intent of the instruction is and how the instruction is being presented. These components can then be used for planning and evaluating professional development. Professionals also need to have access to learning opportunities and incentives to participate (Buyssee et al., 2009, p. 238).

Program Quality

Forming relationships between teachers and children requires interactions, which have been a major focus of the inquiry of quality programs. There are positive, long lasting affects derived from these exchanges and having experienced childcare professionals who have had adequate training are the main predictors of quality in a childcare program. But in some instances, the absence of specialized training may be due to a lack of resources (Winterbottom & Jones, 2013). Belsky and Pluess (2012) noted the importance of mother child attachments. Quality of care for young children is related to this; in that low quality care and maternal insensitivity can lead infants to develop insecure attachments (Thompson, 2010).

There is also a link between quality of care that young children received and the development of language skills and school readiness. "When children start spending time in center based childcare when they are between the ages of two and three, they show the most improvement in their cognitive skills and school readiness" (Loeba, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumbergerd, 2007, p. 65).

Quality care includes developmental stimulation, interactions with the children and the attributes and educational status of the caregiver. When children are not

being cared for by their parents they benefit from a high quality childcare environment. Program quality is predicted by the training and background of the providers. High quality care enhances the cognitive and language skills of young children. These gains are even greater for children of low socio economic status and high quality care may also buffer these children from other negative effects of poverty (Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2011, p. 480).

Staff turnover also has implications for the quality of care; but, statistics on retention vary greatly, from 13% to 30% (Rolfe, 2005). Wright (2011) showed an even higher rate of turnover, to as high as 40% to 50% annually. A lack of consistent training is one problem cited as contributing to high turnover in early childcare programs. Sometimes staff initially works under supervision; but, often times they are taking on their full duties on their first day of employment.

Providing training opportunities has been shown to increase retention (Rolfe, 2005) and "childcare centers with less than 10% staff turnover each year tend to have higher scores on measures of quality than childcare centers with high turnover rates" (Wright, 2011, p. 244). Eighteen percent of the staff who leave childcare centers actually leave the field entirely (Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001). This high turnover impedes recruiting, affects training of new staff, and affects the quality of care.

When the people in their environment change frequently, it can interfere with the child's adjustment and affect their ability to form critical relationships with their caregivers. Well-educated staffs are more likely to continue working in a program that has a higher rate of staff retention (Gable, Rothrauff, Thornburg, & Mauzy, 2007). In

2011, California created an incentive program called the Matching Funds for Child-Care Retention Incentive (CRI) Program for Early Care and Staff Education. This program paid a stipend to childcare staff for acquiring college level training. This program was put into place in an attempt to reduce staff turnover. Research showed a modest yet consistent completion of college level training, particularly for lower paid, less senior staff members (Bridges, Fuller, Huang, & Hamre, 2011).

Methodology

Methodology is the analysis of the principles or procedures of inquiry in a particular field (Glesne, 2011). In the field of education one type of inquiry is a program evaluation and Spaulding (2008) described a program as having a set of specific activities that were developed for an intentional purpose. These activities have measureable goals and objectives. Because this study examined a particular program, it was appropriate to conduct a program evaluation.

Gilliam and Leiter (2003) described the process of program evaluation as being a standardized procedure used to depict the factors and ramifications of an organized intervention or service, with the aim of documenting the program's beneficial impacts. This study was based on an educational point of view, which formed the basis for the questions about the Pathways Program, and the desire to conduct a program evaluation related to the Pathways Program. The purpose of a program evaluation is to provide feedback to the stakeholders. In creating the agenda for this process, the stakeholders participate in the formation of the questions that will drive this inquiry. In program

evaluation strictly generalizing to other populations is less important because the evaluation is very program and content specific.

Ultimately evaluations results need to be seen in the context of whether or not the stakeholders are capable of making decisions and judgements based on the results of the evaluation. Program evaluations can have an impact right away because the purpose of an evaluation is to be put to use (Department of Educational Research Methodology, Comparing Program Evaluation to Research 2015, para.4).

The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Development created a set of five standards to be used to ensure quality of education program evaluations:

- Utility standards ensure that the program evaluation will meet the needs of the stakeholders. This includes having the evaluation conducted by qualified people, taking into consideration all of the individuals of the stakeholder group who will be affected by this evaluation, identifying the purpose of the evaluation based on the needs of the stakeholders, and creating an evaluation that allows participants to reveal their understandings and behaviors (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2015, para. 2).

- Feasibility standards are needed to ensure the program evaluation is conducted in and efficient and effective manner. The evaluation process should take into account the schedule and procedures of the program and use available resources in effectively (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2015, para. 3).

- Propriety standards address the proper and legal aspects of the program

    evaluation such as creating formal agreements to conduct the evaluation,

    protecting the rights of the participants, presenting a full accounting of any

    conflicts of interest, and giving a full accounting of the findings from the

    evaluation as well as an explanation of any limitations (Joint Committee

    on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2015, para. 4).   .

- Accuracy standards increase the honesty and dependability of the study.

    The information gathered should align with the purpose of the evaluation

    and support the interpretations that are made as a result. Procedures should

    be determined for the collection, analysis, and storage of data (Joint

    Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2015, para. 5).   .

- Evaluation accountability standards ensure that the purpose of the

    evaluation, process design, procedures, data and outcome will be

    documented adequately, and that these standards will be used to critically

    analyze the accountability of the evaluation itself (Joint Committee on

    Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2015, para. 6).

Although there is no research specifically related to this program, many resources have been explored that discuss the importance of a quality early childcare setting for young children.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study links the components of the research. Jabareen (2009) described a conceptual framework as the network of ideas and theories

that are linked together to provide understanding. These ideas then support each other,

creative individual pieces to the puzzle and form a framework for the philosophy of the

project. Each plays a part in the questions being examined, such as explaining the way

things currently are, how they are working, and how these relate to the methods and the

process of discovery and what the real story will be. The conceptual framework gathers

the key components as well as the variables and speculates about their relationships to

one another. This helps lead to an understanding of the interpretation of the data, which

can be organized into themes. The framework binds the relationship that exists between

data collection and analysis and can be created by identifying the sources of the data,

examining the data looking for themes and similarities, discovering and labeling the

concepts the data is revealing, organizing the results by assumptions and conclusions, and

eventually combining all of the information into a theoretical framework. In order to

ensure the validity of the conceptual framework the process needs to make sense,

showing that logical steps were taken to answer the questions that provided the basis for

the research (Jabareen, 2008).

The theoretical framework is a theory that is used to ground the research,

determining what will be measured, what relationships are being investigated, and what

variables may be present. It also defines how the research being conducted fits into what

is already known about the topic and how it will make a contribution to the field. By

developing these ideas it can help the researcher formulate research questions and

methods to be used as well as justify this as a worthy and important research topic

(Maxwell, 2005). The framework for this program evaluation is based in the constructivism research of several theorists.

Piaget (1972) as well as Vygotsky and Kozulin (2011) proposed that ideas and concepts being presented to students should be constructed from experience in order to have personal meaning for them. Piaget noted that in order for learning to occur, children and adults benefit from a social environment and experiences that provide them with cognitive nourishment and intellectual stimulation (Piaget, 1972). In order to do that successfully teachers need to make sure the instruction is explicit and communicates the concepts clearly so the students can connect to them. Piaget's viewpoint of cognitive constructivism proposed that ideas were constructed by each individual, through a personal process, forming intellectual constructions (Piaget, 1928).

Vygotsky felt that ideas were constructed through the interactions of the learner with the teacher and with other students, more of a social constructivism (Powell & Kalina, 2009). He also pointed out that children's learning incorporates their previous experiences and that teaching and imitation alone are not enough to form new knowledge (Vygotsky & Kozulin, 2011).

Dewey believed that the student needs to create meaning about what they are learning and encouraged active participation for the learners. He also pointed out the importance of creating high quality learning experiences, as well as the role that prior knowledge and experience plays in learning (Monk, 2013). He felt that education was the way to help individuals reach the utmost of their potential (Dewey, 2010).

Bruner (1963) advocated for creating more opportunities for students to be actively engaged, giving them the chance to discover new concepts and develop their own insights. He felt that problem solving and discovery experiences were the most important kind of learning (Lawton & And, 1980). Bruner also investigated the components of learning. He felt that learners were influenced by their early experiences and that some of those predispose children to learn effectively. He proposed that information was taken in and used to structure knowledge, allowing the learner to grow. This building of knowledge requires teachers to present information in the optimal sequence, giving the children a place to start off from, something from which to build upon (Bruner, 1963). Pathways uses a cohort model, which means that the students begin the program in groups that stay together throughout the training, which seems to support the social aspect of these theories.

The goal of the study was to determine if Pathways is having any effect on the participants and their interactions with children, in essence investigating the effectiveness of Pathways. The research questions focused the study by guiding the development of the researcher produced survey that was created and distributed to the participants. Participants were asked specific questions about what they learned in the training, how they learned it and if they are able to apply that knowledge.

Based on developmental theory and research, there are several indicators of quality in early childcare settings: (a) the quantity and quality of interactions between adults and children. (b) opportunities for interactions between children and the content of those interactions (c) the social and emotional atmosphere environment (d) the ways that

the children are grouped (e) the type of the activities that are accessible. Most assessments of quality in early childcare programs include a focus on the physical environment, curriculum and program philosophy, characteristics of the staff, and adult-child interactions (Ceglowski & Davis, 2004).

Dearing, McCartney, and Taylor (2009) suggested that quality early childcare opportunities stimulate and support the child's healthy development. Qualities of that care need to include frequent opportunities for communication to foster language development, learning activities that incorporate materials appropriate for the child's developmental abilities, a positive social and emotional atmosphere that includes adults who are caring and responsive to the needs of the child, and allowing children the opportunities to explore the world around them.

Currie (2008) discussed the fact that inspections and licensing requirements do not necessarily measure the aspects of quality such as having caregivers who are actively engaged with children These types of providers often smile at the children, frequently touch and hold them and get down to their eye level to speak with them. Childcare providers may not recognize the importance of having adults who respond when a child asks questions or seeks help from them. It is also very important that adults encourage the children to talk about themselves, including what they are feeling, what activities they are involved in, and their ideas. Caregivers who are attentive listeners also ask open-ended questions, helping children to enrich and extend their vocabulary and encouraging independence. All of these characteristics are signs of a quality early childcare setting (Currie, 2008).

When conducting her study about quality daycare in Ireland, O'Hara (2010) discovered that high quality practices in programs were associated with improved cognitive and social emotional development in children and that professional development for the staff and their qualifications were associated with better quality of services provided.

Implications

This background information has guided the formation of a conceptual framework for this program evaluation research. The ideas of Piaget (1972) (1928), Vygotsky (2011), Dewey (2010), and Bruner (1963) all focused on how learning takes place. A literature review showed that a quality early childcare program has lasting benefits for children. An important component of a quality program is the training and education of the professionals who are working with the children.

The Pathways Program was designed specifically for early childcare providers in Wyoming, with the intentions of improving their knowledge and skills. Therefore, the assumption is that the program is successful in doing that and this research investigated whether or not this is true. Nevertheless, there may be key variables that are having an affect not only on the participants but also on the actual program itself. The level of previous early childcare experience may affect the impact the program has on a participant. If a participant has no prior knowledge in the area of early childhood development they may be more likely to feel that this program was beneficial, compared to someone with extensive knowledge already. Shapiro also (2004) noted that when learners apply the prior knowledge that they have about a topic to the current learning

experience, it enhances their ability to remember information. "A large number of studies have indicated that prior knowledge predicts the amount of factual information that adult and child subjects are able to recall from texts" (Shapiro, 2004, p. 161). Another variable to consider is whether or not the information being delivered to the participants is current, accurate, and research based.

The implications for social change from this research are directly related to evaluation of the Pathways Program, which could have an impact on early childcare providers, children, and ultimately the communities of Wyoming. By increasing the knowledge of childcare providers, they can then apply what they have learned to implement higher quality care, creating opportunities for building positive relationships, and stimulating learning experiences, which increases the chances that children will reach their full potential. "Children who attended high quality early childcare displayed higher average levels of mathematics and reading achievement from early childhood through adolescence, as well as higher earnings in adulthood, showing that these affects can last a lifetime" (Dearing et al., 2009, p. 1330). Currie (2008) also stated that children who were placed in a high quality early childcare setting performed better on standardized assessments at age 15, were less likely to be held back in school or require special education, and at age 21 their test scores were still higher than average. They were also twice as likely to still be in school or continue their education at a 4 year college.

This study employed an analytical organizing framework. The subject and objectives of the study are defined, the literature was reviewed and the research questions were created. The hypothesis for this study was that there are benefits for the childcare

providers who complete the Pathways Program. The research questions came from the assumption that by increasing the educational levels of childcare providers, it provides them with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel and possibly advance in their career as an early childhood caregiver and educator. The purpose of this study was to explore the affects that Pathways is having on the participants. The program evaluation explored the participants' perceived experiences related to the coursework of the program. Additional findings included the effects the program had on the participants' interactions with children and on their plans to further their education. Surveys were used to gather the data, which were then analyzed. Conclusions were then made based on that data.

The results of this study will be presented to the Wyoming Children's Action Alliance and Align, since they are the stakeholders in this program evaluation. These are the state organizations that created and implement the Pathways Program and also provide other professional development resources and opportunities for early childcare providers in Wyoming. They will be presented with a narrative overview of the study as well as the complete document, a summary of the study, and the results of the data collection. Any questions they may have concerning the study will be answered for them as well. The stakeholders may then use these results to make adjustments to the program based on the feedback from the participants.

Summary

Early childcare programs that demonstrate the characteristics of high quality have a positive and significant effect on children's development in the early years (National

Association for the Education of Young Children, n.d.). A component of a quality

program is having providers who are knowledgeable in child development. Wyoming

does not require childcare providers to complete any training before beginning to work

with children in a childcare setting. Pathways was created as a quality entry-level

community based training for childcare providers in Wyoming. Section 2 and the

remainder of the project examine and explain the impact this program is having on the

participants.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Methodology is the description of the techniques that will be used during a particular method of study (Glesne, 2011). In the field of education, one type of inquiry is a program evaluation. A program can be described as the development of activities designed in a purposeful way to meet a specific need with outcomes that are measureable (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Because this study examined a particular program, it was appropriate to conduct a program evaluation and the results lead to a discussion of how the study's findings relate back to the literature. Gilliam and Leiter (2003) described program evaluation as "a systematic process of describing the components and outcomes of an organized intervention or service, with the aim of documenting the program's beneficial impacts" (p. 6).

This study is an objectives-based program evaluation, meaning it evaluated if the objectives written by the creators of the program were met. Gilliam and Leiter (2003) identified six specific steps in the evaluation process:

1) Identify the core components of the program intervention.

2) Identify the desired outcomes.

3) Identify the context of the population and community for which it was designed.

4) Develop what you want to study, incorporating feedback from the program

administration.

5) Conduct the study to see if the program's implementation is consistent with the

identified outcomes.

6) Identify which parts of a program work well and which parts need

improvement, or if a program is being implemented consistently with the way that

it was planned (p. 9).

Conducting and evaluation involves collecting the data and then analyzing it to guide the decision making process based on the results (Zohrabi, 2012). Program evaluation is a strategy used to describe the effectiveness of the program, why it is effective, and when appropriate how it can be improved upon (Zohrabi, 2012). In the current study of Pathways, the personal experiences of participants are important, even though they are subjective. Their experiences become part of the evaluation. These data need to be identified, collected, and used as objectively possible in a program evaluation (Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2010).

Justification for Methods Chosen

This is an appropriate choice of study design, evaluating this program to determine if it has met the three stated goals of the program: (a) to increase the quality of childcare by increasing the qualifications of the individuals working with young children, (b) to provide a financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education, and (c) to increase the retention of staff and providers who work directly with children (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2013), and then make recommendations for

possible program refinement and success. This program has a defined curriculum and activities designed for a specific purpose with measureable goals and objectives. The data that were collected in this study are the responses to the survey questions and these were examined to look for general themes. A cross-sectional survey design involves the collection of data at one point in time, as opposed to a longitudinal study that continues to collect data over a period of time. This was an appropriate approach for the study. A survey created for the research project served as a method of data collection and was designed to summarize the participants' perceptions about the program and its impact on them. This provided useful information to the decision makers who created and administered this program. A copy of the survey used can be found in Appendix A. Validity and reliability are fundamental aspects of the evaluation instrument. An instrument is considered to be valid if it measures what it is intended to measure (Steiner & Norman, 2007). When formulating the questions for this survey it was important to phrase the questions appropriately and provide options for responses that were appropriate as well. The validity of this survey was also assessed by comparing the results of the survey to the follow up interviews conducted after the survey had been completed. This strategy allowed for a comparison of the responses, to find out if the answers given in the survey agreed with the actual opinions of the participants and in the case of this study the responses were the same. The instrument is reliable if it has the ability to measure consistently (Steiner & Norman, 2007). The survey is considered to be reliable as well because the setting and situation could be reproduced with future participants of the Pathways Program and would still be a reliable measure of their

experiences. The questions are consistent and related to the topic, so it is reasonable to expect that all of the responses given in the instrument would be fairly consistent (Steiner & Norman, 2007).

The data collected during this process are summative, meaning that they were collected at the end of the program cycle. The narrative data were then analyzed to see if the program's goals and objectives have been met.

There is another way that this study could have been conducted. Before participants entered the program they could have been interviewed to determine their level of education and knowledge in the subject areas addressed in Pathways. Site visits could have been conducted to see the techniques and teaching strategies they were using and to observe their interactions with children. After completing all three modules of the program, the participants could have been interviewed again and follow-up site visits could have been completed. These strategies could have provided useful information about the participants to determine if their knowledge and classroom practice were influenced by Pathways.

Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) described the steps used for analyzing data collected in the program evaluation. It was important to read the data thoroughly. First impressions can be written to be considered at a later time. As the data were being evaluated, it was important to remember what the research questions were. This helps a researcher focus the analysis on where to begin and on what is really important.

A survey was used to collect data so the participants' answers were examined to see if there are consistencies or differences. There were also connections and

relationships between the questions in the survey. Next, the information needed to be put into categories by themes and patterns. Similar ideas, terminology or phrases were grouped together. The information in these groups was then summarized to bring meaning to all of the responses. Going through this process allowed for the discovery of what was learned from the participants. The stakeholders also needed to be considered, considering how they would use the results of this evaluation and what they would be most interested in knowing about this data.

In this study, the intent was not to generalize to a larger population. By using an objective-based approach, the information was collected and the data was compared to the stated objectives. It is possible that other outcomes may be discovered that are equally important, but not based on the goals and objectives originally stated. The participants are the important piece to this study, because it is their position, opinions, and story that are being told; so, they are the expert resource on the accuracy of that story.

This program evaluation is a type of applied research because it examined the effectiveness and usefulness of Pathways. By using a pragmatic framework, a study of Pathways was conducted to determine if it is having the stated desired effect on the participants. This framework is often used in educational research to study methods and solve problems. It seeks to make improvements in the field of education and involves the researcher collaborating with the participants (Lodico et al., 2010).

Role of the Researcher

I was considered an external evaluator because I was someone outside the immediate setting and I have no obligations to the program. I have been a teacher for this

program in the past; but, I am no longer acting in that capacity and none of my former

students participated in this study. I have a working relationship with the organization,

which made the process easier in that they trusted me to conduct this program evaluation.

I also have an understanding of how Pathways works.

The Participants

All of the Pathways participants who had completed the entire program were

contacted about being a part of this study, resulting in 35 actual participants. In order to

participate in Pathways the participants had to be working in a licensed child care center.

At the time that this contact information was collected the participants in this study were

between the ages of 23 and 69. Ten of them are members of a professional organization

related to early childhood. Their current hourly wages ranged from zero to 16 dollars.

When asked about their current job titles some of the participants responded that

they were directors and/or owners of centers and in the state of Wyoming, the minimum

age for a director is 21 years of age. Other qualifications for Directors include a high

school diploma or GED and working full time with young children for at least 1 year

under qualified supervision. Directors are also required to complete 10 college credit

hours in the area of early childhood education, child development, nursing, or other child-

related field or have 100 approved clock hours of training with a minimum of 4 clock

hours in each of the required training areas of early care and education as required by the

Wyoming Department of Family Services (Wyoming Department of Family Services

Early Childhood Division, 2011). Assistant director was also listed by some of the

participants and this position requires a high school diploma or GED, 1 year of

experience in a licensed child care center or 15 of approved training and a minimum age of 21 (Wyoming Department of Family Services Early Childhood Division, 2012).

The participants in this study were early childcare providers who were enrolled in Pathways, which is being offered in many geographical areas of Wyoming. Participants were at least 18 years of age and working in an early childcare center. Pathways stipulates that participants cannot already hold a four-year degree in any subject area in order to be eligible for the program. Only participants who have completed all three components of the program were included in this study in order to determine if all of the objectives of the program have been met. The Wyoming Children's Action Alliance and Align entered into an agreement to conduct this study, and Walden University then gave permission to begin the study (IRB approval #10-08-14-0190087). Pathways participant's contact information was then provided by Align and they were contacted by phone. This initial contact developed a working relationship with the participants. After this initial phone call attempt to each prospective participant, 83 survey invitations containing the consent form (Appendix B) were sent by e-mail in the hopes that the return rate would be high enough to have a sufficient amount of data.

Protection of Participants

I respected the human subjects involved and abided by the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Informed consent means that all participants were given the opportunity to choose what will or what will not happen to them. Participation was voluntary. The research procedure, their purposes, risks, and anticipated benefits were all

explained to the participants during the initial contact by phone or email. This also gave

them the opportunity to ask questions to make sure that they fully understood the

information. It was also explained that they could withdraw at any time from the

research. This was a properly designed study that posed no risk to the participants. All

subjects in this study have completed the Pathways to Professional Development

Program and are only chosen based on that criteria.

All data were collected and are stored electronically on a password-protected

computer with only the researcher having access to the data. All subjects will remain

anonymous in the presentation of the data in this study.

Data Collection

When data is being collected as part of a program evaluation it is important it be

examined for quality. In order to determine the quality of a program evaluation it is

necessary to consider the reliability and validity of the results of the evaluation. One

method for checking the reliability of the results can be triangulation of the data

collection methods, which means that the feedback from the participants was collected

using different methods at separate points in time and analyzed at the same time. This can

be used as a test to determine if the data is consistent. "When this data demonstrates

convergence, or agreement, then the internal validity of the evaluation can be

established" (Department of Educational Research Methodology, Reliability and Validity

in Program Evaluation, 2015, para.8). When conducting a program evaluation it is

appropriate to use a survey. There are several types that can be used for research

purposes, including surveys that are mailed, web-based or conducted by telephone. Self-

administered surveys collect data without the use of a telephone or in person (Thayer-Hart, 2010). These provide data to a researcher about the impact the program had on the participants and allows them to answer questions in multiple ways. A survey may use multiple choice questions, rating scales, or open-ended questions. This survey was created to determine the impact that the program had on the participants. Objectives of Pathways and the stated research questions were used to determine the questions. The survey used nominal scales with categories, ordinal scales using categories that imply or express rank order and quasi-interval scales using continuous equal interval, open ended questions and multiple choice questions.

Open ended questions do not provide a response option, but allow the participants to provide their own responses to the questions. Open ended is beneficial because as Thayer-Hart (2010) noted, giving respondents an opportunity to use their own words to express themselves may give them increased amounts of reflection to their answers. They may describe their experiences more accurately and unanticipated answers may emerge.

Online Survey

The online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey which generated the survey after the questions had been developed, gathered the data and kept a record of the responses. This is a type of web based survey (Creswell, 2012). To begin the process of data collection, an attempt was made to contact all 86 potential participants by phone. The study was explained, their e-mail contact was verified and any questions they had were answered. If not contact was made an attempt was made to leave a message with the information. The potential participants were notified at this time that an email would be

sent to them with the consent form, again explaining the purpose and process of the study. This consent form can be seen in Appendix B.

The participants were instructed to read the information and if they were willing to participate in the study they responded back with their consent. They were then sent the link to the online survey. If a participant was not contacted by phone, they were still sent the same e-mail containing the consent form. Once the online survey was underway, the participants were able to log into it using the Survey Monkey link that was sent to them. After a period of 2 weeks, a reminder email was generated by Survey Monkey and sent to all potential participants who had initially consented to participate but had not filled out the online survey.

Mailed Surveys

If no response to the online survey was received from a potential participant, a follow-up attempt was made by sending a consent form, survey and self-addressed stamped envelope, via the United States Post Service. Seventy-three total envelopes were mailed. When those responses were received they were manually entered into Survey Monkey. These surveys were collected for the next 2 months.

The participants are the important piece to this study, because it is their perceptions, opinions, and stories being described, so they are the expert resource on the accuracy of that story. The stakeholders in this study provided the contact information for the participants. Only those participants who had finished all three modules were surveyed. Participant information and data were recorded accurately and stored safely for later retrieval. With 86 survey invitations being sent and 35 participants responding an

appropriate sample size was achieved because this is a large enough sample to ensure that

most of the possible perceptions of the participants were discovered (Creswell, 2012).

Data Analysis

Initially, 20 people consented to participate after receiving the initial email. Three

of the potential participants who replied to the e-mail with consent to participate did not

respond to the online survey or the mail survey. Five participants had replied to the e-

mail with their consent but later returned a mail survey instead of filling out the online

survey. Thirteen participants who responded by e-mail went on to fill out the online

survey. There were a total of 13 online surveys filled out and 22 mail surveys were

returned. According to the AAPOR Outcome Rate Calculator (American Association for

Public opinion Research, 2015), the cooperation rate for the survey was 92%, the refusal

rate was three percent, the contact rate was 42% and the response rate was 39%.

According to American Association for Public opinion Research (2015) results show that

in some cases the results that have the least bias have come from surveys with less than

optimal response rates. After transcription of interview data was completed, the next step

was to look for emerging commonalities or themes in the responses and careful thought

needs to be given to these responses. Analysis began by identifying potential categories,

then comparing and contrasting these themes, looking for merging descriptive themes,

relationships and cause and affect type relationships. Once these initial themes and

commonalities were identified, it was important to go back and further divide them into

subcategories (Thayer-Hart, 20110). Reading through those data electronically allowed

for color coding the themes and changing colors as necessary.

       Researchers employ a variety of strategies to increase the trustworthiness of the research meaning that a researcher did everything possible to ensure that the data were collected, analyzed and reported in an ethical an appropriate manner. The very nature of qualitative inquiry, and in this program evaluation, is an investigation of the unique opinions of those who had completed Pathways. Providing thick and rich descriptions, a detailed description of the participants as well as the data collection and analysis procedures is one way to ensure credibility. Triangulation and member checking are also two methods that are often used in research (Carlson, 2010).

Member Checking

Member checking was a method used in this study to ensure quality and accuracy. This gave the participants and opportunity to offer their opinions about the interpretation of the data. This allows the researcher to find out if the data analysis accurately reflects the participants experiences (Carlson, 2010). In this study member checking was conducted in two different ways. Five of the participants were chosen randomly by using a random number generator (Stat Trek, 2015). The numbers were used to pick the corresponding participants from the list of participants. The member checking took place by initially calling the participants on the phone, which was successful in two of the instances, and the other three participants were contacted by email. In each contact, the analysis of the data was discussed and their responses indicated that the analysis of the information was correct. This verified that it was an authentic representation of their opinions (Harper & Cole, 2012). This interaction with the participants was also used to gain an even deeper understanding of the data.

Triangulation

This study initially started out with an email and online survey; however mailed surveys and follow up interviews were conducted as well. This strategy, triangulation, is also a method of ensuring credible results. Triangulation involves collecting and interpreting data that is gathered using a variety of methods. The premise is that if the different data sets substantiate each other, then the results are likely to be trustworthy (Carlson, 2010). To triangulate the data word documents were created that had each survey question listed as the heading. Each participant's responses were copied under the

corresponding question. By going back and reading the answers again, themes and common phrases began to emerge and these were grouped together and color coded. As the mailed surveys began returning, once again the answers were organized under the questions and color coded with common themes and phrases found previously in the online surveys. It was not necessary to create any new categories because the responses were very similar. The final method of data collection was the follow-up interviews, or member checking. Once again, comments offered by the participants were added to the document and color coded into the appropriate categories and no new categories were needed as the responses were very similar.

Role of the Researcher

When conducting research, it is impossible not to have assumptions about the program ahead of time, in this case, whether the Pathways Program was meeting its objectives or not meeting its objectives; however it was important not to let these assumptions influence the data analysis process. Because I have been in the field of early childhood education for over 25 years, I have seen many training programs such as the Pathways Program. I am also an instructor of early childhood classes at the college level. However, my assumptions did not interfere with my analysis of the data that was collected. I recognized that it was imperative that I remain unbiased and not let my personal opinions determine the outcome of this study.

Limitations

Survey designs do come with limitations. If the sample size is too large, there may be too much data for easy analysis. Qualitative data is time-consuming to collect, and

even more time-consuming to analyze. Utilizing a survey allows the researcher to look

for tendencies in the responses rather than trying to determine rigorous explanations and

the focus of the study is a specific population (Creswell, 2012). According to Anderson

(2010) there are several additional limitations. The study is very dependent on how

effectively the researcher collects the data and the results may be more easily influenced

by their personal bias. It is more difficult to maintain and demonstrate rigor and there can

be issues of retaining the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of their

responses when presenting findings. It may also be difficult to truly convey the

complexities of each participant's story fully when the narrative is written. In this

particular study, there are limitations as well. The results of the study are not intended to

be generalized to a larger group. Another limitation to this program evaluation was

relying on the participants to fill out and return the survey. The participants of the

Pathways Program were not required to participate in this study, so there was no way of

knowing ahead of time specifically how many of them would complete the survey and

the contact information that was available for each of the potential participants may have

no longer been correct. Some participants may not have been willing to give both positive

and negative feedback about the program. Some participants have only recently

completed the program, and for others some time has passed by since the first

participants completed the program; this may have affected participation as well. And

finally, some participants did not answer all of the questions on the survey.

Survey Results

When Pathways was initially developed, there were certain objectives determined for the program, specifically that it would increase the quality of childcare by increasing the qualifications of the individuals working with young children, provide a financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education by offering a stipend, and to increase the retention of staff and providers who work directly with children (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2013). The program evaluation would then collect data to be considered in making recommendations for possible program refinements. The study design reflected these in that it was an outcomes-based program evaluation. Because the data was collected at a single point in time, after the participants had completed all three modules in the program, it is also considered to be a summative evaluation.

This program evaluation was conducted to see what impact the Pathways Program had on the participants. At the time this study was conducted there had not been any data collected about the program and so this was the initial feedback from the participants. This was important because the agency was trying to determine the future of the program and this information may be a part of those decisions.

Survey Questions and Results

Survey Question 1

How would you rate the Pathways to Professional Development program overall? As seen in Figure 1 below, on a scale from 1-5, with 1= *Poor,* 3= *Good*, and 5=*Excellent*, the majority of the participants, 18, rated the program as a five, meaning that they felt it

was an excellent program. Twelve of the participants rated the program as a four and five rated the program as a three. No participant rated the program lower than a three.
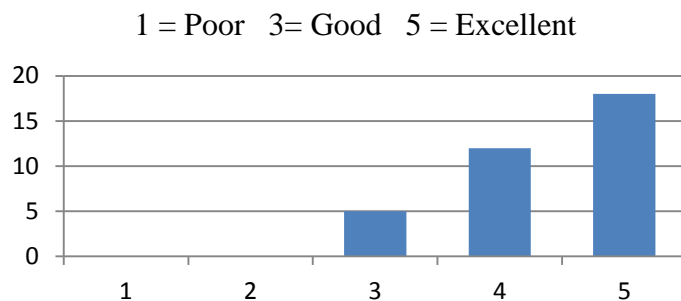
1 = Poor   3= Good   5 = Excellent

Figure 1. Data distribution for overall rating of the Pathways Program.

Survey Question 2

On a scale of 1 to 5 how would you rate the teachers of the program?

Participants rated the teachers of the program on a scale of one to five in four different areas: (a) They were knowledgeable about the material (b) They communicated clearly (c) Their goals and expectations were clear (d) They gave me opportunities to ask questions. On the rating scale 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree.

As seen in Figure 2 below, the majority of participants, 32, agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers were knowledgeable about the material. One participant marked a three, meaning that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Twenty-nine of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers communicated clearly, but there were two responses of neither agree nor disagree, one response of disagree and once response of

strongly disagree. Thirty-one participants agreed or strongly agreed that the goals and expectations of the teachers were clear, but two people disagreed, feeling that the teachers did not communicate clearly and that their goals and expectations were not made clear. When asked if the teaches gave the participants opportunities to ask questions, 32 agreed or strongly agreed, but there was one response of disagree.
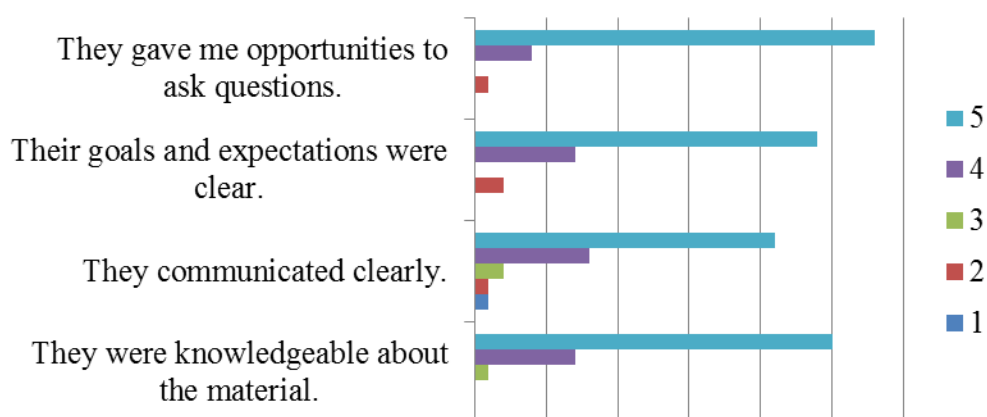
Figure 2. Data distribution for teacher ratings.

As part of Question 2, participants also had the opportunity to add any additional comments regarding the teachers.

Participant Responses:

- The teachers I had were awesome-very helpful & knowledgeable!! I would like to have them again.

- Loved the teacher. She was awesome!

- She was a good teacher for me, but others would disagree. She was very selective about who she favored and treated students differently based on that.

- Amazing teachers, they helped us get through this program and made it fun even though it was hard. Awesome ladies. Graduation was great too.

- They were wonderful- did great!

- They were wonderful. Very knowledgeable and practical too with advice on child care questions.

- Loved the hands on.

- Our first set didn't have a lot of knowledge about material. Our 2nd one was wonderful.

- We had amazing instructors. Very knowledgeable in their field & the material. Always answered question & explained materials thoroughly.

- They were wonderful!

- They both did an excellent job w/presenting the information and engaging the people who took the class.

- She did a great job.

- I enjoyed my class and felt she was a wonderful teacher. We had fun while learning and I think that's always important when you're learning something new.

- they all had their strong points, but they were good

- The quality of the class is dependent upon the teacher and their understanding of the amount of time and work involved for Child care providers. Our first class, the teachers were very expectant of the class and presented a lot of material to study. The final pathways classes, we had a

new teacher and she made the class not so tedious and stressful. She helped with our study and did not add extra material, I was not so overwhelmed and was able to absorb and use the materials in a more valuable manner.

- They were so personable and nice

- She was a fantastic teacher! She helped us every step of the way and would reply to us quick if we emailed or texted her.

- I don't know how they choose the teachers but we got two of the cream of the crop for our program. I was very pleased.

- The teacher I had truly cared about my success in completing the program.

- They were very knowledgeable and helpful. They made the class enjoyable.

- I disliked the teacher.

Survey Question 3

In what area do you think your skills increased the most?

Participant Responses:

- Preparing for preschool.

- I think I increased my knowledge in competency goal 3 social & emotional development and positive guidance.

- About children and development overall.

- In general all.

- Observations and record keeping.

- All areas- I enjoyed learning & increasing knowledge in all areas.

- Understanding children's abilities at different ages.

- Organization

- I would say it is hard there was so much I learned. The way that you talk to the children, go to their level. We learned more about older kids and way of doing certain things.

- Child development-how & why kids do things.

- All areas.

- The teacher's knowledge.

- Understanding behaviors and how to handle them.

- Just really opened our eyes to new learning/teaching angles.

- Most of my information was reminders of things I knew. It showed me ways to do things differently.

- I learned a lot overall & really enjoyed doing projects/presentations. I liked learning about the developmental age, age appropriate toys, activities etc.

- The setup of the classroom/daycare.

- I loved that I got to see different daycares & share stories with the others. New ideas are always great.

- In the areas of development.

- The different development stages of children and also how to present my information.

- It was just a refresher-didn't really "learn" new info.

- Child development

- In all areas. They did a great job with materials.

- I learned quite a bit with babies and their developments that I never knew before, as well as the various government agencies, ways to use specific paperwork to track progress with a child, and how to best set up a classroom so it works for both children, teachers and parents.

- Teaching preschoolers their environment and what children learn at different ages and how they act also the different theories were interesting to learn about.

- I am better able to express to family the specific needs of the children as well as communicate better with educators and the community. I believe I had the basic knowledge but now I can be of better help to the children and their families.

- How children's brains grow and develop.

- All areas

- I gained the most knowledge & skills in the area of curriculum. Learning how to bring art, math, social studies, music & science to the classroom every day.

- Milestones

- Communication between myself and parents.

- Infant areas and cognitive areas.

- I had been at a school and getting more information in child development was the best. You can never have too much information, how to run daycare, how to treat employees.

- Child development

Survey Question 4

Rate each of the following on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) in terms of how much it helped you: activities, program staff, audio visual materials (films, charts), worksheets/workbooks/handouts, large and small group discussions, and teaching and instruction.

Figure 3 illustrates that the teaching and instruction had the biggest impact on the participants receiving 24 responses of five, closely followed by the program staff with 23 responses of five, activities with 22 responses of five, large and small group discussions each with 20 responses of five, and audio/visual materials with 19 responses of five. Worksheets, workbooks, and handouts were viewed as the least helpful to participants, with only 16 responses of five.
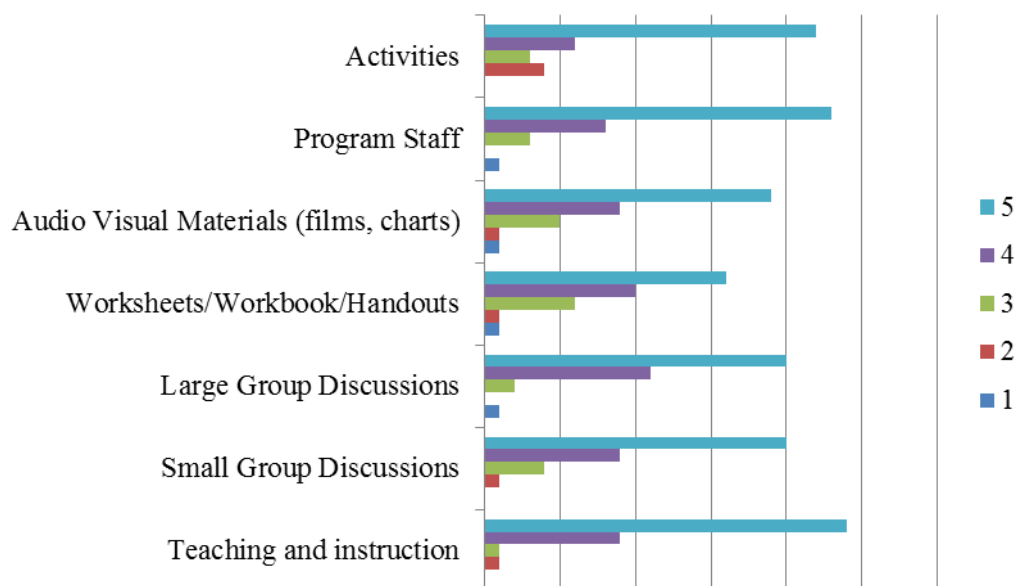
Figure 3. Data distribution of what aspects of the program had the most impact.

Survey Question 5

How have the skills you learned in this program changed your practice with

children?

Participant Responses:

- Knowing how children grow and learn has helped with meeting the needs

  of students where they are developmentally.

- The stuff I learned was amazing.

- Yes

- Give me more positive reinforcement. Rephrase the way things are said to

  be positive.

- Some things I was doing were incorrect- I have also since bettered myself

  by moving into a better position for myself.

- Gave me the knowledge and understanding to be a better teacher.

- It has led me to think about things in different ways when dealing with problems or behaviors. I now think about why we do things and what the kids will get out of an activity rather than just doing it.

- Sometimes it is easier to learn how to relate to the children to try to find answers, talking to them, seeing what is the matter. Get to their level and listen. Try to think of their feelings and show them these emotions and when they are feeling that way be able to show me.

- I have tried new ways of completing activities to make fun & engaging for everyone. I have used the developmental charts/milestones as well.

- Everything we learned related to thing we did every day at daycare.

- More patient because of knowledge of behaviors. Appropriate preschool activities.

- More resources --Teaching the different angles every child may need. Some learn other ways then other children.

- In just a few ways. Maybe webbing a little more and going more in depth with teachable moments.

- I learned a better way to talk to children, a different "language" in communicating to them expectations, directions & discipline. How to build them up, support their self-expression, & talk on their level.

- I have closed my daycare but it has changed by outlook on education. I highly still want to work with kids.

- It has changed everything. There were so many areas I learned about, I don't have room to describe them.

- It helped me explain to parents the hows, whys and whats of their children's different development rates. Also I am more observant of any difficulties the children may be having in development areas.

- It has given me an eagerness to do better in my job w/childcare. I also learned more of the different stages and development.

- Just reminded me of a few things to do better on. Patience!!

- More aware of what stages they are in and how to appropriately help them learn.

- Yes

- I feel more knowledgeable and I've learned to recognize development issues with children as well. Also how to better arrange a classroom.

- Able to identify were a child's level is and adjust what I am doing for that child making learning even more hands on through play.

- I am more confident in my knowledge and that has an overall effect of professionalism with a positive effect on the day care.

- I am much more I tune to the kids developmental levels.

- The new skills & knowledge allows me to understand how children learn & allows me offer better quality child care that has more learning experiences for them.

- I have more patience and understanding.

- I am more understanding of how children develop and what is developmentally appropriate for the ages of my kids.

- I have gained a better understanding of the way young minds work and grow. I understand better about how they think, react and learn.

- It may me sit and pay more attention to be more in tune with what they are doing and how they develop and be more in tune with what the parents needed.

- I am a better provider because of the program. It helped me realize what a huge responsibility caring for children is.

- We changed a lot of things we do because of the training. Not only the teaching but the environment.

Survey Question 6

How do you think we could improve the program?

Participant Responses:

- Get a different teacher, one that can communicate better and has field work in home day care.

- I think it needs to be done faster than 3 semesters, with staff turnover it's hard for some to complete the program.

- The teachers I had were very knowledgeable and my personal feeling is that they did an awesome job.

- Getting a PDA Specialist was confusing. Not many available. Even the Specialist was confused. I had to have 2 observations.

- Unsure on changes. I liked the program and feel I learned more in Pathways than I have in some of my college classes. I wish the CDA counted towards more college credits.

- I think there should be more knowledge in children with disabilities, and more information relating to older children. People need to be educated how to treat children with disabilities.

- I think the program was great. I was very sad it was over.

- Thought it was great.

- I don't think the program needs improvement. I think this would be a great program for anyone who is just starting in the child care field.

- The program overall is a good program, but in the end I don't believe anyone in my class went on to get their CDA. The instruction on that was unclear & steps were not shown to us. I even got me portfolio put together but no help /support of the next steps. Suggestion: Having an extra class or 2 to give instruction on how to go about getting the CDA, help putting portfolio together, "practice interview", direction on steps to take.

- Not sure.

- Not sure. Maybe more help on actually getting the CDA. I know most of us did all the schooling but never went on to get the CDA.

- If all the teachers were as attentive and knowledgeable, there wouldn't need to be any changes or improvements.

- The workbook was a little much with having all the other assignments along with it to do but overall I enjoyed the program.

- Closer locations for some- I had to travel 88 miles for 120 Mondays (some Saturdays) It was a very long/large commitment on my part.

- I think it was wonderful. It was long, but having breaks in between the 3 different phases helped. Otherwise, I don't think there is any way to improve it. Except maybe make sure that everyone tries to have fun with it. Not be so serious all the time. I was lucky and had both a class and teacher that enjoyed laughing, joking and learning from each other.

- Talk about our cda renewal some of the people in the classes we were in have been wondering what counts for classes for our renewals.

- I think it can be down sized as far as how much material that is being covered. It can be easier to study and retain the information if there were not so much to read. Especially when you have run your own home program all day long and try to cram in more into the hectic world of child care.

- Less hours in the classroom.

- I think a better explanation of the final project would be helpful.

- Nothing. It's great

- Instead of having the classes spaced out to a year n half long, have it consecutive without long breaks, except for holidays.

- I think it should be offered to anyone whether you have college education or not. Scholarship program should still continue for those who can't afford it. Really needs to be pushed in day care centers, more staff need to know it is available. It can be long but it is worth it.

- More handouts.

Survey Question 7

What is your current job title?

Participant Responses:

- Assistant director/ preschool teacher

- Preschool teacher's aide

- Owner

- I no longer work in child care.

- Day Care Director

- Instructional Assistant II @ CDS-CC

- Pre-K teacher

- Owner/Provider

- Co-teacher with several ages, newborns to Preschool age

- Director/Child Care Provider

- Assistant Director & teacher

- Daycare Owner

- Family Child Care Provider/Owner

- Bookkeeper

- Owner/Provider

- Physical Training Instructor (I taught preschool for over 6 years & still sub from time to time but now I teach fitness).

- Mary Kay Beauty Consultant/Working Mom @ Home.

- Parts Manager.

- Owner/operator

- Toddler Group Leader

- Owner/Family Daycare

- Home daycare owner

- Helper

- Infant Teacher.

- Owner/director/preschool teacher sm child care center

- Early childhood educator/ owner/teacher/ and chief operator in a Home Child care Program.

- Director

- Owner of childcare

- Owner of game child care center

- Director

- Lead classroom teacher

- Assistant director/ preschool teacher

- Working to get into the school system or head start after a recent move. Had home day care before moved and worked in a center.

- Owner/director/teacher

- Teacher

Survey Question 8

Why did you make the decision to participate in the Pathways Program?

Participant Responses:

- My boss signed me up.

- It was a good way to learn more about my chosen career, working with young children, as well as increase my knowledge in areas where I could improve.

- More knowledge about children.

- I enjoy being around children.

- To be better educated and even though I have worked in child care for a number of years it is nice to actually have a CDA degree. I also challenged my staff that I would if they would.

- To get my CDA- better myself and get a better job for myself.

- More schooling

- I enjoy learning and increasing my knowledge base regarding the field of early childhood.

- I wanted to learn how to treat my children better, get more knowledge, better understand them, be a better teacher, get more information. Asked by supervisor, was in class with coworkers.

- To increase my knowledge in caring for kiddos and get education hours.

- To further my education.

- More knowledge.

- To better myself and what I do. To been recognized more professional in my line of work.

- I owned my own daycare at the time and had all the ages from birth to school age so it was very helpful.

- It was a great way to learn, and get clock hrs. The compensation pd. for my gas money as I had to travel 60 miles for each class.

- I wanted to better myself & the business I worked for. I wanted more education in the field I love, and I knew it would benefit the children, the parents and even my coworkers. I also wanted to improve & learn & truly get all the information I could possibly get in this field. I thought it would end up being a career.

- To further my education & better the care of the children.

- Education is always good.

- I was asked to participate as I am a coordinator for Providers Empowering Providers (PEP). This way I would be able to mentor more successfully.

- My previous director asked if I would be interested in taking the class.

- Just wanted to better my understanding of children/parents/environments.

- Excited to learn and better serve my Littles.

- Because I wanted to learn more.

- I wanted to expand my knowledge in the preschool field. I am always looking for ways to learn and grow. You're never too old to learn something new!

- Wanted to learn the money was nice but I would have signed up without it. It was the ability to be able to take free ed that would increase my knowledge about children and it was close to home.

- I wanted to learn what it was about and what was now being expected of child care program. It was a lot of work and extremely stressful. I did not receive a pay increase, or health insurance...so was it worth it?

- To continue my education without paying for college.

- I like learning new things.

- This was an opportunity to further my early childhood education that was affordable.

- I wanted to further my education.

- Gain skills and knowledge to better serve the children in my care.

- To further my education and advance in my career. To understand young children better. To help me be a better teacher.

- I am in my 50's and needed more, lifelong learner, wanted more

  knowledge and wanted more knowledge about my job. Disappointed that

  only one other person finished the program besides me.

- To further my education goals.

- Gain knowledge.

Survey Question 9

Would you recommend the Pathways Program to others? Why or why not?

Participant Responses:

- Yes, it helps out with info I didn't know.

- Yes, it was a good way to meet others that are in the dame field as you. It

  also helped with planning a successful place where children can grow and

  learn.

- Yes for the learning experience but no if she taught again.

- Yes, I did.

- Yes I think you can learn a lot through the program, especially for

  providers that are just starting out.

- Most definitely!! Awesome program-very informative class!

- Yes as long as the problems with the Specialists are worked out.

- Yes & No. I think it is a good program that provides a lot of information,

  but you don't gain much by taking it other than personal fulfillment.

- Yes, I think it should be, being where I come from and what is going on in the US today, be an opportunity for parents to take, young mothers would benefit from it. So much important knowledge to help people.

- Yes. I felt this was a great program. Yes it took time but every education opportunity takes time. Wonderful program.

- Yes

- Yes

- Yes. Learned a lot and at no cost to the participant. Why not improve yourself as a professional?

- Yes, I will always recommend this program because I believe it gives us as teachers confidence in what we are trying to teach these young minds as well as support.

- Yes, I believe it gives you great reminders and helps some providers see what they need to be doing in their programs.

- Yes, but again help on getting the CDA!!

- Yes, very educational.

- Yes. It is very informational and fun.

- Yes. Because our children need us to be aware of any growth or development difficulties so we can steer their parents in the right direction.

- Yes, because I find it very educational especially if you plan on continuing w/childcare.

- Yes and No. Yes- The interaction w/other providers helps me relate better to my responsibilities. Also most providers have not been in Childcare for 20 years and there is a lot of information they would be able to use. Also I felt better about myself having tried to better my education-it is nice to have my CDA resource file on hand for new potential clients- Helps me look better as a Professional. No- For me putting all that time and effort in I got nothing in return- no higher pay- the money I received to take the class didn't even pay for all the gas it took me to get there.

- Yes, the material was very helpful and sharing others experiences with children was also insightful.

- Yes, it was an excellent program to go thru.

- Yes. I felt it was an easy course to follow and learn from and even though it took up some times from your personal weekends, I made new friends also and I'm able to go to them if I have any questions or need advice as well.

- Yes and I have but I haven't heard much about it lately.

- If it were made into a simpler and not so intense, I would say, try it. It can make you a better provider.

- Yes lots of educational opportunity.

- Yes

- Yes. This is a terrific program that touches on many aspects of early

  childhood education that is affordable and can be done while still

  working full time.

- Yes

- I would. We had very knowledgeable trainers that were easy to talk with

  and help whenever we needed.

- Yes because you gain valuable knowledge from the class.

- Yes, I think it is beneficial for anyone who is working in day care,

  education any situation like that.

- Yes! It is well structured and has a manageable workload/schedule. It was

  not overwhelming.

- Yes

Survey Question 10

After participating in the Pathways Program, are you planning to get a degree in
Early Childhood Education?

As seen in Figure 4, two of the participants already hold an associate's degree in early

childhood education and three of the participants are planning to get a bachelor's degree

in early childhood education. There are nine participants who are planning to get an

associate's degree in early childhood education. Twenty people are not planning to get a
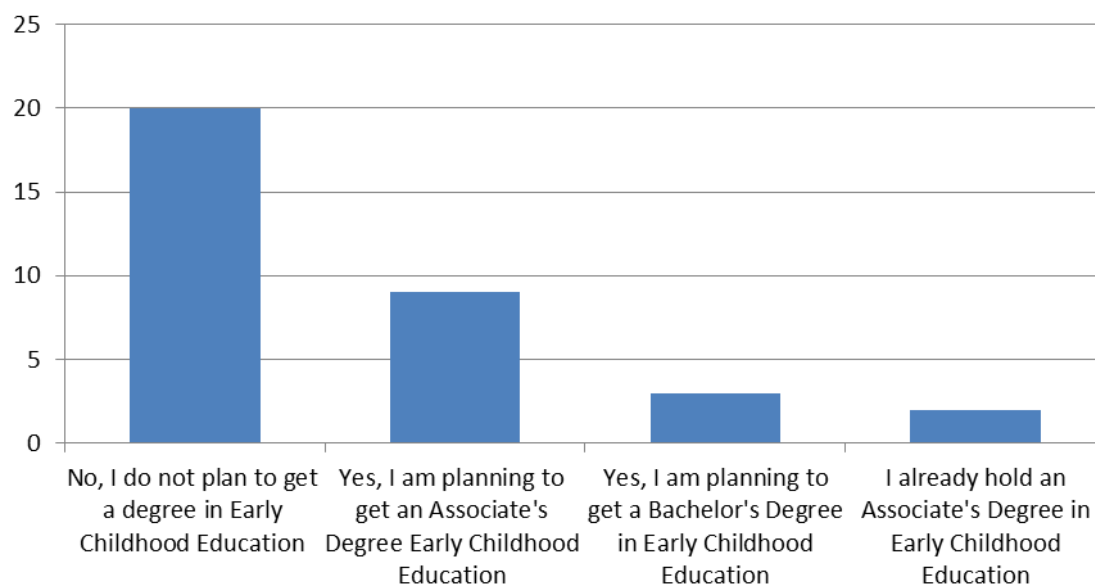
degree in early childhood education.

Figure 4. Data distribution of participant's degree status.

Conclusion

Overall the participants of Pathways responded very positively about their experiences and the impact the program had on their professional practice with the majority of tem rating the program as excellent. The majority of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers were knowledgeable about the material, communicated clearly, the goals and expectations of the teachers were clear, and that teachers gave them opportunities to ask questions. Participants felt that they increased their skills and knowledge in the areas of child development, program process and quality, and their interactions with children. Teaching and instruction had the biggest impact on the participants, closely followed by the program staff, activities, large and small group discussions, and audio/visual materials. Worksheets, workbooks, and handouts were viewed as the least helpful to participants. Participants were able to offer some suggestions for improving the program such as the locations and the time

requirements but the majority would recommend the program to others. After completing

this program, the majority of the participants do not intend to pursue a college degree.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This program evaluation was conducted to see what impact Pathways had on the participants. At the time this study was conducted, there had not been any data collected about the program. This was the initial feedback from the participants. This was important because the agency was trying to determine the future of the program and this information may be a part of those decisions.

The criteria used for this program evaluation was based on the objectives the stakeholders had for the program: (a) to increase the quality of childcare by increasing the qualifications of the individuals working with young children, (b) to provide a financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education, and (c) to increase the retention of staff and providers who work directly with children (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2013). They were also influenced by the present study's research questions:

1. After completing the Pathways Program, did the participants feel they were more knowledgeable about process quality?

2. Did the participants change the way they interacted with children after completing the Pathways Program?

3. Did the financial incentive of a $400 stipend for each completed module have any influence on the participant's decision to participate in the Pathways Program?

4. How would the participants rate the Pathways Program on a scale of 1 to 5?

5.   How would the participants rate the Pathways Program instructors on a scale of 1 to 5?

6.   How beneficial were the instructional strategies used in the program?

7.   Do the participants have any suggestions to improve the program?

These objectives and research questions were then used these as a guide to sort, code, and analyze the qualitative data.

Programs providing quality care for young children have an impact on children's early development in positive and important ways and according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (n.d.) high quality programs result in both short and long term benefits for children's social emotional and intellectual development. Children engage in more multifaceted play, exhibit stronger social and emotional attachments to other people, and perform better on measurements of language development and cognitive ability. A component of a quality program is having providers who have excellent preparation and ongoing professional development.

The numbers of workers needing childcare has increased; but, there is a lack of well-prepared workers. This is having a negative effect on the amount and the quality of care that is available. The NAEYC has developed 10 program standards that are the used in the accreditation process for early childhood programs and these standards were developed to ensure that young children are being provided a high quality program (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2015).

Standard number 1 looks for relationships among all of the children and adults, stating that warm, sensitive and responsive adults help children feel secure and

standard number 2 addresses curriculum because children need a curriculum that promotes learning in the areas of social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive development. Providers need to understand how to plan and implement curriculum. Standard number 3 states that effective teaching approached need to be implemented in order to enhance each child's learning and development. Teachers who can recognize that children have different styles of learning, different needs and different backgrounds can use instructional approaches that are appropriate for each child. Standard 4 covers assessment of children's progress and notes the importance of collecting ongoing information about children's learning and development. This information needs to be communicated to families and used to inform decision making and teaching. Standard 5 discusses health and nutrition issues and how staff can protect children from illness and injury. Standard 6 addresses the teachers specifically, noting that teachers who have specific preparation and knowledge, as well as skills in child development and early childhood education are more likely to provide positive interactions, richer language experiences, and quality learning environments. Standard 7 addresses the important relationship between providers and families, stating that in order to support children's learning and development, providers need to establish relationships with families, involving them in their children's education. Standard 8 urges providers to use resources in the community to support their curriculum goals and provide help families make connections with these resources. Standard 9 discusses the physical environment and how providers can

provide safe and appropriate facilities, equipment, and materials to support learning and development. Standard 10 describes procedures and systems that can help support leadership and management. Effective management and operations, knowledgeable leaders, and sensible policies and procedures are all needed to build a quality program and maintain that quality over time (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2015, p.11).

Staff turnover is also an issue that affects program quality. "Early childcare programs with high rates of teacher turnover have lower levels of quality and less favorable teacher-child interactions. Children that are in programs with high turnover rates have lower levels of language, cognitive, and social development" (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011, p. 2). One influence on staff retention is the opportunities for professional development. Quality early childcare programs have a positive and important impact on children's development in their early years and one component of a quality program is having providers who are knowledgeable in child development (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011). The amount of formal education that employees in an early childcare setting have is a strong predictor of their ability to provide and engage in positive developmentally appropriate activities (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2015).

Rationale

Educational programs are designed to improve knowledge, skills, performance and attitudes and one strategy used to determine if these programs are efficient and effective are program evaluations. Conducting a program evaluation can allow the

researcher to figure out what parts of the program are successful and what parts can be improved upon (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). Cafarella (2002) defined program evaluation as an organized examination to consider if the construction of the program and the delivery system produced the desired effect of meeting the program objectives. A program evaluation can also be considered a process of gathering and analyzing data that will result in decisions being made about the quality and worth of a program (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Based on the responses of the Pathways Program participants, it may be possible to learn if the program is having an impact on the participants and if the teachers are well qualified.

Another reason to conduct a program evaluation is for the stakeholders and those that are making decisions about the program. The outcomes of the evaluation may be used in the decision about funding or continuing a program. The program evaluation can also be used to evaluate the teacher's instructional methods, materials and resources being used in the program. Program evaluations can be used to assess the effectiveness of a new program and collect data from the participants to monitor their perceptions of the program. This may also help stakeholders find ways to meet their program objectives in a more efficient way (Cafarella, 2002). This particular program evaluation was conducted at the end of a three module series so the overall program, the teachers and the materials could be a part of the evaluation to determine how the participants felt about the program and whether or not it was successfully accomplishing the program objectives.

Review of the Literature

I initially began my search for information about program evaluations by reading several books written on the subject. These texts provided the initial background knowledge needed to create a program evaluation. Several educational databases were also utilized. ERIC is a database that provides articles, books, reports and policy papers and allows a search for peer reviewed materials. Education Research Complete and Sage include education journals. ProQuest Central is a multidisciplinary database that also provides access to education research journals. Three Wyoming libraries also provided resources for this study, the Riverton and Dubois Public Libraries as well as the Central Wyoming College Library. Using the search engine Google Scholar also produces some peer reviewed articles. Saturation has been reached within this review of the literature.

This search for information has been approached from several perspectives. Search terms were used to find information about adult education, professional development, and program evaluations. The steps of a program evaluation were investigated as well as the reasons it is used in educational research. The information found using these terms led more information about adult education and adult learning. This led to finding resources about collecting qualitative data and research methods. Tracy (2010) outlined eight criteria of quality in research, the various means and ways that quality can be achieved:

(a) Worthy topic- It is important that the topic of the research is relevant, timely, significant and interesting. This makes the topic worthy of the research process (b) Rich rigor- In order for the research to exhibit rigor the study must use appropriate theoretical

constructs, allow an appropriate amount of time for the collection of the data and the sample size must be sufficient (c) Sincerity- The study should be characterized as objective, free of bias and inclinations of the researcher, and exhibit transparency about the methods used and the challenges faced (d) Credibility- The research should reflect thick descriptions and concrete details. Data collection and analysis should reflect triangulation and participant reflections about the topic (e) Resonance- The research should be seen as a representation that elicits opinions and ideas from the stakeholders and if possible be transferable and able to produce generalizations (f)Significant contribution- The research should provide a significant contribution either conceptually, practically or morally (g) Ethical- The research should follow procedural ethics when involving human subjects (h)Meaningful coherence- The study should achieve what it purports to be about, use methods and procedures that are appropriate to meet the stated goals and connect literature, research questions, findings and interpretations in a meaningful way (p. 840).

Creswell (2007) described data collection as a process the researcher engages in to gather accurate information that can then be used to answer the questions being investigated by the project. The first step was to determine the individuals who were to participate, and gain access to them. Building a good rapport with the participants during the study aided in the collection of good data. Purposeful sampling techniques need to be determined and then data collection methods can be planned.

It is important that an appropriate number of surveys are available for analysis, and that the types of questions asked are appropriate and provide the type of information

relevant to the research questions. Those data needed to be coded and analyzed. Coding

the data allows the discovery of overlapping responses and redundancy that will lead to

themes in the data. Line by line data analysis was necessary to ensure that the data could

be sorted and organized (Tracy, 2010). Patterns, similarities, and differences can then be

discovered in the individual experiences (Creswell, 2007). When potential emerging

themes and commonalities have been identified, they can be organized into proper

categories for further data analysis. This involves making sense of the themes and

categories that have been justifiably identified (Suter, 2012).

A researcher can then make inferences and reconstructions of the meanings that

have been derived from those data, and again explore the properties and dimensions of

the categories looking for relationships and patterns (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). After

analyzing the data, researchers need to provide in-depth and concrete details that lead to

understanding not only the scene but the participant's interactions and behaviors in that

scene as well (Tracy, 2010).

> When conducting a program evaluation, a researcher is providing an in-depth
> picture and the ability to do that can diminish if the sample size is too large. The
> quality of the analysis and the dignity, care, and time it took to analyze
> interviews, rather than quantity, should determine the sample size. Qualitative
> data needs to build a convincing analytical narrative based on richness,
> complexity and detail rather than on statistical logic (Baker & Edwards, 2012, p.
> 5).

The number varies by study, and by limiting this study to the Pathways Participants who have completed all three modules of the program, it was possible to present the complexity of the information provided by these individuals (Creswell, 2012).

Member checking can also be used to ensure quality and accuracy, and are used to validate themes, test categories and discuss conclusions with participants (Bradbury-Jones, Irvine & Sambrook, 2010). This could involve conducting an interview with the participants by phone, email, or in person after the data has been analyzed. This would verify that it was an authentic representation of their opinions (Harper & Cole, 2012). This follow up gave participants the opportunity to see if the analysis accurately reflected their opinions and experiences. This interaction with the participants was used to gain an even deeper understanding of the data, allowing for a deeper understanding of their thoughts and a chance to clarify the analysis as they reflected on their answers. This could also be considered a type of triangulation. By conducting a follow-up interview, another method of data collection was utilized to ensure that the participants had a chance to share their multiple views and perspectives which provided a stronger account of their experiences in the study (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011).

The idea of crystallization is also discussed by Tracy (2010), when researchers gather multiple types of data, using various methods to collect that data, and numerous theoretical frameworks as a basis for their study. This provides researchers with a more complex understanding of the issue. Crystallization provides a deeper and complex understanding of the topic. It combines multiple forms of analysis, identifies and

articulates patterns and themes seen during the analysis process and reflects back, building a rich account of the experiences being collected (Ellingson, 2008).

When conducting research, there is always the possibility that there would be discrepant data. It was important not to allow bias toward uniformity affect the analyses of the participant's responses. The differences must be retained and an attempt made to understand their significance (Maxwell, 2010).

Program evaluations do come with limitations. If the sample size is too large, there may be too much data for easy analysis. Qualitative data is time-consuming to collect, and even more time-consuming to analyze (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). It is not always possible to take the responses from a survey, such as opened ended questions, and present them in a numerical way. Some researchers view this as a serious weakness (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). The results of the study most likely will not be generalized to a larger group and can be perceived as another weakness of gathering qualitative data (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001).

Internet surveys are being used more frequently in survey research; but, they typically have a lower response rate then surveys that have been mailed (Millar & Dillman, 2011). By initially seeking a web-based response and then asking non-respondents to fill the survey out using a different method it was possible to increase the response rate, which is consistent with prior research (Millar & Dillman, 2011).

Data Analysis

The analysis process consisted of several steps. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) described the steps for analyzing data collected in a program evaluation. The Pathways

survey and member checking interviews included open-ended questions. These are considered narrative data. The first step is getting to know the data. It was important to read the data thoroughly because good analysis depends on understanding the data. The data is read through several times and first impressions were written down to be considered at a later time.

The second step describes how the focus needs to be on the analysis of the data. As the data were being evaluated, it was important to remember what the research questions were and what the purpose was for the evaluation. This helped to focus the analysis on where to begin and on what was really important. The third step is to categorize the information. The participants' answers were examined to see if there were consistencies or differences and then placed into categories based on those similarities. The information was put into categories by emerging themes and patterns. Similar ideas, terminology or phrases were grouped together.

The fourth step involved identifying patterns and connections between the categories. Looking for key ideas in the responses allows the researcher to discover important connections in the data. It is also important to look for responses that run counter to the prevailing theme so that these perspectives are presented as well. The final step is interpretation of the data, bringing all of the responses together to explain the findings and attach meaning and significance to the analysis (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Going through this process creates a narrative of the participant's experiences.

In this study, the intent was not to generalize to a larger population. By using an objective-based approach, information was collected and the data were compared to the

stated objectives. It is possible that other outcomes were discovered that were equally important, but not based on the goals and objectives originally stated. The participants are the important piece to this study, because it is their position, opinions, and story that are being told, so they are the expert resource on the accuracy of that story.

I was considered an external evaluator because I was someone outside the immediate setting and I have no obligations to the program. I have been a teacher for this program in the past; but, I am no longer acting in that capacity and none of my former students participated in this study. I have a working relationship with the organization, which made the process easier in that they trusted me to conduct this program evaluation. I also have an understanding of how Pathways works.

This program evaluation is a type of applied research because it examined the effectiveness and usefulness of Pathways. By using a pragmatic framework, a program evaluation was conducted to determine if the Pathways Program is having the stated desired effect on the participants. This framework is often used in educational research to study methods and solve problems. It seeks to make improvements in the field of education and involves the researcher collaborating with the participants (Lodico et al., 2010). The stakeholders in this project were the Wyoming Children's Action Alliance and Align. These agencies created and implemented the Pathways Program. They provide professional development opportunities for early childcare providers in the in the state of Wyoming. Because there are no other studies related to the Pathways Program at this time, there is no literature to be discussed that specifically addresses the program.

Resources being found that relate to this study are now repeating themselves and citing

research that has already been included in this paper.

Project Description

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

This project was made possible through a partnership with the Wyoming

Children's Action Alliance and Align. They provided the contact information for the

program participants and allowed the program evaluation for this study. A search was

conducted of the literature on how to conduct a program evaluation. Resources from

Walden courses were used as well. It was also necessary to become familiar with Survey

Monkey, investigating how to utilize the data collection and analysis tools offered.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

There were potential barriers to this project. Some of the contact information was

no longer correct. There were other participants that although they were contacted did not

respond to the initial email invitation to participate in the process. In most cases, there

was no way of knowing if the participants actually received the initial email that was sent

to them. In order to increase the response rate a follow up was mailed to the participants

which did result in more survey responses.

The survey was also conducted in the months of October, November and

December which meant that there were possible conflicts with holidays. Because of this,

extra time was allowed to collect data in case some respondents took more time than

others to complete the survey. As with any study of this type, the rate of return is based

on the willingness of the participants to fill out the survey. The initial survey was a web based survey and this has become an increasingly popular method of data collection. This is a survey instrument used for collecting data that is available on the computer.

According to Creswell (2012) there are both positive and negative aspects to utilizing a web based survey. These surveys can gather extensive data quickly and many people are familiar with using computers and accessing information on the web. However, low response rates using web based surveys are of concern. Several other issues are mentioned by Creswell (2012) that may have also had an impact on this study. Problems with the technology may have prevented some potential participants from responding. Email programs may have sent the initial contact information to a potential participant's junk mail, resulting in them not realizing that they had been contacted. Creswell (2012) also noted that people often change their email address.

"Studies have shown that mail surveys generally have higher response rates than Web surveys" (Shih & Fan, 2008, p. 257). Many people are familiar with mail surveys and completing a web based survey may only be completed by participants who feel comfortable using the technology. When asking participants to fill out a survey, a high response rate is desired and is seen as an important criterion for a quality survey. Having a high response rate implies that there was less chance of having nonresponse bias. This study also used follow-up reminders which have also "been shown to increase response rates for both Web and mail surveys" (Shih & Fan, 2008, p. 208). In this study an attempt was made to contact and survey 86 people. The final number of surveys completed was 35. Twelve of the participants completed the Web based survey and 22 completed the

mail surveys. When determining if this study had an acceptable response rate there are several factors to consider. Response rates are very important but they are especially important when the purpose of the study is to "make generalizations to a larger population and are less important if the purpose is to gain insight" (Carter, Edmonds, Johnson, n.d., p. 9). This study was designed to gain insight into the effectiveness of the Pathways program and its impact on the participants. Some data analysis may require a minimum sample size for statistical calculations that are being used. This study did not require a minimum sample size for that purpose. Response rates are also affected by how well the respondents know the researcher. Respondents who have regular contact with the researcher and know them by name are more likely to respond to a survey (Instructional Assessment Resources, 2011).

Project Implementation

In order to conduct the program evaluation, the necessary contact information was obtained from the stakeholders. An attempt was then made to contact each potential participant by phone to explain the study and to let them know that an email would be sent to them in the next week. This email contained a consent form, thorough explanation regarding the purpose and process of the study. The person could then reply if they consented to be a part of the study. When the consent was received the participant was sent the link and the instructions for completion of the web based survey. After two weeks, all of the initial participants who had consented to fill out the web based survey were sent an email reminder through Survey Monkey about completing the survey. Two weeks after this, any participant who had not responded to the initial email was sent the

consent form, and paper survey by mail, via U.S.P.S. Also included was a self-addressed

stamped envelope so they could return the survey at no cost to them. Two months were

allowed for data analysis and member checking. A random sample of participants was

contacted after their surveys had been analyzed to determine if the interpretation of their

answers was correct. This process was completed by email and phone interviews. All of

the data were then put together in a final product for the stakeholders.

Roles and Responsibilities

This study would not have been possible without the partnership and cooperation

with The Wyoming Children's Action Alliance and Align. They provided all of the

contact information of their program participants and allowed me to conduct the program

evaluation. My role in this study was to create a quality survey that would encourage

participants to provide feedback about the program and their experiences. I was also then

responsible for storing, analyzing, organizing and presenting the data to provide the

stakeholders with an unbiased picture of the impact the program had on the participants.

Program Evaluation

In the field of education, one type of inquiry is a program evaluation. Educational

programs have activities and instruction created for target audiences in addition to certain

outcomes that the program would like to accomplish (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle,

2010). Because this research project looked at a particular program, it was appropriate to

conduct a program evaluation and the qualitative results lead to a discussion of how the

study's findings relate back to the literature. Gilliam and Leiter (2003) described program

evaluation as a "systematic process of describing the components and outcomes of an

organized intervention or service, with the aim of documenting the program's beneficial

impacts (p.6).

This proposal describes one objectives-based program evaluation, meaning it

evaluated if the objectives written by the creators of the program were met. Gilliam and

Leiter (2003) identified six specific steps in the evaluation process:

1. "Identify the core components of the program intervention.

2. Identify the desired outcomes.

3. Identify the context of the population and community for which it was

    designed.

4. Develop what you want to study, incorporating feedback from the

    program administration.

5. Conduct the study to see if the program's implementation is consistent

    with the identified outcomes.

6. Identify which parts of a program work well and which parts need

    improvement, or if a program is being implemented consistently with the

    way that it was planned" (p. 9).

Zohrabi (2012) described evaluation as a series of actions in which information is

collected and analyzed and as a form of inquiry that illustrated the accomplishments of a

program and outlined ways that further development may be possible. The results may

then be used to influence important decisions based on the results of the research

(Zohrabi, 2012). In the study of the Pathways Program, the personal experiences of

participants were important, even though they are subjective. Their experiences become

part of the evaluation. These data were identified, collected, and used as objectively

possible in the program evaluation (Royse, Thyer, & Padgett, 2010).

This was an appropriate choice of study design because the purpose was to

determine if the program has met its three stated goals set forth by the Wyoming

Children's Action Alliance (2013):

(a) to increase the quality of childcare by increasing the qualifications of the

individuals working with young children (b) to provide a financial incentive to providers

for increased levels of education(c) to increase the retention of staff and providers who

work directly with children and then make recommendations for possible program

refinement and success. The data that were collected in this study are the responses to the

survey questions and these were examined to look for general themes. Thus, it is

appropriate to develop a survey and gather qualitative data, as opposed to a quantitative

study design that collects and measures numerical data. Program evaluation utilizes

interviews and surveys to collect data (Creswell, 2003). In a program evaluation the

researcher does not want to restrict the views of the participant. In this study the

participants were chosen using purposeful sampling, where individuals are chosen

intentionally to learn or understand a specific phenomenon, in this case the Pathways

Program.

In this type of research there are also two choices of study design, cross-sectional

and longitudinal. The collection of information at a single point in time uses a cross-

sectional survey design as opposed to a longitudinal study that continues to collect data

over a period of time (Creswell, 2012).The Pathways program evaluation utilized the

cross-sectional survey design and this was an appropriate approach for the study. A survey was created for the research project in partnership with the Wyoming Children's Action Alliance and Align and this served as a method of data collection. It was designed to summarize the participant's perceptions about the program and the impact it had on them. This provided useful information to the decision makers, or stakeholders, who created and administered this program. The data collected during this process was summative, meaning that it was collected at the end of the program cycle. The narrative data was then analyzed to see if the program's goals and objectives had been met (Fagen, Redman, Stacks, Barrett, Thullen, Altenor, & Neiger, 2011).

Project Implications

When reflecting on the results of this study, the first objective of the Pathways Program was to increase the quality of childcare by increasing the qualifications of the individuals working with young children (Wyoming Children's Action Alliance, 2013). Participants reported specific skills that they learned and areas where their knowledge increased. One participant responded that they increased their knowledge in children's social and emotional development and how to guide children in a positive way. Another noted that they gained an understanding of children's abilities at different ages. Knowledge about children's behaviors was also mentioned, with participants understanding them better and being better equipped to handle them. One participant explained how this program changed her practice with children, stating that she "learned a better way to talk to children, a different language in communicating to them expectations, directions and discipline." She learned how to build them up, support their

self-expression and talk to them on their level. Another participant stated that these new skills and knowledge allows her to "offer better quality child care with more learning experiences for the children." These skills were then put into practice with the children and as discussed earlier a component of a quality program is having providers who are knowledgeable and when children are exposed to a program that provides high quality care, they have better academic outcomes, lower rates of unemployment and are less likely to commit crimes between the ages of 18-25 (Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, Steinberg, & Vandergrift, 2010).

The next objective for the Pathways Program was to provide a financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education. When this study was first proposed, the stakeholders were able to provide a financial stipend to participants. The third objective was to increase the retention of staff and providers who work directly with children. Among the participants who completed the Pathways Program, the majority of participants were still working directly with children and it may be that the program was a direct result of that number, for example when a participants feels that completing this program has given them an eagerness to do a better in their childcare job. Another person also had this same experience, realizing that she is a better provider now because of the program, saying "I am more confident in my knowledge and that has an overall effect of professionalism with a positive effect on the day care." Another participant echoed these sentiments, saying that the program helped her "realize what a huge responsibility caring for children is." It may be that these changes in attitudes will lead to increased job satisfaction and therefore better staff retention.

There are also my own research questions to consider. *After completing the Pathways Program, did the participants feel they were more knowledgeable about process quality?* The University of North Carolina Child Development Institute (n.d.) noted that process quality consists of the interactions that occur between children and adults as well as the way the children use the materials. Participants spoke of increased knowledge about improving their teaching techniques, communicating more effectively, child development and developmental milestones, planning and implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum and creating learning environments. "I now think about why we do things and what the kids will get out of an activity rather than just doing it." "Knowing how children grow and develop has helped with meeting the needs of students where they are developmentally." "I am better able to express to family the specific needs of the children as well as communicate better with educators and the community." "I feel more knowledgeable and I've learned to recognize developmental issues with children as well. Also how to better arrange a classroom."

Did the participants change the way they interacted with children after completing the Pathways Program? The participants have changed their interactions with children. They reported changing the way they teach and interact with children, being more patient, planning better activities, and having a better understanding of how children learn and develop. "Rephrase the way things are said to be more positive." "More patient because of knowledge of behaviors and appropriate preschool activities. I have tried new ways of completing activities to make fun and engaging for everyone. I

have used the developmental charts/milestones as well." "We changed a lot of things we do because of the training. Not only the teaching but the environment."

Did the financial incentive of a $400 stipend for each completed module have any influence on the participant's decision to participate in the Pathways Program? At the time this study was proposed, there was a stipend being offered but no participant listed this as being the main reason they enrolled in the Pathways Program. It did cover the cost of travel for a one participant, but did not seem to be a major factor in their decision to participate.

How would the participants rate the Pathways Program? Participants were given a scale from one to five, with one being poor, three being good and five being excellent to answer this question. Eighteen of the participants rated the program as a five, or excellent and twelve gave it a four rating. No participant rated the program lower than a three. The high ratings revealed that overall the participants felt that this was a very good program.

How would the participants rate the Pathways Program instructors? The majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers were knowledgeable about the material, communicated clearly, had clearly stated goals and expectations, and gave the participants opportunities to ask questions. Individual comments showed that some participants were not completely satisfied with their instructors however.

How beneficial were the instructional strategies used in the program? According to the participants, the teachers had the greatest impact on them. Next to teachers and program staff, activities were viewed as the most beneficial instructional strategy

followed by discussions and audio visual materials. The worksheets and workbook were noted as being the least beneficial.

Do the participants have any suggestions to improve the program? They certainly did. It was noted that more information could be provided about working with children who have disabilities as well as more information about and guidance in obtaining their CDA would have been beneficial. Offering the classes in more locations would have been a benefit to participants who had to travel long distances to participate. The structure and pacing of the course was something some participants would like to see changed and participants felt the program should be open to parents and professionals, and people who already have a bachelor's degree.

One question sought determine if the participants were more likely to enroll in a college program after having completed the Pathways Program, but this did not seem to be the case. However, the increase in knowledge that these participants have gained will directly influence the care they provide to children, thus creating a higher quality program, which benefits the children of Wyoming.

Based on the results of this data collection and analysis, some conclusions can be made about the Pathways Program. Overall, the participants rated this as a very good program. The majority of them gave the teachers high ratings as well. They think the teachers were knowledgeable about the material and gave them opportunities to ask questions. Most also felt that the goals and expectations of the program were clearly stated. Based on the data, the teachers could have communicated more clearly. Most narrative comments from the participants about the teachers were very positive, but there

were some that were not as positive. Participants gave many different examples of how they have increased their skills and knowledge the most and the area of child development was a frequent answer. Participants also rated the teaching and instruction as being the most helpful to them, as well as program staff, and group discussions. Participants told how the skills they have learned in this program have changed their practice with children and in many instances it was in the way they communicate and relate to the children. They also made changes in the planning and implementation of activities for the children. Participants also had suggestions for improving the program which included changing the amount of time that it takes to complete all three modules, helping participants with the CDA process, offering the classes in more locations, and including more information about children with disabilities. After finishing the program, the majority of the participants are still working in the field of early childhood in many different capacities and when asked why they participated many of them mentioned that they wanted to improve themselves by getting more education and increasing their knowledge about child development so they were more effective in their positions. The CDA was also mentioned as a reason some participants wanted to complete the program. The majority of the participants would also recommend the Pathways Program to someone else. This program was available to professionals who did not already have a four year college degree and the majority of them still do not plan on getting that degree. However, twelve of the participants do intend to go on to get a two or four year degree in early childhood education.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this program evaluation was the way the survey was directly related to the objectives, the outcomes of the program, and to the specific research questions for the present study. The evaluation actually measured and provided data related to the research questions about the program. The data were specific enough to provide concrete suggestions about what participants liked and did not like about the program.

Although attempts were made to provide an opportunity for each participant to voice their opinion, not everyone responded to the survey. Forty-one percent of the participants who had finished all three modules of Pathways participated in this study. Program evaluations do come with limitations. If the sample size is too large, there may be too much data for easy analysis. It may also be difficult to convey the complexities of each participant's story fully when the narrative is written.

In this study, there are limitations as well. The participants of Pathways were not required to participate in this study, so there was no way of knowing ahead of time specifically how many of them would complete the survey. Some participants may not have been willing to give both positive and negative feedback about the program. Some participants have only recently completed the program, and for others, some time has passed by and that may affected participation as well. Some participants are no longer working in early childhood education and that may have influenced their decision to participate.

The methods used for collecting data in this study were an online survey using Survey Monkey and a mailed survey. These methods have their limitations. Surveys that have been mailed out are also dependent on the participant being willing to fill them out and return them. Mailed surveys took more time for the data to be collected, and the time of year they were sent also may have an effect on the response rate, for instance sending them out during a major holiday season may delay the process. There is also a cost associated with a mail survey.

In regards to this study, there were several steps taken to increase the response rate. The time frame for this data collection was October 2014 to February 2015. This meant that there were several holidays and participants may have been less likely to take the time to complete the survey or may have inadvertently missed the initial email that was sent. The initial attempt to contact each participant by phone allowed them to talk about the study and gave them notice that an email would be coming. Once a participant had agreed to participate in the study an email was sent to them with the link to the web based survey. There were some potential participants who were not reached by phone or email and these were contacted by mail. Even among participants who are comfortable using the Internet, a mailed survey that includes a paper questionnaire is more likely to be returned (Millar & Dillman, 2011). Using the two different options in sequence was also an effective strategy. The success of the follow-up interviews was directly related to the ability to reach the participants as well.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are other ways that this program evaluation could have been completed. Each survey could have been completed by phone after explaining the study and getting the consent of the participant. There were several reasons I chose not to use this method. I believed contacting them by phone may have led them to only give positive feedback, that they would be less likely to make negative comments about the program. I also considered the amount of time that it would take to answer all of the questions thoroughly and I was concerned that some of their answers may be shortened because of this. The participants could have also been interviewed in person. Because this was a statewide program and the participants live in many different towns, it was not feasible for me to travel and try to contact 82 potential participants. Using the Web based and mail surveys provided the opportunity to collect data in a more timely and efficient manner.

The core of the problem is that providers working in early childcare settings in Wyoming sometimes do not have much formal education beyond high school. Training that is required by the licensing agencies is important and they do provide resources to help providers become more knowledgeable. However, Wyoming also has providers who are not licensed and so they are not monitored for this training requirement. If an employee is working for a center that is accredited they may also be required to obtain their Child Development Associate Credential, and part of this includes 120 hours of instruction in early childhood education. The goal is to make sure that early childcare providers have educational opportunities available to them that are affordable and of high quality. To ensure that the Pathways Program was successful towards these goals, a

program evaluation was the appropriate method to use. Data collection could have been

approached in a different way, possibly traveling to the participants to conduct an

interview in person or using focus groups. This evaluation had an impact on the local

problem as well because the program had participants from all over the state of

Wyoming.

Scholarship, Project Development, Leadership and Change

I was working for Child Development Services as an early childhood special

education teacher when I became an instructor for the first module in the Pathways

Program. My background is in early childhood and education. After the participants

finished the module, I began wondering two things. I wanted to know what impact this

training was having on them and if it was changing their practice in the classroom. The

second question I had was if the training was being presented in an effective way and the

participants were becoming more knowledgeable about early childhood. Shortly after we

completed that first module, I became an employee at Central Wyoming College where I

am now teaching more adult learners in my education and early childhood courses. This

also influenced my decision to investigate an adult education program, which the

Pathways program is.

I had to initially find out if I would be allowed to conduct a program evaluation of

the Pathways Program and establish the partnership with the stakeholders. When I

initially began this program evaluation I did not know what steps were involved in the

process. I found resources that were very specific that outlined the process and the

different approaches and methods that could be used. I then had to decide which one was

appropriate for my study proposal. I then needed to investigate ways to collect data and learned about the strengths and weaknesses of each option and had to decide which ways were the most realistic for my study proposal.

I had never created a survey and this project gave me the opportunity to use a survey to gather feedback from the participants about their program. I took steps to keep the data secure and protect the anonymity of the participants. Analyzing and interpreting the data was also new to me and I researched ways to work with qualitative data. I felt confident in my abilities to write the paper discussing my findings but I also had to summarize the data in a functional way for the stakeholders. I have never presented information in that way before. I feel I have grown as a scholar, practitioner, and researcher during this process. I have improved my research and writing skills.

The responses from the survey have allowed me to take a critical look at my own instruction methods with adult learners. I have increased my knowledge in the field of early childhood and became familiar more with the research of others. By conducting this research I was able to learn many things, not just how the participants felt about the Pathways Program. I have never conducted any type of study before and the process of what that involves was new to me. I had to create the survey because a commercial survey would not have been specific to this program. I investigated what types of questions to use and how to create a survey to improve the chances that it would be completed. I had to develop methods for delivery of that survey. Making contacts with potential participants who lived all over the state of Wyoming was also a challenge. Data analysis was also new to me and I had to do extensive reading about survey responses

and coding of qualitative data. This also gave me the opportunity to learn about presenting information in a scholarly manner, both in the writing of this paper and in presenting the information to the stakeholders of this program.

When the project was in the initial planning stages I had to investigate the different designs of studies to see which one would be appropriate for this project. Then working with the stakeholders the design had to be planned and executed in such a way as to meet their needs as well as mine. Understanding the different options for data collection and deciding on the effectiveness of each of them also had to be considered within the confines of this particular program evaluation and the target population. I then had to analyze the data that was collected which meant I had to determine the methods and tools that would be used to conduct the analysis. The information then had to be presented in a professional manner. Each of these steps was new to me as I had never conducted a program evaluation before.

If I were to plan or repeat this project, I think that there are some things that I would have done differently. After the initial contact was made with the potential participants, I would first send the letter, the consent form and the survey by mail. After two weeks I would make a follow-up phone call to all potential participants who had not yet responded to find out if they received the survey and to encourage them to return it. Two weeks after that I would contact them by email and offer this secondary option of taking a web-based survey. This method may result in a higher response rate.

There were several things that I learned about myself as I went through this project. I became more adept at researching information about methods of data collection

and data analysis. I also learned to analyze data and how to present the data to stakeholders. I came to realize that if I thought about the study in a step by step manner, I was better able to plan what my actions needed to be at each step. My collaboration skills have improved because I was working with a state agency who is the stakeholder in this program evaluation. My planning skills have improved in that I was able to approach the state agency with an idea, create the program evaluation and implement it.

At first, it seemed as if the project would never get off the ground but as time went by the project came together easily and the actual steps of the program worked just as I had planned. I was surprised that more people did not participate and fill out the survey, so in the future, I may try to learn more about writing surveys and survey method that may increase the response rate. The actual survey and data collection piece did take longer than I had anticipated but the process itself yielded the results I needed, which was the feedback from the program participants.

Reflection of the Importance of the Work

This program evaluation has been a wonderful opportunity for me to investigate whether or not an educational program that is provided at no cost to early childhood professionals would be successful in Wyoming and have a positive impact on the participants. Pathways has accomplished the objectives and this information may be used by policy makers to determine if this program continues to be funded, and if so what changes may be made to the program to improve it. It also gave me the opportunity to discover what makes an adult education program successful. I learned what resources, materials, and presentation styles adult learners prefer to help them be successful and

how important it was for them to form a relationship with their instructors and other participants. I also learned how to conduct a program evaluation and compile the data to present to the stakeholders. This study could ultimately have an effect on how we train early childcare providers in the state; thus impacting the quality of that care.

Implications, Applications and Directions of Future Research

The Pathways Program was created to have a positive impact on the participants and as a result have a positive impact on the children who attend the preschools and child care centers that the participants work in. It was also created to be a stepping stone to encourage participants to further their education, possibly even going on to earn a college degree in the field of early childhood education. By conducting this program evaluation the stakeholders were able to determine if the people who participated in this program felt that the program had a positive impact on them, if it changed their professional practices, and if they plan to pursue a college degree after completing the Pathways Program. This information may possibly be used in the process of making future decisions about the program, such as whether or not future resources will be allocated to fund the program or if the program is deemed beneficial enough to continue. It may also be used to make changes to the way the program is structured and delivered to the participants. The successes or failures of this program may be used in the future to guide additional training opportunities and influence how other training programs are designed in Wyoming for early childhood professionals. Because the participants of the Pathways program gave such positive feedback about the program and reported that it did have an impact on their interactions with children, there may be additional opportunities for

programs like this in Wyoming in the future that will target people working in the field of early childhood education who do not hold a college degree.

There are some important possibilities for further research in this area. If the population was identified at the beginning of the program then initial data could be collected at that time. These participants could then be tracked. If they do not complete all three modules then it might be possible to find out the reasons behind that. If there were some way to observe and analyze their interactions with children before the program and after the program then more evidence may be found about the true impacts of the program. It may also be interesting to collect demographic information on the participants to determine if a certain age group is more likely to finish all three modules. I also believe that in addition to the survey and follow-up interviews some focus groups would also be beneficial to get additional feedback from the participants.

Conclusion

The population of children in Wyoming is exposed to many risk factors. According to the Kids Count Data Center (2015),

33,052 students were eligible for free or reduced lunch programs in Wyoming in 2011 (para. 7). In 2013, 7,000 children under the age of six were living below the federal poverty level (para. 9). Between 2011 and 2013, 5,000 children who were living at or above 200% of the poverty level were not attending Preschool (para. 14). Between 2010 and 2011, four percent of Wyoming students dropped out of high school (para. 15). In 2011, the rate of births to unwed mothers was 35%

(para. 22) and in 2012 there were 6,000 children who were not living with either

one of their parents (para. 22).

Wyoming frequently has the highest suicide rate in the country, and in 2011 two

Wyoming counties were twice the national average (Wyoming Life Expectancy, 2011).

Between 2011 and 2012, 22,000 children were diagnosed by a doctor as having one or

more emotional, behavioral, or developmental condition. In 2010, 5, 975 juveniles were

arrested, with the majority of those being young men (Kids Count Data Center, 2011).

Quality childcare environments are especially important for children living in a low

income situation. A stimulating and responsive childcare setting can be a positive

influence on a child's well-being if they are faced with limited resources in their own

homes. A large number of low income children are cared for by relatives or in

unregulated child care settings, which may provide lower quality care than a licensed

caregiver (Adams, Tout, & Zaslow, 2007).

> Children who receive a high quality early childhood education have better math,
> language and social skills as they enter school. As they grow older they are less
> likely to be placed in special education. They are more likely to finish school,
> have fewer interactions with the justice system and they have higher earnings as
> adults (Child Care Services Association, 2015, para. 1).

According to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral

Agencies (2010) "more than 11 million children under the age of five regularly spend

time in some type of child care setting every week and parents consistently report that

their greatest concern is the quality of their child care arrangements" (p. 9). One of the

factors influencing quality of care is the education levels of the providers. Program quality is associated with having caregivers who are attentive, responsive to the children and provide a stimulating and positive environment (Belsky & Pluess, 2012). Yet in many states childcare provider's training requirements are very low and may not provide the necessary knowledge and skills needed to effectively work with young children. Wyoming providers are not required to have training in health and safety practices or child development before working with children (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2010).

The amount of formal education that employees in an early childcare setting have is a strong predictor of their ability to provide and engage in positive developmentally appropriate activities and be more responsive to the children (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2011). By educating the professionals who are working with the children of Wyoming, not only can their lives be improved but their future opportunities as well. This can result in a positive impact on our families, our communities and our state.

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Appendix A: Pathways Evaluation Report

Introduction

This program evaluation was conducted to see what impact the program had on the participants. At the time this study was conducted there had not been any data collected about the program and so this was the initial feedback from the participants. This was important because the agency was trying to determine the future of the program and this information may be a part of those decisions.

The criteria used for this program evaluation was based on the objectives the stakeholders had for the program: a) to increase the quality of childcare by increasing the qualifications of the individuals working with young children, b) to provide a financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education, c) to increase the retention of staff and providers who work directly with children. They were also influenced by my own research questions:

1. After completing the Pathways Program, did the participants feel they were more knowledgeable about process quality?

2. Did the participants change the way they interacted with children after completing the Pathways Program?

3. Did the financial incentive of a $400 stipend for each completed module have any influence on the participant's decision to participate in the Pathways Program?

4. How would the participants rate the Pathways Program on a scale of 1 to 5?

5. How would the participants rate the Pathways Program instructors on a scale of 1 to 5?

6. How beneficial were the instructional strategies used in the program?

7. Do the participants have any suggestions to improve the program?

These objectives and research questions were then used these as a guide to sort, code and analyze the qualitative data.

Quality early childcare programs have a positive and important impact on children's development in the early years. A component of a quality program is having providers who are knowledgeable in child development. The Pathways to Professional Development Program (Pathways) was created as a quality entry-level community based training for childcare providers in Wyoming.

The numbers of workers needing childcare has increased but there is a lack of well-prepared workers. This is having a negative effect on the amount and the quality of care that is available. A lack of adequate training and career development opportunities are factors that contribute to higher staff turnover and low quality of care.. The amount of formal education that employees in an early childcare setting have is a strong predictor of their ability to provide and engage in positive developmentally appropriate activities. The lack of higher education of the childcare providers hurts Wyoming's children and has economic and social repercussions for our communities.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The Pathways Program survey was conducted to find out what impact the program had on the participants. This is the initial feedback from the participants and their input may be used to make program decisions in the future.

Criteria

The Pathways Program was available to early childhood professionals who met certain criteria. They had to be working in a licensed child care environment and could not hold a four year degree in any subject area. For the purpose of this study they also had completed all three modules in the Pathways Program.

This survey was created for this program evaluation to collect feedback from the participants about the program. It was conducted and analyzed using Survey Monkey, a web based survey website.

Pathways to Professional Development

Program Evaluation Survey

1. How would you rate the Pathways to Professional Development program

overall?

Poor   Good

Excellent

  1   2   3   4   5

2. On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how would you rate the teachers of the

program?

_____They were knowledgeable about the material

_____They communicated clearly

_____Their goals and expectations were clear

_____They gave me opportunities to ask questions

Is there anything you would like to add about the teachers?

3. In what area do you think you increased your skills or knowledge the most?

4. Rate each of the following on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) in terms of

how much it helped you:

_____Teaching and instruction

_____Small Group Discussions

_____Large Group Discussions

_____Worksheets/Workbook/Handouts

_____Audio Visual Materials (films, charts)

_____Program Staff

_____Activities

5. How have the skills you learned in this program changed your practice with

children?

6. How do you think we could improve the program?

7. What is your current job title?

8. Why did you make the decision to participate in the Pathways Program?

9. Would you recommend the Pathways Program to others? Why or why not?

10. After participating in the Pathways Program, are you planning to get a degree

in Early Childhood Education?

_____No, I do not plan to get a degree in Early Childhood Education

_____Yes, I am planning to get an Associate's Degree Early Childhood Education

_____Yes, I am planning to get a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood

Education

_____ I already hold an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education

Major Outcomes

As seen in Figure A1, on a scale from 1-5, with 1= Poor, 3= Good, and

5=Excellent, the majority of the participants, 18, rated the program as a five, meaning

that they felt it was an excellent program. 12 of the participants rated the program as a

four and five rated the program as a three. No participant rated the program lower than a
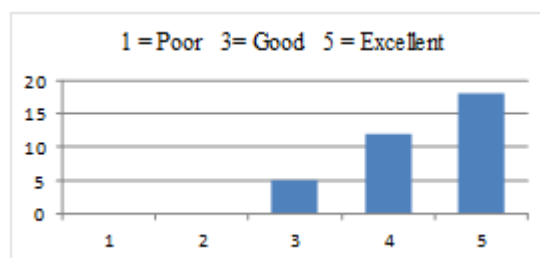
three.

Figure A1 Program rating.

Participants also rated the teachers of the program on a scale of one (lowest) to

five (highest) in four different areas. (Figure A2) The majority of participants, 32, agreed

or strongly agreed that the teachers were knowledgeable about the material. One

participant marked a three, meaning that they neither agreed nor disagreed. 29 of the

participants agreed or strongly agreed that the teachers communicated clearly, but there

were two responses of neither agree nor disagree, one response of disagree and once

response of strongly disagree. 31 participants agreed or strongly agreed that the goals and

expectations of the teachers were clear, but two people disagreed, feeling that the

teachers did not communicate clearly and that their goals and expectations were not made

clear. When asked if the teaches gave the participants opportunities to ask questions, 32

agreed or strongly agreed, but there was one response of disagree.
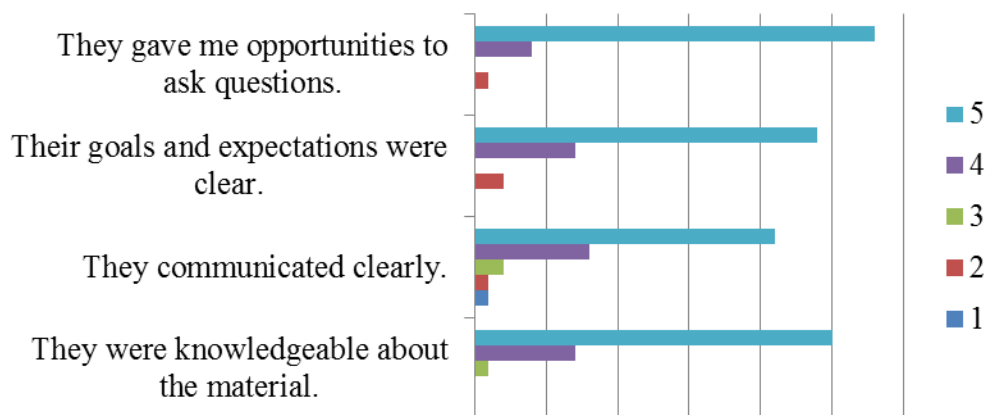

Figure A2 Teacher ratings.

Participants also had the opportunity to add any additional comments regarding

the teachers. By looking for themes in their responses it was able to determine the

characteristics mentioned most frequently by the participants to describe their teachers.

(Figure A3)

The majority of the participants felt that the teachers helped them get through the

program, were very knowledgeable in their field and about the material, gave them

practical advice, and made the program fun. They also described their teachers as being

engaging, using hands-on techniques, and explaining the material thoroughly. One

participant felt that the teachers always answered questions.

Figure A3 Teacher characteristics.

Specific comments included:

      • They were wonderful. Very knowledgeable and practical too with advice on child care questions.

      • We had amazing instructors. Very knowledgeable in their field & the material. Always answered question & explained materials thoroughly.

      • The teacher I had truly cared about my success in completing the program.

      • They both did an excellent job with presenting the information and engaging the people who took the class.

      • We had fun while learning and I think that's always important when you're learning something new.

Several of the instructors were mentioned specifically by name and participants described them as being "wonderful", "amazing" and "fantastic". One teacher would also reply to the students quickly if they emailed or texted them.

Other responses were not as positive. Specific comments included:

• Our first set didn't have a lot of knowledge about material. Our 2nd one was wonderful.

• The quality of the class is dependent upon the teacher and their understanding of the amount of time and work involved for Child care providers. Our first class, the teachers were very expectant of the class and presented a lot of material to study. The final pathways classes, we had a new teacher and she made the class not so tedious and stressful. She helped with our study and did not add extra material, I was not so overwhelmed and was able to absorb and use the materials in a more valuable manner.

One participant also felt that their teacher was a good teacher but that she favored certain students and treated them differently based on that and one participant responded that they disliked their teacher.

Participants were also asked in what area they increased their skills or knowledge. Figure A4 indicates that participants greatly increased their knowledge of child development, followed by learning how to communicate better with children and families, setting up the classroom and learning environments, improving teaching techniques, and planning developmentally appropriate curriculum. One participant described that they learned about the way that you talk to the children, going to their

level. Learning about older children and ways of doing certain things was beneficial to several participants and one participant felt that they are now better able to express to families the specific needs of the children as well as communicate better with educators and the community.
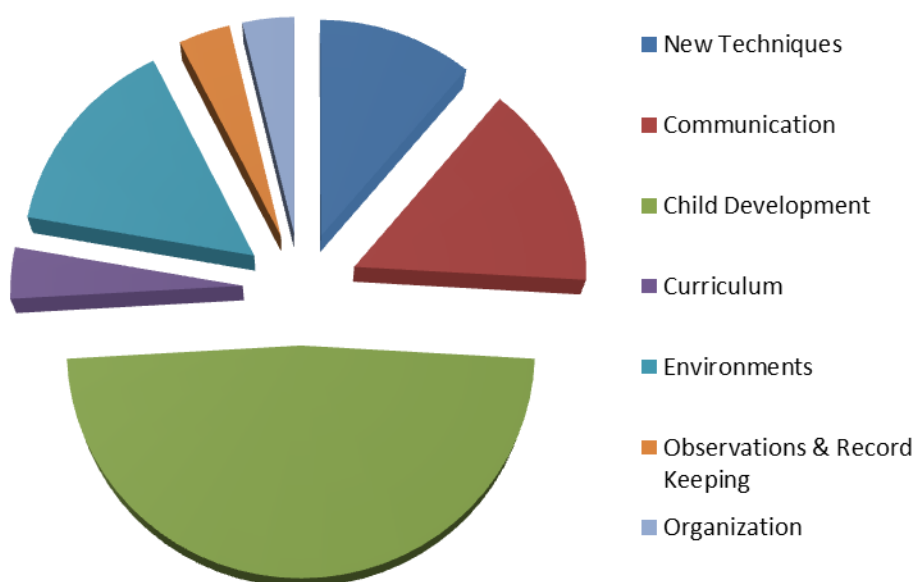

Figure A4 Knowledge and skills gained.

Specific comments included:

• Understanding behaviors and how to handle them.

• I loved that I got to see different daycares & share stories with the others. New ideas are always great.

• The different development stages of children and also how to present my information.

• I gained the most knowledge & skills in the area of curriculum. Learning how to bring art, math, social studies, music & science to the classroom every day.

• Just really opened our eyes to new learning/teaching angles.

• I learned a lot overall & really enjoyed doing projects/presentations. I liked learning about the developmental age, age appropriate toys, activities etc.

• I learned quite a bit with babies and their developments that I never knew before, as well as the various government agencies, ways to use specific paperwork to track progress with a child, and how to best set up a classroom so it works for children, teachers and parents.

Two participants felt that is was a reminder of things that they already knew.

The next question on the survey asked the participants to rate several items on a scale from one (lowest) to five (highest) in terms or how much it helped them. Figure A5 illustrates that the teaching and instruction had the biggest impact on the participants, closely followed by the program staff, activities, discussions and audio/visual materials. Worksheets, workbooks, and handouts were viewed as the least helpful to participants.
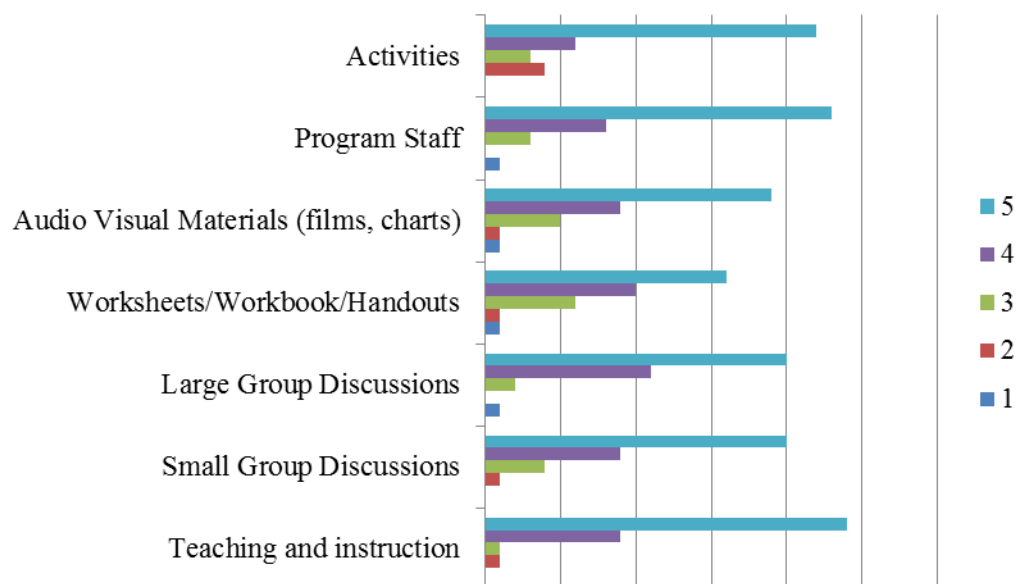
Figure A5 Beneficial to participants.

The next portion of the survey dealt with the skills learned in the Pathways

Program being put into practice with children. There were two major changes in the ways

participants starting working with children in their care after completing the Pathways

Program. These changes were in the planning and implementation of developmentally

appropriate activities and in the way that they talked to and related to children. One

participant talked about getting to the level of the children and listening to them and

another noted they are more patient now because they have more knowledge about

behaviors. Another person mentioned that they now try to build children up to support

their self-esteem by using this new way of communicating that they have learned.

Learning about the developmental stages had an impact as well, with participants now

planning developmentally appropriate activities for the children as well as being able to

watch for difficulties children may be having. Participants made specific changes such as

using webbing more, changing the way they set up their classroom, and being able to take advantage of teachable moments. Learning about the developmental stages also influenced how one participant is now making learning even more hands on through the use of play and another person now realizes that children learn in different ways. One participant noted that everything they learned related to things they were doing every day at daycare. Several of the comments pointed to the fact their increase in knowledge is having a positive effect on the quality of their program and the relationships they have with children and families.

Specific comments included:

• It helped me explain to parents the how, whys and what of their children's different development rates. Also I am more observant of any difficulties the children may be having in development areas.

• I have tried new ways of completing activities to make fun & engaging for everyone. I have used the developmental charts/milestones as well.

• More patient because of knowledge of behaviors. Appropriate preschool activities.

• I feel more knowledgeable and I've learned to recognize development issues with children as well. Also how to better arrange a classroom."

• I am much more I tune to the kids developmental levels.

• I learned a better way to talk to children, a different "language" in communicating to them expectations, directions & discipline. How to build them up, support their self-expression, & talk on their level.

• The new skills & knowledge allows me to understand how children learn & allows me offer better quality child care that has more learning experiences for them.

• It has changed everything. There were so many areas I learned about, I don't have room to describe them.

Participants were also asked for suggestions about how the Pathways Program could be improved. One participant suggested that more information be included about working with children who have disabilities. Other participants pointed out that although they were building their portfolio that could be used later to complete their Child Development Associate Credential (CDA), they were not aware that anyone in their class ever went on the actually get the CDA. They felt that the instruction about this process was unclear and the steps were not shown to them, and wished that this had been included in the program. Class location was also mentioned by participants. One person was traveling 88 miles and noted that it was a very long and large commitment on their part. Another participant was traveling 60 miles. One person thinks it should be offered to anyone whether you have college education or not and the scholarship program should still continue for those who can't afford it. Another comment was that it should be promoted more in day care centers because more staff needs to know it is available. One participant felt that the program might seem long but it is worth it. The comment about it being long may also be related to other responses that there should be fewer hours in the classroom or that instead of having the classes spaced out over a year and a half that they instead are offered consecutively without long breaks except for holidays. Yet another participant felt that having the breaks in between was helpful. One participant mentioned

that the workbook was too much along with the other assignments that were required and another person seemed to agree, feeling the amount of material that is being covered could be down-sized.

One of the conditions for participating in the Pathways Program was participants had to be currently working in a Wyoming licensed childcare center. One survey question investigated how many of the participants had left the early childhood profession after completing the program. According to Figure A6 the majority of the participants are still working in an early childhood setting.
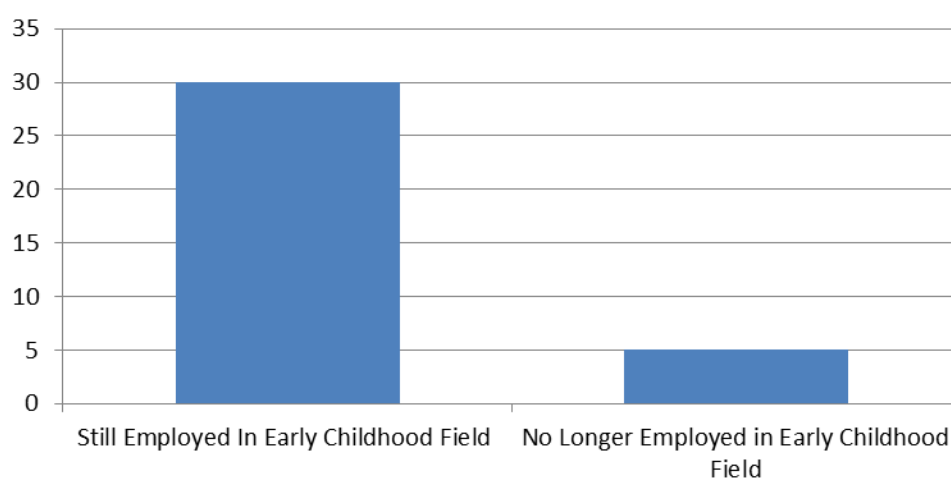

Figure A6 Current job title

Of those participants who are still working with children, their current job titles were listed as teachers and co-teachers, directors and assistant directors, child care owners and child care providers, family and home child care providers, group leaders, instructional assistants, Pre-K teachers and preschool teachers.

Participants were also asked why they made the decision to participate in the Pathways Program. One of the objectives from the stakeholders was to provide a

financial incentive to providers for increased levels of education. Based on the answers

given to this question, the financial incentive was not the reason that any of them decided

to participate in the program. Only two people even mentioned it. One participant noted

that it covered the expense of her travel while another said the money was nice but they

would have signed up without it. Many of the people who took part in this training were

told about it by their supervisors or co-workers. Their answers to this question revealed

that they mainly wanted to increase their knowledge in order to gain a better

understanding of the children they work with, and felt that this training would better

themselves and the businesses that they work in. One participant also saw this as an

opportunity to be seen as a professional in their field by obtaining this training and

another mentioned that it was a way to get credit for hours of continuing education.

Another participant mentioned that this experience would help them to be a better

mentor. It was also seen as a way to get further education without the expense of paying

for college courses.

Specific answers included:

   • I wanted to better myself & the business I worked for. I wanted more education

in the field I love, and I knew it would benefit the children, the parents and even my

coworkers. I also wanted to improve & learn & truly get all the information I could

possibly get in this field.

   • To further my education & better the care of the children.

   • Just wanted to better my understanding of children/parents/environments."

• I wanted to expand my knowledge in the preschool field. I am always looking

for ways to learn and grow.

• This was an opportunity to further my early childhood education that was

affordable.

• To further my education and advance in my career. To understand young

children better. To help me be a better teacher.

One person also made a comment that goes back to a problem that was discussed

previously. Some professionals working in the field of early childhood education are not

making a livable wage and when they do make the effort to obtain further education they

are often not compensated financially for it. This person felt that it was a lot of work and

extremely stressful. They did not receive a pay increase, or health insurance so they were

asking themselves if it was worth it.

They survey also asked participants if they would recommend this

program to others and why. Many times this is what encourages people to enroll in

programs. Figure A7 below shows that the majority of the participants would recommend
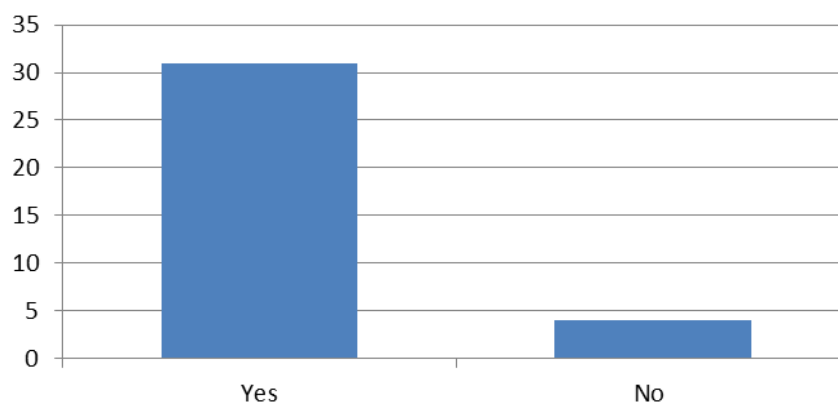
the program to someone else.

Figure A7 Program recommendation.

Generally, people seemed to find the program to be very educational, informative, affordable, and fun. Being able to work full time while participating in the program was mentioned by one participant as a reason they would recommend the program to others. Another comment made was that the participants learned a lot at no cost to them. One person believes that it gave them confidence in what they are trying to teach young minds as well as support, while another stated that the material was very helpful and sharing others' experiences with children was also insightful. Forming relationships with other participants was also mentioned and the ability to ask others questions and get advice was seen as a benefit. One participant said they would recommend the program because children need us to be aware of any growth or development difficulties so we can steer their parents in the right direction and another felt that parents and young mothers would benefit from the program. Another person added to this by saying it helps some providers see what they need to be doing in their classrooms.

There were also responses about why participants would not recommend the program, one being that they had put in all that time and effort and got nothing in return such as higher pay and the money they received to take the class did not pay for all the gas it took them to get there. Another participant stated that they would recommend the program if it were simpler and not so intense. One participant felt that it is a good program that provides a lot of good information, but that there is not much to be gained by participating in it other than personal fulfillment.

The final question asked of the participants was if they planned to get a
degree in Early Childhood Education after participating in the Pathways Program. Figure
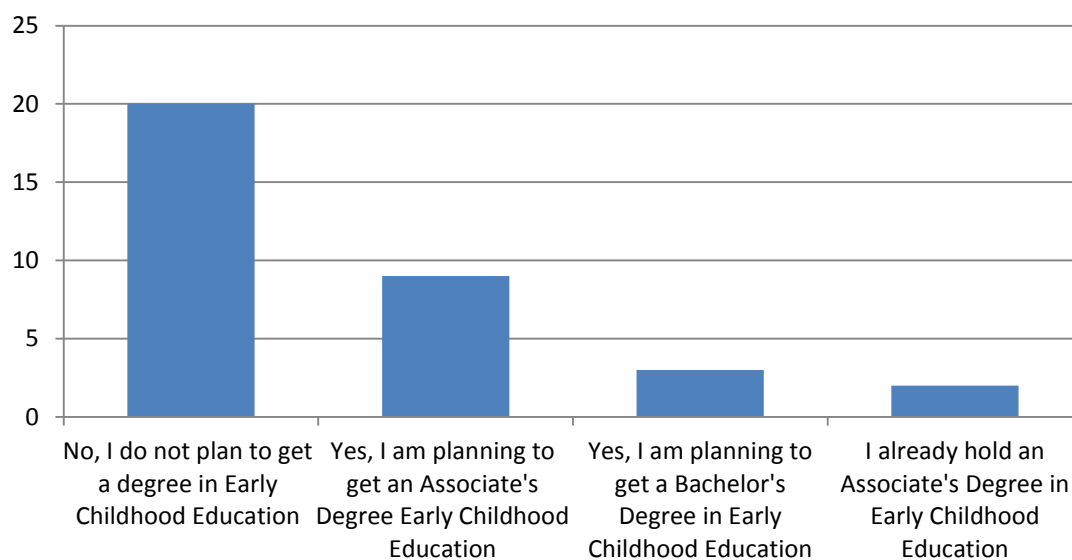A8 shows that for most participants this was not the outcome.

Figure A8 Current degree status.

Most of the participants do not have a college degree and still do not plan on
getting a degree in Early Childhood Education after finishing the Pathways Program.

Local Needs

The Pathways Program is offered statewide in Wyoming. It is apparent that this is an important program with implications for the early childcare professionals and children in Wyoming. The program has changed the provider's interactions and practice with children as well as increased their knowledge and skills in the field of early childhood education. Most of the participants do not have a college degree and the majority of them do not plan on continuing their education at the college level, so it becomes even more crucial that training programs such as the Pathways Program continue to offer professional development to these professionals, and hopefully can be offered to more parts of the state as resources allow. This study will be sent to the stakeholders by email and they have asked for it in its entirety when it is finished. I have also conveyed to them that I am willing to meet with them to discuss any questions they may have about the study or to present the findings.

Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of the Pathways to Professional Development Program. This study is being conducted to get feedback from the participants regarding the effectiveness of the program. Any participant who completed all three parts of the Pathways Program is eligible to participate in this study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Colleen Bartlett who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to get feedback from the participants regarding the effectiveness of the program.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey online and possibly participate in a short interview by phone.

Here are some sample survey questions:

1. How would you rate the Pathways to Professional Development program overall?

2. In what area do you think you increased your skills or knowledge the most?

3. How do you think we could improve the program?

After the survey is completed you will be contacted about your willingness to participate in a follow up interview by phone or email. The follow up interview will give you the opportunity to add any additional information. There is minimal risk to you in the participation of the survey or follow up interview, and these are no greater than the psychological stress one would experience in daily life (e.g., materials or topics that could be considered sensitive, offensive, threatening, degrading).

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the Wyoming Children's Action Alliance or Align will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as needing to take the time to complete the brief survey. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

This study has the potential to directly affect the decisions made in the future about the Pathways Program and your input will help us to know what worked well and what things could be improved upon.

There will not be any compensation made to participants for this study.

Conflict of Interest:

Colleen Bartlett was a Pathways instructor for Module I in Lander, Wyoming. To avoid any possible conflict of interest, those students will not be contacted to participate in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by using a password protected computer and the surveys and interviews will only be accessed by the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Process for study participation:

Please return this form to Colleen Bartlett. You will then be sent the link to access the survey online. . The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. After the survey, I will be contacting you about participating in a follow up interview. These interviews will take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at colleen.bartlett@waldenu.edu or (307)851-4209. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-08-14-0190087 and it expires on October 7, 2015.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent," I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.