

In the Blink of an Eye: Conducting Utilization-focused Evaluations with Sensitive Populations Under Extreme Time Constraints

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Key Questions



- What are the challenges faced when doing PE in vulnerable populations?
- What are the challenges faced when doing time-pressed evaluations?
- What challenges do the combination of these present?
- How can these challenges be overcome?

Presentation Overview



- Introduction
- Evaluation Overview
 - Get Set Learn Evaluation
 - Methods
 - Results
 - UW Directions Evaluation
 - Method
 - Results
- Discussion
- Reflection



Introduction

Evaluators' Context



- Introduction to the Evaluators
- My social location
 - Young, Middle class, Female, Caucasian, Student (High literacy, no Aboriginal identity)
- My assumptions about the programs
 - Supportive of the goals of the programs
 - Hypotheses and expectations
 - Affinity for program and directors

Purpose



- **Primary:** To undertake the practice of utilization-focused evaluation in uniquely vulnerable groups
- **Secondary:** To investigate, reflect, and report on challenges faced in evaluating these programs and lessons learned through the process



Evaluation Overview

Get Set Learn!

- Family literacy program
 - ▣ Ontario Works clients in the Waterloo and Wellington regions
- (Mostly) mothers and their child(ren)
 - ▣ Many were immigrants
 - ▣ Almost all were low income
- 12 Week program, 2 hours per week, offered 3 times per year
 - ▣ One hour Parent and Child together, one hour parents and children separate
- Previous internal evaluation

Program Goals



- 1) Reach: To reach as many parents with low literacy skills on Ontario Works and their children as possible.
- 2) School success: To provide these parents with strategies and skills that will enable them to help their children succeed in school.
- 3) Parental literacy/education: To encourage parents to continue enrolling in educational programs for themselves.

Evaluation Methods



- Observations were made at three GSL sites
 - Both PACT and Separate time
- In-depth interviews:
 - Mid way through the program
 - Post program
- Questionnaires: orally administered to participants and controls by evaluators
 - Open and close ended questions
 - Controls were individuals who signed up for GSL but did not attend

Constraints

- Evaluation began after program started
 - No possibility for pre-test
 - Little time for research and evaluation planning
- Staff overworked
- No evaluation budget
- Evaluator limitations
- Low literacy participants
- Many language barriers

Evaluation Results



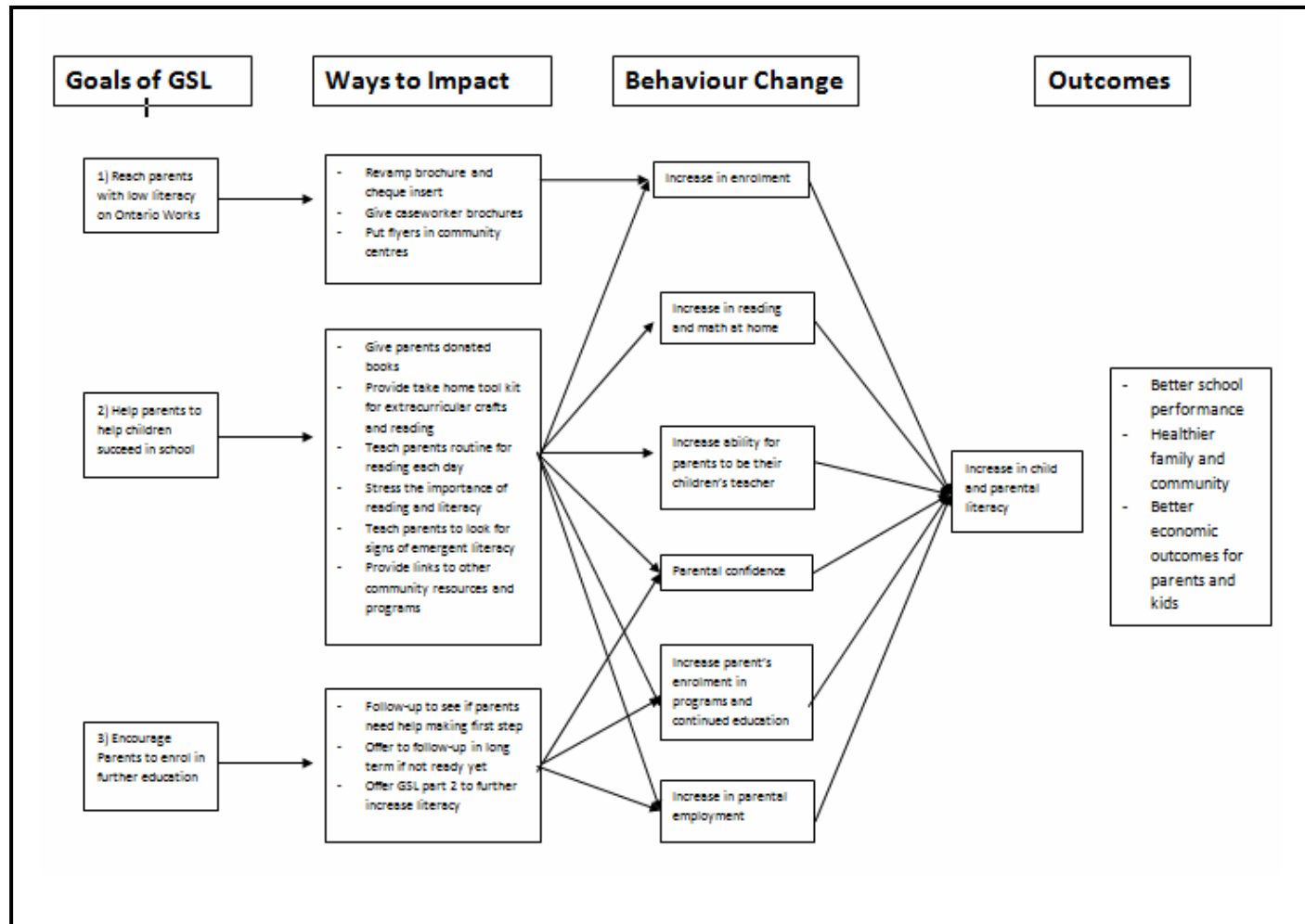
- Mothers showed strong positive support for the program and had very few critical comments
- Interviews revealed:
 - Mothers wanted to continue education
 - Many had poor community connections
 - Supportive home environments
 - Increased comfort enrolling in other programs
 - Increases in amount of time spent reading, writing and doing math since participation in GSL

Evaluation Results



- Questionnaires revealed:
- GSL participants seemed to differ from controls
 - Worry about talking in front others who seem to know more
 - Going back to school
 - Attitudes rubbing off on children

Logic Model



UW Directions



- UW Directions is a program that brings Aboriginal high school students from across Ontario to the University of Waterloo to spend a week on campus
- Goals:
 - ↑ student motivation to complete high school
 - ↑ interest in post secondary
 - ↑ self-confidence for post-secondary success
 - ↑ increase consideration a health-related career
- No previous history of evaluation

Methods



- Observation
 - Evaluator observation of activities
- Chaperone focus groups
 - Chaperone questionnaires about students
- Student pre and post questionnaires
 - Quantitative and qualitative questions
- Elder interviews
 - In-depth, semi-structured interview

Constraints

- Evaluation began 1 week prior to program
 - ▣ Pre-test, but no possibility for control group
 - ▣ Little time for research and evaluation planning

- Staff overworked

- Limited evaluation budget

- Evaluator limitations

- Teenage Aboriginal participants

- Cultural considerations

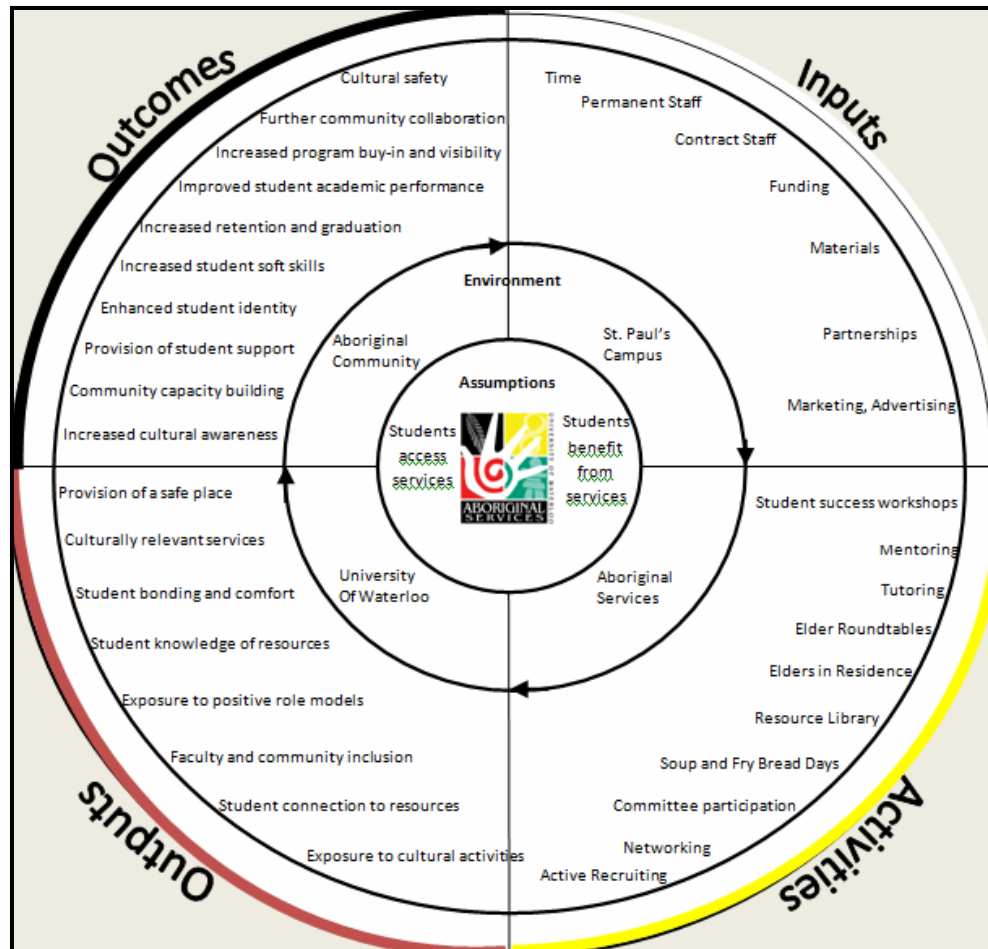
- Parental consent

Results



- Positive student feedback
 - With areas for improvement identified
- High student interest in PSE (pre and post), student change on many indicators
- Extremely positive chaperones and Elder feedback
 - Especially about downstream and preventative effects of the program
 - More area for improvement identified
- Staff stress evident

Logic Models





Discussion

Similarities



- Vulnerable populations
- Time constraints
- Fear of being evaluated
- **Close contact and organization involvement**

Differences



- Organizational structure and culture
- Program planning
- Stage of program development
- **Delivering PE results**



Reflection

Challenges



- What challenges were faced?
 - Logistical challenges
 - Evaluation Participation Challenges
 - Challenges of Working with Vulnerable Participants
 - Cultural Challenges

- Confounding conflict
 - Organizational Structure challenges (UW Directions)

Solutions



- Logistical Challenges
 - Triangulation
 - Creativity (and flexibility)
 - Collaboration with stakeholders around design

Solutions



- Evaluation Participation Challenges
 - Rapport building/relationship
 - Personal factor
 - Building evaluative thinking

Solutions



- Vulnerable Populations
 - Reflexivity
 - Evaluator involvement in program activities
 - Actively attempting to increase participant comfort
 - Engaging in normative practices
 - Commitment to hearing stories and voices

Solutions



- Cultural Challenges
 - Cultural Awareness*
 - Cultural Sensitivity*
 - Cultural Safety

Lessons Learned



- The importance of:
 - Rapport building
 - Personal factor
 - Participation of organizations
 - Triangulation
 - Creative solutions!

It's complicated!



Contributors



- Kelly Anthony, PhD
University of Waterloo
- Julie Yang, BSc
- Program Staff and Participants !

THANK YOU!



QUESTIONS?

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