A Qualitative Process Evaluation of the Tools for Life Program

by

Sarah Ranby

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE PROCESS EVALUATION OF THE TOOLS FOR LIFE PROGRAM

Sarah Ranby
University of Guelph, 2019

Advisory Committee
Dr. Clare MacMartin
Dr. John Dwyer

This research project involved a process evaluation of the social-emotional teaching and learning program, Tools for Life, which had been adopted in elementary schools in a Catholic school board in southwestern Ontario, Canada to support primary prevention under the board’s mental health strategic framework. The project investigated educators’ perceptions of, and experiences with, program implementation. Twenty-eight educators who taught Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 took part in semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Resulting themes included: factors affecting implementation (i.e., facilitators of, and barriers to, optimal implementation of Tools for Life); modifications that participants made to program resources and delivery and the reasons for such adaptations; and suggestions about how to support the sustainability and effective use of the Tools for Life program. Recommendations for school personnel and Tools for Life program developers, as well as directions for future research, are discussed.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

As many as 1 in 5 children and youth will have some form of mental health problem in Ontario (Children’s Mental Health Ontario, 2019). More specifically, 17% of children between the ages 2 and 5 years fit diagnostic criteria for mental health problems (Children’s Mental Health Ontario, 2019). For instance, children as young as 3 or 4 years of age are being diagnosed with emotional/behavioural disorders, particularly anxiety or depression (Luby, Belden, Pautsch, Si, & Spitznagel, 2009). Findings from a recent meta-analysis conducted on epidemiological surveys of mental health disorders in children and youth (Waddell, Shepherd, Schwartz, & Barican, 2014) have shown that estimates of the highest prevalence rates of disorders amongst children (4-17 years) in Canada are: Anxiety (3.8%), Attention-Deficit/ Hyperactivity (2.5%), Conduct Disorder (2.1%), and Depressive Disorder (1.6%). Based on the aforementioned statistics, it is clear that mental health problems are becoming increasingly common in childhood, including early childhood. The first six years of a child’s life constitute an essential stage of neurological development and brain growth that is crucial to the foundation for human growth, development overall, and positive or adverse mental health (Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010). It is a stage in which complex brain functions such as attention, self-regulation, and stress are shaped by the interaction between genes and environmental factors (Boivin & Hertzman, 2012). Brain development is inherently linked to environmental influences (Lavoie, Pereira, & Talwar, 2016). Positive experiences such as making meaning of stressful situations and having a sense of connectedness to peers, family support, and self-awareness are experiences within one’s environment, which serve as protective factors against the onset of mental health
problems (Lavoie et al., 2016). Conversely, negative experiences in a child’s environment are risk factors whereby a child may not have adequate cognitive capacity (brain maturation) or access to social resources, resulting in the potential for mental health problems. Risk factors at the child, family, and school levels include difficult temperament, learning difficulties, negative parenting, child maltreatment (abuse and neglect), and lack of positive ongoing support (Waddell, 2007). The absence of such protective factors and opportunities for supporting children and youth through challenging situations can pose long-term difficulties (Clinton, Kays-Burden, Carter, Bhasin, & Cairney, 2014), such that children who experience multiple adversities are three to four times more likely to develop anxiety or depression in adolescence than children who do not experience such adversities (Fryers & Brugha, 2013). Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that behavioural disorders are more likely to arise when children with genetic vulnerability also experience aforementioned risk factors such as negative parenting (Waddell, 2007). Children with mental health problems can experience various issues that have the possibility to impede their academic and social development (Kang-Yi, Mandell, & Hadley, 2013). Mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and hyperactivity that arise in early childhood can lead to persisting problems throughout adolescence and adulthood (Waddell, 2007). Prospective longitudinal studies confirm that the developmental processes that determine mental health have their roots in early childhood and have the potential to persist over the life span (e.g., Beyer, Postert, Muller, & Furniss, 2012; Luby et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2017).

For example, Luby et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study over the course of 24 months that examined Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) in preschool aged children
in comparison to children not diagnosed with MDD. It was found that preschool children diagnosed with MDD exhibited continuity throughout a 24-month time period. In particular, a diagnosis of MDD at baseline predicted later MDD in children. In addition, it was found that, even when controlling for comorbid disorders, demographic variables, and risk factors, preschoolers with depression initially were more prone to having MDD 12 and/or 24 months afterwards than preschoolers without diagnosis of MDD at baseline (Luby et al., 2009).

Another large-scale longitudinal study conducted by Smith et al. (2017) aimed to examine whether hyperactive preschoolers are at greater long-term risk of poor mental health than preschoolers not identified as hyperactive. The sample consisted of 170 3-year olds who were identified as hyperactive by their parents and 88 3-year olds non-hyperactive who acted as controls at baseline. The follow-up mental health and functional impairment measures were gathered from participants between 14 and 25 years of age. It was found that, specifically for males, preschool hyperactivity was a strong predictor of poor adolescent and adulthood outcomes. Children who were initially rated as hyperactive displayed elevated symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Conduct Disorder, Mood Disorder, and Anxiety in adolescence and young adulthood while the control group of preschoolers who were not identified as hyperactive did not display these symptoms (Smith et al., 2017).

Lastly, Beyer et al. (2012) conducted a study that examined changes in and persistence of behavioural and emotional problems throughout a span of four years from preschool age to the fourth grade. Mental health problems were analyzed using the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL). Findings indicated high persistence of internalizing
behaviours throughout the duration of the study from baseline to follow-up. Externalizing behaviours were also found to be more prominent when children were in Kindergarten in comparison to when they entered primary school. It was found that externalizing behaviours in Kindergarten shifted to both internalizing and externalizing behaviours at the primary grade level. Beyer et al. (2012) found that mental health problems present at follow-up were correlated with pre-existing mental health problems at baseline, as well as with other contributing factors (i.e., gender and family structure).

These findings are substantial evidence that the onset of mental health problems in childhood can have a negative impact on a child’s development and persist into adulthood if not treated. Thus, prevention, early identification and intervention are required in order to improve immediate and long-term mental health for children who have been diagnosed and/or exhibit mental health problems. Despite the pressing need for effective mental health services for children, there are difficulties with access to and availability of resources, which places constraints on use of mental health services among children and their families (Kirby & Keon, 2006). An estimated 75% of children with mental health problems are not receiving the specialized intervention they need (CAMH, 2019; Waddell et al., 2014). It is important that if access to mental health services for treatment is not available, then children should be able to access some form of alternative supports Consequently, given the high prevalence of mental health problems in children, it is crucial to consider alternative ways to promote and support children’s social-emotional well-being (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is imperative to children and youths’ mental health, well-being, and academic success (Denham, Bassett, Zinsser, & Wyatt, 2014;
Weare, 2010). How children comprehend their feelings, interpersonal skills, and empathy are aspects that can have an impact on their resilience to the onset of mental health problems (Weare & Markham, 2003) and plays a significant role in the prevention of mental health difficulties. Thus, the effective mastery of such social-emotional competencies has been found in research studies to be associated with greater well-being; in contrast, the failure to attain proficiency in these areas can lead to numerous personal and social problems that can ultimately have an effect on one’s mental health (Durlak, Dymnicki, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011; Eisenberg, 2006). Core social-emotional competencies are foundational to children’s development (Denham & Brown, 2010), as well as playing an important role in protecting children from stress experienced in their environment (Humphrey & Wigelsworth, 2012). Evidently, successful SEL helps children cope with perceived adverse experiences and equips them with the needed tools to make healthy, sensible choices that direct them towards successful outcomes in life and promote positive mental health (Oberle, Domino, Meier, & Weissberg, 2016).

mental health programs on children’s school outcomes. It was found that school-based mental health programs have positive effects on children’s social and academic outcomes (Kang-Yi et al., 2013). This finding underscores the importance of schools using school-based mental health programs as a means of teaching the necessary social and emotional competencies that can support children’s well-being.

The present Masters thesis project is a community-engaged research project in partnership with the Wellington Catholic District School Board (WCDSB). The Mental Health Lead of the WCDSB approached the University of Guelph to be a third-party evaluator of a primary prevention mental health program that had already been adopted as part of the board’s mental health strategy. The study focused on a qualitative process evaluation of a school-based program, Tools for Life, which aims to teach such social-emotional competencies to young elementary school children. The literature review below covers the following areas: Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Tools for Life, Program Evaluation, and Program Evaluations of Tools for Life. This is followed by the research questions and study design and methods.

**Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Tools for Life is an SEL program that strives to promote the development of social and emotional competencies in children. To better understand the core components of Tools for Life, it is important to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what SEL means and what constitutes it. Academicians, early childhood educators, and parents view SEL as a very important aspect of what a child learns in school; therefore, consideration of SEL as a multi-faceted construct within an educational context would benefit from being grounded in a theoretical perspective (Denham et al., 2014). Denham
and Brown (2010) adopted an organizational perspective on social-emotional development and posited that stability and change in social-emotional development revolve around particular developmental tasks (i.e., successful peer interaction, positive engagement, and managing emotions). The key tasks that children face at each developmental period differ depending on age; therefore, behaviours that show social emotional maturity at one age vary from behaviours that exemplify social-emotional success at a different age (Denham & Brown, 2010). These developmental tasks act as key indicators to evaluate a child’s SEL achievement (Denham & Brown, 2010). Denham and Brown (2010) suggested that multiple theoretical approaches are required to identify important SEL constructs that function within these developmental stages. As a result, Denham and Brown adapted and incorporated Rose Krasnor’s (1997) model of social competence, as well as the model of social-emotional learning (Payton et al., 2000) to develop the Prism Theoretical Model of SEL, which demonstrates certain skill levels, with emotional competence and social problem-solving abilities outlined (Denham & Brown, 2010). In this adaptation, Denham and Brown (2010) constructed a working definition of SEL at the top level of the model that can be defined as “effectiveness in interaction, the result of organized behaviours that meet short-term and long-term developmental needs” (p. 654). This definition serves as a central definition that is then broken down in the lower levels of the prism.

The microelements of SEL are key factors that contribute to a child’s successful, social interaction with peers, parents, and teachers (Denham & Brown, 2010). At the bottom, the most foundational level of the prism consists of particular SEL skills and behaviours that shape part of the assessment of self and others considering SEL success
(Denham & Brown, 2010). Consistent with much of the work done by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CAESL), Denham and Brown (2010) suggested five main SEL competencies at the foundational level: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship/social skills. Self-awareness involves being able to accurately consider personal interests, values and strengths. This SEL competency also includes recognizing and labeling one’s feelings. Self-management includes effectively managing stress, persevering through obstacles and communicating emotions appropriately. Social awareness is the capability to take into consideration other people’s perspective and feelings, as well as appreciate other’s similarities and differences. Responsible decision-making is the ability to recognize problems, make prosocial goals, and figure out effective ways to solve problems; compliance with classroom directions and lack of aggressive behaviour are also attributes of this SEL competency. The goal of the relationship skills competency is to foster positive and meaningful interactions with peers. This includes learning to successfully cooperate, listen, and take turns with their peers (Denham & Brown, 2010).

Children’s mastery of these fundamental SEL competencies is crucial for positive outcomes within an educational context (Denham & Brown, 2010; Oberle et al., 2016; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). SEL competences have been found to facilitate and promote communication with peers and educators, enhance motivation to learn, and improve commitment to school, which are factors that are important for academic success (Zins et al., 2004). The effective mastery of social emotional competencies has been found to be associated with better school performance (Durlak et al., 2011). For instance, children who struggle to cope with negative emotions might lack
the innate capability to concentrate on their learning; whereas, children who frequently display positive emotions might be adept to remaining attentive and engaged with classroom activities (Denham & Brown, 2010). In another study conducted by Bernard (2004), it was found that social emotional competency was a significant indicator of 5-year olds’ level of reading achievement. Such findings (Denham & Brown 2010; Durlak et al., 2011; Zins et al., 2004) are evidence of an established link between SEL in school and positive academic outcomes (Oberle et al., 2016).

A plethora of programs created to educate and promote SEL have been implemented and evaluated with the conclusion that SEL is a necessary component for learning and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011; Oberle et al., 2016; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015). Supported by a large body of research, SEL programs have been found to enhance children’s capacity to self-regulate, correctly identify and express their emotions, and establish positive peer interactions, thereby contributing to academic success and healthy growth and development (Payton, 2000).

For example, a large-scale meta-analysis conducted by CAESL showed that SEL programs had a positive effect on students’ social-emotional competence, social behaviours, academic performance, and attitudes about self and peers (Chung & McBride, 2015). In another meta-analysis, Durlak et al. (2011) examined 215 SEL interventions that revealed significant positive effects on social-emotional skills; such interventions enhanced students’ prosocial behaviour, academic achievement, and decreased conduct and internalizing difficulties. In addition, students who received SEL programming displayed better academic outcomes in comparison to students who did not (Durlak et al., 2011; Oberle et al., 2016). Overall, as seen in previous studies and
programs that have been implemented within an educational setting, outcomes for SEL interventions for children have generally been positive (Chung & McBride, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Kordich Hall & Pearson, 2004; Oberle et al., 2016; Payton et al., 2000). At present, there are many SEL programs that are being used across the United States and Canada (CAESL, 2013). A brief overview of three SEL programs currently being implemented and how they have been evaluated will be described in the next section. The programs identified and included in the CAESL meta-analysis (2013) that will be discussed are as follows: Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS); Reading, Writing, Respect and Resolution (The 4Rs program); and the MindUP program. These three programs were selected for review as they have been rigorously tested and are established, evidence-based programs that have been integrated into the curricula of various US States and Canadian provinces, and they have been shown to improve children’s social and emotional well-being.

**PATHS**

PATHS is a comprehensive program designed to support emotional and social competencies and minimize behavioural problems (PATHS, 2017). The program is intended to be delivered by educators and counsellors using a multi-year approach for children in preschool through Grade 6 (CAESL, 2013). It is delivered two or more times per week for at least 20 to 30 minutes per day. Developmentally-based lessons, materials, and thorough instructions are given to educators to support and guide emotional literacy, self-regulation, social skills, positive relationships, and ability to problem-solve. In addition, each lesson has a detailed script for teachers to follow, which also includes lesson goals, guidelines for implementing the lesson, suggestions for parental
involvement, a list of common questions and answers, additional activities, and handouts for students to take home and complete with their families (CAESL, 2013).

PATHS has been evaluated in multiple large Randomized Control Trials in Prekindergarten to Grade 5 in four American locations (CAESL, 2013). Findings from all studies have consistently displayed an improvement in academic achievement, social behaviour, and social and emotional attitudes and skills, as well as fewer conduct problems and reduced emotional distress (CAESL, 2013). In addition to conducting research on overall effectiveness and behavioural outcomes, a study conducted by Kam, Greenberg and Walls (2013) examined whether principal leadership and the quality of teacher implementation of PATHS in six elementary schools in Pennsylvania would impact child outcomes. In classrooms where teachers implemented PATHS with high quality and received strong principal support, there was a significant decrease in aggressive behaviour within the first four months of implementation. Interestingly, significant effects were only found in learning environments where both principal support and quality of implementation were high. Thus, both principal support and the quality of implementation were important aspects that influenced the success of program impact on child outcomes. Further research was recommended to examine multiple facets of the implementation process that this study did not address (Kam et al., 2013).

In addition, Socially and Emotionally Aware Kids (SEAK) is a 3-year project (2015 -2018) run by the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia. The project is working with school boards to implement PATHS as the chosen SEL curriculum (SEAK, 2017). The project is in collaboration with multi-stakeholders and inter-provincial partnerships concentrating on scaling-up SEL in Atlantic Canada (SEAK, 2017).
SEAK project aims to contribute to and assess the regional scale-up of SEL involving capacity building, integrating into current systems, and piloting SEL curriculum in select schools.

**The 4Rs Program**

The 4Rs program, developed by Morningside Center, was first implemented in New York City public schools and designed for students from Prekindergarten to Grade 8 (Morningside Center, 2018). The program is a school-based intervention that supports the development of literacy skills, awareness of diversity, and conflict resolution skills that trains and supports all educators on how to incorporate the instruction of social and emotional skills into the language arts curriculum (Jones, Aber, & Brown, 2011). The 4Rs program offers an interactive literacy curriculum that uses literature as a foundation for children to engage in reading, writing, discussion, and skills aimed at fostering caring, responsible behaviour (Morningside Center, 2018). Each grade consists of 35 lessons that are divided into seven units. Each unit consists of three steps (Morningside Center, 2018): 1) A Read Aloud of a children’s book that is relevant to the week’s theme (e.g., cooperation), 2) Book Talk involves having conversations, writing and role play to strengthen students’ understanding, and 3) Applied Learning which is to practice the skills related to the theme.

A rigorous study conducted by Jones et al. (2011) examined the effects of the 4Rs program on a cohort of third-grade students in 18 New York City public elementary schools. The participating schools were randomly assigned to either implement the 4Rs program or the control group (i.e., those that did not implement the 4Rs program). After two years of participating in the 4Rs program, it was found that children who participated
in the program, in comparison to those who did not, demonstrated fewer teacher-reported incidences of aggression, fewer signs of depression, less symptoms of attention and hyperactivity, increases in students’ social and emotional skills, and improved academic performance (Jones et al., 2011). A second study conducted by Brown, LaRusso, Aber, and Jones (2010) examined if teachers’ inherent social-emotional skills were a moderator of program impacts on a third grade classroom. Results from the study indicated that teachers’ perceived emotional ability had a positive effect on classroom quality (Brown et al., 2010). Therefore, findings from this study support the notion that the quality of implementation of a program such as the 4Rs is influenced by teachers’ perceived abilities.

**The MindUP Program**

The MindUP program promotes pro-social behaviour in schools by utilizing evidence-based SEL strategies, developmental neuroscience, and positive psychology (The Hawn Foundation, 2018). The lessons include practices promoting mindfulness, attention, and awareness, which are recognized as key aspects that foster a child’s executive functions. The main feature of the program focuses on breathing practices and encourages teachers to incorporate these practices three times daily to promote mindfulness on a regular basis. The program consists of 12 to 15 structured lessons over the span of four units for each age group: Prekindergarten to Grade 2, Grades 3 to 5, and Grades 6 to 8 (The Hawn Foundation, 2018). In addition to breathing practices, lessons include activities aimed at developing SEL competencies such as perspective taking to promote students’ awareness of peers and to promote self-regulation with the goal to reduce stress (CAESL, 2013). A unique feature of the MindUP program is the
introductory modules that teach students about major parts of the brain (e.g., amygdala, prefrontal cortex) and the role these parts play in their emotion and cognition. These lessons provide children with the opportunity to learn about their brain, as well as to recognize how their thoughts and emotions affect their actions (Maloney, Schonert-Reichl, & Roeser, 2016; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

Multiple rigorous outcome evaluation studies that have been conducted have consistently demonstrated that the MindUP program increased pro-social behaviour, empathy, and optimism, and reduced conduct problems and emotional distress (CAESL, 2013; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Each study that has been done on MindUP (e.g., Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) included a process evaluation component. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) assessed implementation dosage (the comprehensiveness of program components delivered) and quality by administering surveys to teachers. The dosage was measured by asking teachers to report how many of the lessons were completed. In addition, teachers were asked to record and track daily implementation of the core practices (i.e., mindful breathing exercises). It was found that teachers completed all lessons and completed an average of 81% of practices in a given week (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) examined two implementation components: fidelity (the degree to which the program was delivered as intended) and dosage. Teachers were provided with a diary in which they were asked to record daily implementation, the degree to which lessons were taught, and the various strategies used to incorporate program concepts into the regular curriculum. Teachers reported delivering elements of lessons 75% of the time. In addition, teachers reported implementing the core exercises an
average of 87% of the time (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Despite these findings, both studies primarily evaluated program outcomes. Researchers recognized that further research is needed to evaluate various dimensions of implementation (e.g., dosage, quality) and participant responsiveness (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

**Tools for Life**

As mentioned earlier, Tools for Life is a social emotional learning program that aims to equip children with life skills such as self-regulation, listening, decision-making, and collaborative problem solving that are necessary to succeed throughout life (Tools for Life, 2019). One of the long-term goals that Tools for Life aims to achieve is fostering resilience in children starting at a young age (Tools for Life, 2019). Resilience is defined as an individual’s ability to show positive adaptation to experiences despite stress and adversity (Conway & McDonough, 2006). Tools for Life promotes wellness and positive mental health by teaching children to identify strategies that they can utilize to cope in response to how they are feeling, thereby helping children discover how to handle their emotions and positively interact with peers. The development of strategies and recognition of what to do when stressed (i.e., using a calm down space) are aspects of Tools for Life that underscore fostering and teaching children to be resilient and, hopefully, prevent mental health problems that can impede academic and psychosocial functioning.

The program is comprised of four modules that target children from preschool age to Grade 8. The primary grades curriculum consists of 27 lessons with the accompanying resources that are required to teach the lesson. For instance, feelings bingo cards, activity sheets, and posters are included to provide visual aids and make the lessons more
interactive and engaging. The primary module intended for children in Grades 1 to 3 uses a common language by which both educators and children use “put-ups” (i.e., verbal praise and comments for one another), saying the names of the “tools” used when trying to problem-solve and making “I feel…” statements. This type of common language allows opportunities for self-expression and consistent ways to resolve conflict. The goal at this level is to advance children in their skills in areas such as cooperation and problem solving (Tools for Life, 2019). In addition, Tools for Life provides a HomeSTART kit in which both a guide and resources are provided for parents to teach their children at home with the goal to reinforce the language and strategies learned at school to be maintained at home also. The HomeSTART kit is not currently being used at any of the schools that are a part of the WCDSB and therefore were not evaluated in this study.

The component of Tools for Life that makes it unique compared to other SEL programs, such as PATHS, The 4Rs, and MindUP is its focus on the necessary tools or behavioural skills that are required to build healthy relationships and successfully navigate conflict-resolution. Although other SEL programs such as PATHS focus on problem solving and conflict-resolution, the methods by which it is taught differ from Tools for Life. PATHS uses activities such as story telling, puppetry, singing, and drawing to convey important SEL concepts (PATHS, 2017). Although there might be some overlap in the kinds of activities used in Tools for Life (e.g., story telling) and other SEL programs (PATHS, The 4Rs, MindUP), the eight overt behavioural strategies that children are taught and encouraged to use are unique to Tools for Life. The tools are consistently taught amongst all age groups with the overarching goal of promoting and fostering a common language both at school and home. In addition, the aim of teaching
these tools is to also equip children with the knowledge of what to do when a potential problem arises. The tools that make up the Tools for Life are as follows (2019):

1. **Talking it out**: Indicate to your peers how you are feeling in response to what they did and to use a kind tone of voice while doing so.
2. **Ignore**: Encourage children to ignore mean comments, when someone is being mean or distracting.
3. **Walk away**: Encourage children to walk away from situations where they might make a poor choice or get into trouble.
4. **Apologize**: Encourage children to recognize how they might act towards others when angry and to be able to say sorry for their actions.
5. **Sharing/ Taking turns**: To avoid a problem, children should identify when it would be best to share and take turns with their peers.
6. **Asking for Help**: When children have tried to solve the problem on their own and it was not successfully resolved, children should then ask for help from teachers, parents etc.
7. **Compromise**: When children have different ideas of what they want to do (i.e., playing different games) and jointly make the decision to do one activity first followed by the other activity.
8. **Chance**: Using a chance game such as flip a coin or rock paper scissors to make a fair decision.

The creation of these tools is reflective of the core competencies that are foundational to SEL. Although in theory SEL programs are posited to produce positive effects (Durlak et al., 2011; Payton et al., 2000), there is a lack of literature that explores the quality and feasibility of the implementation of programs such as the one described above. Evaluative research must be conducted on the implementation of Tools for Life to gain further insight into the processes of Tools for Life and examine whether Tools for Life is being implemented properly. Previous research on Tools for Life consisted of a pilot study from 2009 to 2011 (Tools for Life, 2019). At present, a large-scale program
evaluation study is being conducted to examine the effectiveness of Tools for Life in Jackson, Mississippi (RAND, 2019). It is important to mention that the RAND study is the first rigorous outcome study done on Tools for Life.

**Program Evaluation**

Program evaluation derives from the basic idea that programs should have noticeable benefits (Berk & Rossi, 1999; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 2018). Rossi et al. (2018) defined program evaluation as the “use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their organizational environments and are designed to inform social action to improve social conditions” (p. 6). In recent years, this notion of program evaluation has evolved to be known as evaluation research (Berk & Rossi, 1999). Evaluation research involves the design of social programs, continuous tracking of how well programs are performing, the impact of a program, and analysis of benefits relative to the programs costs (Berk & Rossi, 1999). There are different types of program evaluation, each of which has its own components that guide the design and conduct of evaluation (Chen, 2015). A brief description of the basic concepts and theories that are fundamental to the practice of program evaluation will be outlined in this section as follows: program theory, outcome evaluation, and process evaluation.

**Program theory.** Program theory serves as a model of how a program contributes to a series of intermediate results and to the anticipated or observed outcomes (Chen, 2015). Weiss (1998) defines program theory as “the mechanisms that mediate between the delivery of the program and the emergence of the outcomes of interest” (p. 57). Program theory helps us to understand the causal processes that occur during the delivery
of the program and to identify what features of the program are essential to its functioning (Bickman & Peterson, 1990; Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Program theory does not judge the effectiveness of a program based on its outcomes, but rather by its context.

Program theory consists of two components: theory of change and theory of action (Chen, 2015). Theory of change posits how a program will achieve certain long-term outcomes through a logical progression of intermediate outcomes (Breur, Lee, De Siva, & Lund, 2016). Providing further context, we can view theory of change as the processes (i.e., psychological, social) or drivers by which changes come about for individuals (Chen, 2015). Secondly, theory of action describes how programs are created to initiate the proposed theory of change (Chen, 2015). Applying this to Tools for Life, the theory of change would be the speculation that, upon completion of the program, children’s social-emotional skills would increase in comparison to their social-emotional skills prior to the program. In accordance with theory of action, the change in a child’s behaviour could be attributed to the resources, activities, and lessons used to teach Tools for Life. To better capture insight into and further understanding of the set of beliefs that underlie action, logic models serve as a visual representation of the intervention’s program theory.

Logic models are often utilized to operationalize program theory and to help better understand the finer causal mechanisms of a program (Bickman, 2000; Brousselle & Champagne, 2010). Logic models are a visual method and are often constructed during the design stage of a program to show the “logic” of how a program’s inputs and activities lead to the anticipated short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes and overall impact (Clapham, Manning, Williams, O’Brien, & Sutherland, 2017; Knowlton &
Phillips, 2013). Furthermore, logic models depict how a program operates and guides the design of an evaluation plan (Clapham et al., 2017; Knowlton & Phillips, 2013). Clapham et al. (2017) demonstrated how the development of a logic model underpinned the implementation and outcome evaluation of the Kids Together program, which aims to promote and support inclusion for children with disabilities and/or diverse needs attending mainstream early learning settings. The logic model was informed by initial interviews with key stakeholders to ensure that the logic model was clear and conveyed the how and why of the Kids Together program. The interview questions were informed by the anticipated outcomes identified in the logic model (i.e., short-, medium-, long-term). Results from the study indicated that the Kids Together program was a successful model for encouraging inclusion in a variety of settings essential to early learning. The evaluators identified three lessons learned in light of using a logic model: 1) the flexibility of a logic model is helpful when analyzing hypotheses made by evaluation researchers with key informants (e.g., program developers, service providers); 2) logic models provide the opportunity to create a collaborative dialogue and exchange of ideas during the evaluation process; and 3) logic models serve as a framework for analysis and to report findings from the evaluation (Clapham et al., 2017).

Although logic models can guide an outcome evaluation of a program (i.e., Kids Together), logic models also serve as a powerful tool for assessing the process objectives of a program tied to proper implementation. Logic models make it possible to establish whether or not the program has been faithfully and successfully implemented and can inform the required changes needed for program implementation to be successful (Peyton & Scicchitano, 2017). By doing so, evaluators and key stakeholders can develop with
better specificity the actions that link program goals and activities to program outputs 
(Peyton & Scicchitano, 2017). Therefore, a thorough analysis of the implementation of a 
program can facilitate changes that will, in turn, produce a more effective program 
(Peyton & Scicchitano, 2017). For example, the use of a logic model for school-based 
programs provided a conceptual framework for building logical links between pre-service 
teacher preparation, in-service teacher performance, and students’ expected behavioural 
outcomes (Newton, Poon, Nunes, & Stone, 2013).

In the present study, a logic model was developed for Tools for Life (see 
Appendix A) that aimed to serve as an outline for collecting data to examine how well 
Tools for Life was implemented (Newton et al., 2013; Peyton & Scicchitano, 2017). The 
Tools for Life logic model was developed in collaboration with my thesis advisor, Dr. 
Clare MacMartin, and advisory committee member, Dr. John Dwyer, and in consultation 
with the Mental Health Lead of the WCDSB to ensure its accuracy. The primary Tools 
for Life manual served as a supporting document for the development of the model 
(Tools for Life, 2015). The manual consists of a breakdown of each lesson, as well as the 
corresponding activities and resources required. In addition, the lessons highlight the 
skills being addressed and its link to the Ontario curriculum. The logic model produced 
identified two target groups of participants (educators and children). It is also important 
to note that the stated activities and goals differed for each target group. Lastly, the use of 
downward arrows (see Appendix A) indicated the links between the target group, 
program activities/required resources, and short-term and long-term goals.

**Outcome evaluation.** This type of evaluation takes place in the last stage of the 
program and emphasizes the program’s outcome (Chen, 2015). Outcome evaluation
assesses whether changes in outcomes can be causally attributed to the program’s intervention (Chen, 2015). The main objective of this type of evaluation is to investigate the overall effectiveness of a program. When using this type of evaluation, aspects of criteria that must be met to determine whether or not a program is effective involve factors such as whether the stated long-term goals are achieved as a result of program participation (i.e., behaviour change).

It is evident from the abundance of research that attainment of certain social-emotional skills is critical in enriching a child’s cognitive and social development. As a result, healthy peer interactions, self-regulation, and expression of emotions are target behaviours that are foundational to developing programs and interventions that aim to enhance children’s social emotional growth as an outcome. There are a large number of SEL programs whose developers may claim that the programs are effective; however, there are multiple questions regarding how these programs are implemented. Process evaluation can address these questions.

Process evaluation. Evaluation research is multi-dimensional in that its sole attention should not just be on a program’s outcomes, but should also consider and examine the implementation of a program (Berk & Rossi, 1999; Chen, 2015). Without information about implementation, we cannot know whether a lack of successful outcomes is due to a failure of the program theory or a failure to implement the program properly (Lipsey & Cordray, 2000). Process evaluation is adept at investigating the dynamics of how components of the program work, as well as aiming to capture the various factors that either enhance or hinder the implementation of a program (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). Performing process evaluations can give further
insight into the implementation process and provide helpful information that can make parts of the program that need to be improved more apparent. When interventions lead to significant outcomes, it is important to identify which aspects of the program contributed to its success and which aspects did not (Linnan & Steckler, 2002). Furthermore, essential insight can be gained about what types of intervention methods can and/or cannot be routinely delivered for specific behaviours, program participants, and contexts (Ward, Windsor, & Atkinson, 2012). Such information allows for tailoring of program content method and structure to the capacity of its providers, which can expand to implementation for other services and also benefit more program participants (Ward et al., 2012).

Process evaluations make important connections to better understanding and improving theory-informed interventions (Linnan & Steckler, 2002). Identifying and understanding mechanisms for how and why certain aspects of the program are either successful or unsuccessful is key to revising theory and program effectiveness (Linnan & Steckler, 2002). Before a program can be evaluated for overall outcomes and concluded to be an effective program, it is important to analyze the components that make up the program. For example, if a program was not implemented as intended then a reasonable inference would be that low implementation of the program hindered overall effectiveness (Baranowski & Stables, 2000). Therefore, evaluators must consider the key components that are used to structure and carry out a process evaluation (Baranowski & Stables, 2000; Linnan & Steckler, 2002). Baranowski and Stables proposed the following key concepts that provide a conceptual framework for process evaluation (2000):
1. **Context**: Characteristics of the broader environments (e.g., social, political and economic) that may impact program implementation

2. **Recruitment**: The methods used to attract potential participants for the program. Recruitment happens at the individual and community level (i.e., agencies, implementers)

3. **Reach**: The number of participants in a program that are part of the intended target audience

4. **Maintenance**: The task of keeping program recipients involved in the program and the data collection phase

5. **Resources**: Materials or qualities of agencies, implementers, or target audience required to achieve program objectives

6. **Implementation**: The extent to which the program was implemented as intended and received by the intended target audience

7. **Barriers**: Any problems encountered in reaching the participants

8. **Dose Delivered**: The proportion of the intended program that is actually delivered to program recipients

9. **Dose Received**: The degree to which program recipients engage with, are receptive to and/or use suggested program materials

10. **Fidelity**: The quality and integrity of the implementation of a program. Fidelity is a function of the implementer.

It is essential that the resources and methods used to implement the program be evaluated first. Findings from process evaluation can provide suggestions for further improvement in regards to the resources and services, as well as assist in the development and refinement of the program. Although there is evidence to support the effectiveness and quality of an array of SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Kordich Hall, & Pearson, 2004; Oberle et al., 2016; Zins et al., 2004), examination of the feasibility and sustainability of these programs when implemented in practical contexts needs further investigation. In order to analyze the feasibility of such programs, multiple dimensions of implementation
(e.g., context, resources, maintenance, fidelity) need to be taken into account (Maloney, Schonert-Reichl, & Roeser, 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Within the context of schools, for example, educators have a primary responsibility to implement programs (Franklin, Kim, Ryan, Kelly, & Montgomery, 2012). Since educators are important figures in teaching this program, it is important to understand what educators indicate as identified needs for their students, any obstacles that they believe to exist, and any concerns related to their teaching experiences with the delivery of the program. For example, Reinke, Herman, Puri, and Goel (2011) conducted a study in which they administered surveys to 292 teachers to gain insight on teachers’ self-reported knowledge, skills, and training experiences of classroom-based behavioural interventions, as well as teachers’ perceived challenges to supporting children’s mental health needs in their school environments. Based on the findings, there were three areas for additional training recognized by most teachers: 1) approaches to best support children with externalizing behaviour problems; 2) learning how to recognize and identify mental health problems in children; and 3) training in classroom management and behavioural supports and intervention strategies (Reinke et al., 2011). More than half the teachers also reported three main barriers impeding support of children with mental health needs: 1) lack of programs to support parents; 2) lack of prevention programs for both externalizing and internalizing behaviours; and 3) personnel training and consultation (Reinke et al., 2011). In addition, for a program that supports children’s mental health needs, it was found that educators must perceive the program as not only meeting students’ needs but also as one that complements their teaching approach. The findings from the study underscore the need for effective training and ongoing
consultation for teachers to perceive themselves as fulfilling a supportive role (Reinke et al., 2011). Future studies should consider the duration of training and types of ongoing support necessary for educators to perceive themselves as competent enough to implement the program effectively (Maloney et al., 2016). Based on these findings (Reinke et al., 2011), it is crucial that service providers and researchers continue to examine educators’ perspectives on the programs they are expected to teach, for example, Tools for Life. Such findings would provide researchers and, in particular, the program developer with information about whether extra resources and/or materials are needed or if the program is one that can be maintained in the school(s) where it is being delivered.

To date, little attention has been focused on analyzing how program implementation influences child outcomes in social and emotional promotion programs (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000).

The broader implications of this research topic suggest that there is a research-to-practice gap of the implementation of evidence-based mental health programs within a school setting (Reinke et al., 2011). Thus, further research is needed to gain insight on educators’ viewpoints, as it can provide valuable feedback as to whether or not there are any contextual influences that can be used to bridge the gap (Reinke et al., 2011). Further research is needed to explore teachers’ perceptions of their ability to teach programs (e.g., Tools for Life) that are integrated into the curricula. Previous studies have typically examined single facets of implementation (e.g., quality of the PATHS program; Kam et al., 2003) or the quality and dosage delivered of the MindUP program (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) and have not often looked at the interconnections among multiple implementation components (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2005).
Therefore, results point to the need for studies to examine numerous components of the implementation process (e.g., dosage, quality of delivery, fidelity, participant responsiveness, and context) of SEL programs (i.e., Tools for Life, PATHS and MindUP (Kam et al., 2003; Maloney et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). At this point, a review of program evaluations of Tools for Life is warranted to consider these questions.

**Program Evaluations of Tools for Life**

KidsLINK conducted a pilot evaluation study on the Tools for Life curriculum from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 3 in Waterloo Region schools that were first introduced to Tools for Life in the 2008 to 2009 school year (Tools for Life, 2019). The pilot study lasted for three years and examined the worth, effectiveness, and usefulness of the Tools for Life curriculum. This was a mixed-methods study that collected both quantitative and qualitative data from surveys. Attempts to contact the investigator to gather more information, including about study design and data collection, were unsuccessful. The first data report was released in June 2009 and was based on key findings from preliminary Tools for Life teacher survey data from 29 teachers who were implementing Tools for Life in their classroom and eight principals who completed a Tools for Life survey. The report from the teacher survey data will be delineated here as the focus of the proposed project focuses on teachers as the sample.

Key findings from the survey data indicated: 85.7% of classrooms received all lessons, 96% of teachers used the Tools for Life program in their classrooms, and 96% of teachers reported using Tools for Life resources in their classroom (Tools for Life, 2019). Secondly, evaluators looked at the perceived professional usefulness of Tools for Life curriculum. It was found that 87.5% of teachers agreed that Tools for Life had
enhanced the quality of their teaching. Participants also agreed that they could explain why the use of Tools for Life was beneficial and agreed that the Tools for Life curriculum aligned with class-wide learning objectives (95.8%). Additionally, teachers reported agreeing that the Tools for Life resources provided are helpful with the teaching activities (100%) and that the Tools for Life curriculum was easy to implement in daily teaching routines (95.8%). Lastly, findings examined the perceived sustainability of Tools for Life. It was found that 95.8% of teachers reported that they would likely continue to implement Tools for Life. Participants also agreed (88.9%) that, if implemented school-wide, Tools for Life would significantly change students’ outcomes (Tools for Life, 2019). The pilot study conducted in Waterloo also examined the following components of implementation: dose received, resources, perceived usefulness, and sustainability (Tools for Life, 2019).

The second program evaluation of Tools for Life is being conducted by the RAND Corporation (“Research and Development”) which is a non-profit American research organization that addresses social issues that impact people through research and analysis with the aim of improving policy and decision-making (RAND, 2019). RAND (2019) is currently conducting a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) at all 52 elementary and middle schools in the Jackson Public School District in Mississippi. All schools were randomly assigned to either the Tools for Life intervention group or the control group. The aim was to assess the implementation, impact, and effectiveness of Tools for Life using a mixed methodological approach. The intended evaluation tools to collect data consist of: school climate surveys, educator and student self-evaluations, Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scale, evaluating online staff logs tracking Tools for
Life practices, assessing administrative data, and case studies in six schools that will consist of structured observations and interviews with staff and focus groups. The methodology being used for the RAND study aims to answer the following research questions: 1) How is Tools for Life delivered to school staff and students? 2) How does Tools for Life implementation vary across schools? 3) What are some of the obstacles or facilitators to implementing Tools for Life? 4) Do staff and students in Tools for Life schools see better improvements in outcomes than control schools? 5) Are there any unforeseen factors or outcomes due to the program? 6) How cost-effective is Tools for Life in improving staff and student outcomes? RAND (2019) hypothesizes that students in the Tools for Life intervention group will display an increase their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills as compared with control group students. Expected outcomes after implementation of Tools for Life also include: improved perceptions of school safety amongst students and staff, enhanced school climate, improved teacher and student attendance, and reduction in rates of office disciplinary referrals and aggressive incidents (RAND, 2019). The first three research questions that are addressed in the RAND study make up the process evaluation piece of the study. RAND is specifically examining how Tools for Life is delivered (dosage), if implementation varies across schools (context, fidelity), and barriers.

The present study aimed to assess the implementation of the Tools for life program in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms using qualitative inquiry in the form of a process evaluation. At the time of the write-up of this thesis, educators who teach at the Kindergarten level to Grade 3 in the WCDSB have all received Tools for Life training in the form of a half-day introduction to the program in small groups facilitated by two
trainers who had received prior training (B. Kenyon, personal communication, May 13th, 2019). The process evaluation was conducted in response to a community need identified by the WCDSB.

The following four research questions were used to guide the analysis of the proposed project: 1) What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about the program? Do these beliefs and expectations determine the extent to which they implement the program? 2) What are the perceived barriers or facilitators in implementing Tools for Life? 3) Do teachers think Tools for Life is successful in aiding children with social emotional development? 4) How is the practice of inclusivity incorporated into teaching Tools for Life?

Although there was some overlap between the present study and the aforementioned Tools for Life evaluations, there are key differences with regard to research questions, study design, the time frame of the study, the jurisdiction and size of study samples, and forms of data collection and analysis. For example, the RAND study is being conducted in Mississippi; the Waterloo pilot study was conducted from 2009 to 2011 in a different school board in southwest Ontario than the present study. The RAND study involves a quasi-experimental design including random assignment and control groups; as mentioned, no information is available regarding the design and sampling used in the Waterloo pilot study. The present study is an interview study employing purposive sampling. The data collected in the pilot study in Waterloo was retrieved from survey responses and the RAND study is using a variety of data sources (including case studies and teacher logs). Data in the present study consisted of semi-structured interviews analyzed using thematic analysis, in the hopes that this approach would generate more
insightful, in-depth findings that those of the Waterloo study. The present study looked at educators’ experiences with and perceptions of training and ongoing support for implementing Tools for Life, which was not a focus in the Waterloo pilot study. The present thesis project identified and examined any perceived barriers similar to the RAND study, how implementation varied based on teachers’ beliefs and expectations (context, implementation), the perceived usefulness of Tools for Life for enhancing students’ social emotional development (dose), and the practice of inclusivity in teaching Tools for Life (context).

Currently, over 100 schools in North America have adopted the Tools for Life program (Tools for Life, 2019). However, at present, there are no published findings from the RAND study; the projected date of completion for the RAND study is 2019. Despite the pilot evaluation study in Waterloo, Ontario, there is no published research that specifically focuses on the implementation of Tools for Life in Canadian schools. There are contextual and cultural factors that may differ between the United States and Canada, which suggests the importance of conducting research on Tools for Life in Canadian schools. To build a more comprehensive understanding of Tools for Life, it is important to gain further knowledge of the implementation of the program by Canadian school boards, as well as about Canadian educators’ perspectives on the program.
Chapter 2: Methods

Introduction

The present research project consisted of a qualitative process evaluation with teachers and Early Childhood Educators in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes in WCDSB regarding their use of Tools for Life. Areas of focus for the interviews concerned educators’ perceptions about the effectiveness, accessibility, and manageability of program delivery, along with barriers to, and facilitators of, its implementation. For example, part of the moral philosophy of Catholic education in Ontario concerns student inclusiveness. The equity and inclusive education plan is an Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) initiative which envisions that:

All students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. Everyone must feel safe, comfortable and accepted in a school community where diversity is valued, respect for others is demonstrated and a commitment to establishing a just and caring society is evident. (p. 5)

WCDSB does not have specialized classrooms for children with disabilities/special needs separate from mainstream classrooms. Dr. Kenyon, the Mental Health Lead, therefore believed that it would be of benefit to better understand teachers’ perceptions of and practices in teaching Tools for Life to all students with a diverse range of needs and accommodations.
Study Design and Methods

**Ethical considerations.** Ethics approval at the WCDSB was obtained from the Executive Council (see Appendix B) after providing them with an Executive Summary of the proposed research project (see Appendix C). Executive Council includes the Director of Education, Superintendents of Education, Operations, Finance, and Human Resources, the Assistant Superintendent of Program, and Administrator of Student Support Services and Labour Relations. Ethics approval from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board (REB) was received in Winter 2018 (see Appendix D). Informed consent was obtained from participants upon initial meeting with participants who expressed interest (see Appendix F). Participants were also informed that data collected from this study might be used to publish reports. If participants had any inquiries or concerns about the study, my contact information, as well as Dr. Clare MacMartin’s contact information, were provided. Participants were reminded that their consent was ongoing and that their participation throughout the duration of this study was voluntary. Participants were reminded that they could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any given time.

*Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.* Participants were informed that research findings would be reported in the write-up of this thesis using anonymized quotations from the interview transcripts to illustrate the research claims. To reduce the risk of identity recognition by readers, the use of pseudonyms and alteration of some details that could lead to identification of students, staff, classrooms, or schools were implemented. Participants were also informed that, if they were uncomfortable disclosing their response to a certain question, they were not required to do so. The...
entire interview, including questions in the form of digitized audiotapes and the participants’ responses, were stored on a password protected, encrypted laptop that could only be accessed by the research team. Once the project was completed and the thesis is approved by the examining committee, the thesis was submitted to the University of Guelph Atrium. In addition, the data produced by this study are being properly stored and archived for three years so that if editors or peer-reviewers on journals have questions about analyses in submitted manuscripts these could be addressed. After three years, the audiotaped data will be erased.

**Incentives to participate.** Participants received a $25 Tim Hortons gift card for their participation. It was also assumed that participants would benefit from having their opinions about the implementation of Tools for Life heard. Additionally, once the interview data were transcribed and analyzed, participants who indicated so on the consent forms, received a summary of the findings from this study.

**Eligibility criteria.** At the time of the writing of this thesis, all Kindergarten to Grade 3 educators are required to implement Tools for Life in their classrooms. For the purpose of the present study, participants were required to meet all of the following eligibility criteria at the time of data collection: (1) individuals who were certified teachers or ECEs with the WCDSB, (2) teachers and ECEs who teach Kindergarten or primary Grades 1 to 3, and (3) teachers and ECEs who have been trained or facilitated Tools for Life in some capacity. Ideally, I wanted to capture a range of diverse perspectives and therefore the study was open to all schools that are part of the WCDSB.

**Participant recruitment.** For the purpose of recruitment, a purposive sampling technique was utilized (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Purposive sampling is not a random
sampling technique, but rather is applied when seeking out participants for a specific purpose associated with gaining insight on a particular topic. Therefore, participants in the present study were selected on the basis of a shared characteristic (e.g., as educators using Tools for Life) to provide insight on the implementation of Tools for Life (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Initial e-mails providing information on the study were sent by the Mental Health Lead of the WCDSB to educators who were using Tools for Life in their classrooms (see Appendix E for recruitment materials). These initial e-mails were sent by the Mental Health Lead to identify individuals who were interested in participating. Initial in-person meetings were arranged with teachers who expressed interest in participating. Initial meetings involved me and potential participants, took place at their school site, and lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes. I gave participants information regarding the purpose of the study, an opportunity to ask any questions they may have, and a copy of the consent form for their own personal records. I retained a copy of the consent form with the participant’s signature for those who agreed to participate (see Appendix F). At the time of this meeting, I scheduled another meeting date and time with participants for the semi-structured interview to take place. Although the sample of interest did not include the elementary school children who were being taught Tools for Life, letters were sent out to parents to provide them with updates and an overview of the proposed research project of Tools for Life for the school year to come.

**Participants.** A sample size of between 15 to 30 individuals is common in qualitative research (e.g., interviews) that aims to identify patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The goal of the present study was to capture a breadth of perspectives and, therefore, the study included 28 participants. There were 12 participants
who were Kindergarten teachers, eight ECEs, and eight educators who taught at the primary level (Grades 1 to 3). Of the 28 educators who were interviewed, 18 participants identified receiving Tools for Life training; additionally, two participants acknowledged receiving training via their participation in the Tools for Life pilot program. Conversely, eight participants discussed implementing Tools for Life despite not having received any form of Tools for Life training.

**Data Collection**

Interviews are suitable for investigating experiences that participants are personally invested in (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In accordance with the purpose and objectives of the current study, semi-structured interviews with participants were used. The semi-structured interview format was characterized by use of relatively open-ended questions that addressed the aims of the study by encouraging a wide range of teachers’ perceptions about their experiences using the Tools for Life program. More closed-ended or follow-up questions were used to clarify participants’ contributions and/or to encourage more elaborated contributions. It was viewed as critical to gain an in-depth understanding of educators’ experiences of implementing Tools for Life, since it is a required part of their job that is to be done weekly.

A preliminary meeting took place in December 2017 with Child and Youth workers (CYW) employed at the WCDSB who worked with the Mental Health Lead and had been involved in monitoring/observing implementation of Tools for Life. The research team generated a majority of the interview questions; however, the CYWs acted as key informants in assisting with the further development and refinement of interview
questions (see Appendix G). The questions that were made for the interview guide consisted of prompting, open-ended questions to explore participants’ views.

The analysis of the Tools for Life program implementation was informed and guided by Baranowski and Stables (2000) who developed a framework for implementation fidelity. This framework highlights several areas for investigation and was used to guide the development of interview questions relevant to the different components of process evaluation (see Table 1). However, it is important to mention that not all of the components of implementation in Baranowski and Stables were used to inform the interview questions used in the present study. For instance, Recruitment was not particularly relevant as the adoption of Tools for Life occurred at the school board level. Moreover, the HomeSTART kit was not in use and thus families were not involved in the implementation of Tools for Life at home. Secondly, Reach did not inform the interview questions, as there was board-wide integration of Tools for Life into the curriculum. In the context of compulsory education, the implementation of Tools for Life fully reached the classroom level. The interviews were used to investigate educators’ perceptions of Tools for Life implementation, the extent to which any observed changes happened in the classroom, as well as any perceived difficulties or concerns with implementation. A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted in rooms booked out at several schools part of the WCDSB, depending on what was most convenient and accessible for participants. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The length and duration of the interviews ranged from approximately twenty to forty-four minutes.
Table 1

Tools for Life Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Components</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Resources                 | (Baranowski & Stables, 2000) | What did you find useful when you received training?  
*Was there anything about the training for Tools for Life that you would change?  
*Anything that could have been further provided in training that would support your confidence in implementing Tools for Life? |
| Resources/ Barrier        | (Baranowski & Stables, 2000) | Did trainers provide you with scenarios of challenges you may encounter and provide you with way to handle it?  
* Did you feel supported? |
| Dose Delivered/ Implementation/ Fidelity | (Baranowski & Stables, 2000) | *Sometimes plans can’t be carried out as expected due to certain circumstances that may arise in your classroom… Were the Teaching Activities implemented as planned?  
*If not carried out as planned, please look at this layout and tell me which lessons you tailored and how? |
| Resources                 | (Baranowski & Stables, 2000). | Were the suggested accompanying materials used when you taught Tools for Life lessons?  
* For example, calm down space, books, music  
* Did you use any additional supporting materials? |
| Dose Received             | (Baranowski & Stables, 2000) | What were some of the aspects you liked about the Tools for Life program?  
* Was it easy to implement?  
* Were the lessons engaging and interactive for the kids? |
<p>| Dose Received             | (Baranowski &amp; | Were there any aspects of Tools for Life |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dose received</td>
<td>(Baranowski &amp; Stables, 2000)</td>
<td>What degree do you observe children using Tools for Life skills?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Were children using Tools for Life language more frequently?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Using the calm down space?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>(Baranowski &amp; Stables, 2000)</td>
<td>What strategies do you use to keep children immersed/involved in the program beyond just the lessons?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to the intervention</td>
<td>(Hickey et al., 2016)</td>
<td>Do you have any suggestions for any improvements that can be made for Tools for Life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation, Dose Received</td>
<td>(Baranowski &amp; Stables, 2000; Linnan &amp; Steckler, 2002)</td>
<td>Was there anything unexpected that occurred in the Tools for Life program for the children or for you as a facilitator in the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation/ Fidelity</td>
<td>(Baranowski &amp; Stables, 2000; Linnan &amp; Steckler, 2002)</td>
<td>Are there any other teaching activities that you would suggest integrating into regular programming?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* If so, have you in the past incorporated these into lessons?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Barrier                   | (Baranowski & Stables, 2000; Linnan & Steckler, 2002) | *Sometimes things come up that can interfere with your daily routine. For instance, there are different types of barriers such as personal, interpersonal and environmental (time) 
Were there any challenges that you encountered when implementing Tools for Life? |
<p>|                           |                                    | * Personal- did you feel confident?                                        |
|                           |                                    | * Interpersonal- challenges associated with different children’s capacities? |
|                           |                                    | * Environmental- time, competing curriculum demands, size of the class    |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>(Baranowski &amp; Stables, 2000)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you know who to seek support from and have you in the past if you are experiencing difficulties and need consultation?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* Does the help exist, and have you used it?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>* If not, if you actually needed help would you know who to go to?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>(Baranowski &amp; Stables, 2000)</th>
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<tr>
<td>*I am aware to the philosophy of inclusion the board has</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>* Have you had children with special needs in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What strategies do you use when teaching Tools for Life to assists students who require additional support and/or accommodations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* If so, having tried these adopted lessons for such students, is there anything different that you would do now?</td>
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* Preamble and Verbal Prompts

**Researcher Positionality**

Part of my role, as a qualitative researcher, is to acknowledge my own positionality within my research and make myself visible as part of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For this reason, I believe it is important to include a reflexive statement that reflects upon the construction of my own knowledge, personal values, and research positioning. Prior to the acceptance of my offer to undertake the Master’s program at Guelph, I was largely influenced to subscribe to a positivist epistemological approach. Throughout my Psychology undergraduate degree, I was taught to believe that there was a singular, absolute truth to explain the effectiveness of interventions. Assessing the effectiveness of an intervention could only be done through established scientific methods. Although I still believe that quantitative post-
positivist research holds value in producing both reliable and valid evidence, I have come to recognize that there are elements of programs and interventions that are situated within a particular time, place, and social context, understanding of which is not accessible using quantitative approaches. I take the stance that knowledge is socially influenced and that there could be one truth or multiple truths in a certain context; therefore, I subscribe to a critical realist researcher identity.

As a critical realist, I acknowledge that there is a real and knowable world, as well as acknowledging and valuing the subjectivity inherent in the knowledge produced; this knowledge is purported to hold an element of truth in certain contexts (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). A critical realist lens validates that knowledge produced is socially influenced and has contextual implications. Such considerations are apparent in the type of evaluation I conducted for my research, as well as reflected in the research questions and interview questions that I developed.

As a researcher, I find that there are multiple reasons that underscore my interest in conducting research. As someone who in the past has experienced mental health problems, my lived experience has contributed to my passion for advocating for positive mental health promotion for others. I found myself drawn to studying social programs and services that aimed to promote positive mental health amongst children and youth. Prior to beginning my Master’s degree, my two years of practical experience in the human services field provided insight about the availability of programs and interventions out there. I found myself continuously questioning, “Are these programs doing what they’re intended to do?” My passion for mental health
advocacy, combined with my ongoing curiosity about how these programs are doing, led to my growing interest in program evaluation research.

Part of my identity in the process of conducting this research was taking on the role of an external evaluator. As an evaluator, I am aware that, through the research process, I may have projected my own personal biases and assumptions onto participants at times in relation to what they discussed in response to the follow-up questions I asked. Participants were also aware that I had partnered with the Mental Health Lead to evaluate the implementation of the Tools for Life program. This also may have had an impact on the research given the power differentials between the Mental Health Lead (who was responsible for bringing the program to the board) and the teachers (who are expected to implement the program). This may have had a negative impact on the research gathered, given that some participants may have been hesitant to share with me program elements they had not implemented. Additionally, as I did not study a group of which I am a member, I held outsider status. I have not delivered the Tools for Life program, nor am I a certified teacher at the board; however, being an outsider can enhance research because individuals external to the group may be in some ways better able to conceptualize the experiences than group members by holding a broader perspective that enables the seeing of connections and patterns more clearly (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). It is important to comment that having an insider or outsider status is not the core component to best understanding participants’ experiences. Accordingly, I gave consideration to my own personal biases and perspectives to try and remain as authentic and open to the experiences of my research participants and to adequately represent those experiences in the findings.
(Dwyer & Buckle, 2009); this was particularly important because I used an inductive form of thematic analysis as my research method.

**Data Analysis**

**Inductive thematic analysis.** This study aimed to collect individuals’ self-reported perceptions of, beliefs about, and teaching experiences with Tools for Life, using thematic analysis (TA) as a form of qualitative process evaluation. Inductive TA aims to generate an analysis from the bottom (the data) up (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is a discovery-oriented process, where both themes and patterns are identified when the data has been gathered. A main strength of TA that makes it appealing to use for the purpose of analysis is its flexibility. Consequently, TA can be applied to a variety of research inquiries, data collection methods, sample size, and, most importantly, can be used for the purpose of deriving meaning from the data. A notable aspect of TA that appealed to me, as a novice qualitative researcher, is that TA is an accessible method that provides an opportunity to learn basic data handling and coding skills. For this reason, TA is viewed as an appropriate analytic tool suitable for the scope of a Master of Science thesis project (see Braun & Clarke, 2013). TA has also been viewed as a useful method for conducting applied research (Braun & Clarke 2013) and, therefore, has been used in a growing body of literature that concerns program evaluation (e.g. Campbell, Torr, & Cologon, 2014; Melo, de Moura, Aires, & Cunha, 2013). The themes and patterns developed from this study about Tools for Life will be used to help personnel at the school board understand the implementation of Tools for Life and to potentially improve program training and delivery.
Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that there are six stages in Inductive TA: familiarizing yourself with the data, creating initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing a final report. It is these phases that guided my analysis for the current study.

**Familiarizing yourself with the data.** Analysis essentially starts with a process of immersion in the data. I began by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews that were recorded via the QuickTime application on my encrypted laptop. I transcribed the interviews verbatim in separate Microsoft Word documents. The interviews were typically transcribed within 24 to 48 hours after the interview; however, at times this varied due to the length of some interview recordings that required more time to transcribe. The interview transcripts included all filler words (i.e., *uh, um, hm, mhmm* etc.), as well as participants’ and researchers’ laughter and any moments of silence. Upon completion of transcribing an interview, I would replay the audio and go through the interview transcript to ensure accuracy. I then printed out interview transcripts to further familiarize myself with the data. I actively read through the transcripts and handwrote notes of my initial impressions, as well as making notes of recurring concepts that could potentially be of relevance to future coding.

**Creating initial codes.** A code is a word or brief phrase that captures why a piece of the data is perceived by the researcher as useful (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I generated a list of initial codes and any findings within the data that were interesting regarding the implementation of Tools for Life, as well as educators’ perceptions of the Tools for Life program. I then proceeded to exhaustively code the interview transcripts line-by-line and ensure that codes were data-derived. That is, I aimed to
identify anything and everything of interest in answering the research questions within the entire data set and to ensure that the codes generated provided a succinct summary of the explicit content of the data, grounded in the semantic meaning of the wording of the interviews. Thus, this process involved creating short descriptors of the data that mirrored participants’ language and concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). At this phase, I ensured I went through each transcript and gave each transcript an equal amount of thorough attention. While ensuring that I maintained the context of extracts, I coded for as many patterns as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, I coded approximately 4,400 separate stretches of text.

**Searching for themes.** A theme has a central organizing concept that conveys to the researcher something about the content of the data that is meaningful and relevant to the research questions and exemplifies patterned responses within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this phase, I collated all of codes from each interview transcript into a single Word document. From this initial list of codes, I began to identify broader patterns. To help better conceptualize patterns, I began to group codes together that were semantically similar by colour, with different colours used to distinguish groups of codes. In total, there were 45 different colours. I then went back through each interview transcript and highlighted codes according to their corresponding colour that was representative of a noticeable pattern in participants’ responses. I then went back to the list of codes, and collapsed recurrent or synonymous codes (e.g., “Likes that language is the same” and “provides common language”). This became a cyclical process in which I continuously collapsed codes, as well as continued to organize codes that appeared to be similar by colour. I continued to refer back to the interview transcripts and extracts for
additional clarification around grouping of codes that were similar. Once all the codes were colour coded, I began to develop candidate themes and subthemes that were reflective of the codes that had been grouped and organized together. Initially, I developed four potential candidate themes: (1) *Facilitators and Barriers*, (2) *Modifications Made to the Program*, (3) *Observed Skills and Knowledge* and (4) *Suggestions for Improvement/Recommendations*. At this point, I began to recognize that some candidate themes, sub-themes and codes were interconnected. To make sense of my own interpretations, I drew a visual representation that attempted to summarize the data and highlight some of these interconnections (see Figure 1, Appendix H). At this point, I met with my thesis advisor, Dr. Clare MacMartin, to discuss my visual representation of potential themes through a process known as triangulation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Triangulation is a social science technique that aims to validate qualitative research, whereby multiple sources (e.g., between researchers, different methodological approaches, and/or multiple theoretical lenses) are used in data analysis. I met with Dr. MacMartin to review my initial thoughts surrounding the candidate themes and associated codes, as well as groups of codes that made up candidate subthemes. A subtheme is a lower-order theme encompassed under a theme that captures and develops a notable aspect of the central organizing concept of one theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, a candidate subtheme developed was *Know Your Learner*, which was nested under the theme *Modifications of the Program* (see Appendix H). I also began to make note of possible relationships between candidate themes. For instance, at this point during the analysis I was able to detect that to some extent there would be a relationship between *Modifications of the Program* and *Facilitators and
Barriers because some of the modifications that participants reported making to the Tools for Life program were explained as ways of overcoming some of the barriers or limitations participants experienced when attempting to use Tools for Life. I made note of such relationship(s) and continued analysis.

**Reviewing and revising themes.** I continued analysis by reviewing themes and subthemes that had been developed in the prior phase of analysis. Initially I developed four candidate themes; however, as analysis continued, it became apparent that in actuality these candidate themes were overarching themes that housed both themes and subthemes. An overarching theme captures an idea encapsulated in a number of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As a result of my review, five candidate overarching themes were developed (four original candidate themes, with the addition of a new one): (1) *Modifications of the Program*, (2) *Facilitators/Barriers to Implementation*, (3) *Program Impact/(Non) Achievement of Learning Outcomes*, (4) *Strengths of Tools for Life Program*, and (5) *Recommendations*. I then returned to the data set to review the coded data extracts, as well as the collated codes to create candidate themes and to ensure that I had not missed coding of any additional data. During the process of reviewing codes, I colour coded any codes that I missed, as well, as sorting and organizing any other remaining codes and their corresponding interview extracts in relation to their appropriate themes and/or subthemes. I then categorized the candidate themes into one of the higher-level overarching themes. For example, two themes were developed, *Types of Modification* and *Rationale for Modification*, that were categorized under the *Modifications of the Program* overarching theme.
I then continued data analysis by going through and pulling relevant interview extracts from which each code was generated and organized all of the extracts within their respective themes by creating a table in a separate Word document. This allowed me to go through the data set and ensure that the interview extracts formed a coherent pattern and were strongly illustrative of their corresponding theme. At this point, the researcher ensures that data within themes are clear and cohere meaningfully, while still being able to identify distinctions between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This led to further discussion with Dr. MacMartin about how the data fit under the themes, as well as how the themes and subthemes related to one another.

At this time, conversations focused on ensuring that the candidate overarching themes, themes, and subthemes were distinct from one another, and that the ways in which the themes and subthemes related to each and the overarching themes were clear. As a result, some themes were revised and some subthemes were combined or discarded. For instance, there was too much overlap between Difficulty Understanding Emotions, Difficulty Understanding Tools and Individual Differences for each to constitute an independent subtheme; therefore, these three subthemes were combined to form one theme, Developmental Capacity of Students which oriented to the presence of student characteristics affecting successful mastery of Tools for Life-related skills and knowledge. In addition, in the previous phases of analysis I had developed three candidate themes, Fosters Common Language, Empowers Children, and Shifting Role of Educators that I felt were important themes that fit well with the coded extracts from the data set; however, they needed an overarching theme to reside under as they did not clearly fit with any of the other overarching themes. When I
discussed with Dr. MacMartin these themes, we came to realize that they were reflective of the ways in which participants spoke about the positive attributes of the program. Therefore, a new overarching theme was developed, *Strengths of Tools for Life Program*, under which the three candidate themes were categorized.

It was throughout this revision phase of analysis that a thematic map was developed (see Figure 2, Appendix H). I then tested the map by inserting random excerpts from the table that I had created to ensure that the overarching themes, themes, and subthemes developed still fit with the data set as a whole. I then met with Dr. MacMartin and my thesis committee member, Dr. John Dwyer, to discuss the meaning and implications of the overarching themes, themes, and subthemes.

**Defining and naming themes.** This phase of data analysis involved defining and refining the names of the themes. The name of a theme should pinpoint the essence of what each theme means and, importantly, define what feature of data each theme reflects to provide readers with a clear understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013), I attempted to develop thematic labels that were representative of participants’ voices to provide a sense of what the theme was about, while also maintaining the analytic scope of each theme. For example, I titled a subtheme as *Know Your Learner* to convey some participants’ attributions for making modifications to the delivery of the program in order to support the needs of the learners they had in their classroom.

During this phase, I continued to define and refine the names of my themes in consultation with my advisory committee. For instance, as we discussed the hierarchical nature of thematic analysis, it was recognized that either an overarching
theme or the themes below required relabelling. Initially, I identified
*Facilitators/Barriers to Implementation* as an overarching theme. As seen on my
initial thematic map (see Appendix H), the themes were divided into *Facilitators* and
*Barriers*, which, in retrospect, overlapped with the overarching theme and thus did not
subscribe to a hierarchical order. We initially discussed the need to revise the themes;
however, I began to realize that *Facilitators* and *Barriers* needed to be their own
themes, not only because there was a sufficient amount of data that fit with each
theme, but also because each theme offered important distinct insights about the
connections and interrelations between the themes and subthemes. Therefore, both
*Facilitators* and *Barriers* remained separate themes and the overarching theme was
relabelled to more broadly capture *Factors Affecting Implementation*.

**Producing a final report.** Once the refining and any relabelling of themes were
completed, I proceeded to write a draft of my thesis, selecting compelling extracts that
illustrated the importance of the identified themes to provide readers with a coherent
narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In order to ensure that I met this goal, once the draft
of my thesis was completed, I reviewed the draft to verify that the data accurately
represented the themes. Lastly, incorporating any advisory committee feedback and
my own final interpretations, I edited my thematic map and thus created my final
thematic map representing the finalized overarching themes, themes, and subthemes
that provided a visual depiction of my data analysis (see Appendix H).

**Reporting number of participants.** While reporting findings throughout the
results and discussion chapter of my thesis, I often use the following words “few,”
“some,” and “many” to provide readers with a sense of the extent to which specific
themes were endorsed by the entire sample of participants. That being said, I am aware that my thoughts about the meaning and implications regarding the number of participants “some” refers to may differ from the framework adopted by other individuals who read the report. Thus, the following are operational definitions to provide readers with a sense of the approximate number of participants who discussed particular themes and/or sub-themes: “Few” (at least 3 to 6 participants), “some” (7 to 14 participants), “many” (15 to 27 participants), and “all” (28 participants).
Chapter 3: Results

Overview

This chapter reports the results of the inductive TA conducted on the transcribed interviews with participants. The following research questions were used to guide the data collection and analysis:

1. What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about the program? Do these beliefs and expectations determine the extent to which they implement the program?
2. What are the perceived barriers or facilitators in implementing Tools for Life?
3. Do teachers think Tools for Life is successful in aiding children with social emotional development?
4. How is the practice of inclusivity incorporated into teaching Tools for Life?

Analysis of participants’ responses to these guiding research questions led to five overarching themes being generated from the data: (1) Factors Affecting Implementation, (2) Modifications of the Program, (3) Recommendations, (4) Program Impact/(Non)Achievement of Learning Outcomes, and (5) Strengths of Tools for Life program. The first overarching theme, Factors Affecting Implementation, captures analysis of participants’ perceptions and experiences of barriers to the delivery of Tools for Life in their classrooms, as well as what they believed facilitated the implementation of Tools for Life. The second overarching theme, Modifications of the Program, was derived from analysis of participants’ various rationales for modifying the Tools for Life lessons. The third overarching theme, Recommendations, captured the suggestions expressed by the participants to improve the implementation of Tools for Life by the WCDSB. The use of a prefix “non” in the fourth overarching theme, Program Impact/(Non)Achievement of Learning Outcomes, indicates areas where improvements could be made.
*Impact/(Non)Achievement*, exemplifies the variability of participants’ perceptions about whether they observed students in their classroom progressing in using the Tools for Life skills over time. Lastly, the fifth overarching theme, *Strengths of Tools for Life Program*, was derived from analysis of participants’ responses about the perceived positive aspects of the program.

As seen in Figure 2, the thematic map serves as a visual representation of the themes generated from participants’ responses (see Appendix H). The use of solid black lines demonstrates the hierarchical relationship between the overarching themes (black squares), the themes (grey squares) subsumed under the overarching themes and the sub-themes (light grey squares) subsumed under the themes. Each overarching theme consists of two themes, with the exception of the fourth overarching theme (*Strengths of Tools for Life Program*), which has three themes. The use of dotted lines on the thematic map exemplifies the interconnections between themes at different levels. For example, *Factors Affecting Implementation* is a central overarching theme that links to the theme, *Rationale for Modification* (a theme subsumed underneath the overarching theme, *Modifications of the Program*).

The primary purpose of this study was to conduct a process evaluation, not an outcome evaluation. While there was obvious interest on the part of the WCDSB in learning about the outcomes of the Tools for Life program, it was critical to first understand participants’ experiences with how, and the extent to which, they implemented the Tools for Life program. Therefore, the first three overarching themes generated, which capture in-depth aspects of the implementation of Tools for Life, are the ones foregrounded in this thesis: *Factors Affecting Implementation, Modifications of the*
Program, and Recommendations (see Figure 3, Appendix H). It is important to recognize that any one reported analysis will never be able to tell the “whole story” of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The fourth and fifth overarching themes are more reflective of and capture aspects of Tools for Life outcomes. Program outcomes would need to be measured and evaluated in a separate outcome evaluation. Not only would such a project go beyond the scope of the present study, but it is also important to evaluate implementation before focusing on outcomes. Accordingly, if any outcomes are eventually discovered to not be successfully achieved, there are data that can help determine whether the lack of program success is due to problems with implementation rather than weaknesses inherent in the program design (Durlak, 2010; Lendrum & Humphrey, 2012).

Although not falling within the main process evaluation framework, the overarching themes of Program Impact/(Non)Achievement of Learning Outcomes and Strengths of Tools for Life Program bear further mention. Program Impact/(Non)Achievement of Learning Outcomes, for instance, was generated from the data as all participants were asked in the semi-structured interviews to consider whether Tools for Life was successful in aiding children in their classrooms with their social-emotional development. The achievement and (non)achievement of the intended Tools for Life learning outcomes were of particular interest to the WCDSB, and it was apparent that participants were making some of their own decisions about how to implement Tools for Life because of their experiences with children, how the children appeared to respond to the program, and what they as educators believed to support successful student learning. Data relevant to the fifth overarching theme, Strengths of Tools for Life Program, were collected when
participants described their beliefs about the program. Given that the participants were generally self-identified champions of Tools for Life, it is not surprising that they focused on multiple positive features of Tools for Life. The findings associated with the analysis of these fourth and fifth overarching themes are summarized in Appendix I, with accompanying illustrative quotations. Thus, the remainder of the Results chapter focuses primarily on the three remaining overarching themes central to the process evaluation: (1) Factors Affecting Implementation; (2) Modifications of the Program and (3) Recommendations.

Factors Affecting Implementation

This overarching theme was grounded inductively in participants’ discussion of a myriad of factors related to the implementation of the Tools for Life program. This overarching theme considered participants’ experiences in relation to a variety of factors that participants shared as either facilitating or impeding the implementation of the Tools for Life program. There were two themes that fell within this overarching theme: (1) Facilitators and (2) Barriers.

Facilitators. Many participants spoke of various factors that served as facilitators to the implementation of Tools for Life. Throughout the interviews, all participants mentioned factors associated with the characteristics of the Tools for Life program and factors associated with planning and implementation processes in the WCDSB (see Bopp, Saunders, & Lattimore, 2013); these factors were described as key aspects that aided in the facilitation of implementing Tools for Life. The following subthemes will be discussed under this theme:

1. Training Opportunities
2. Alignment with Kindergarten program
3. Degree of Experience with Tools for Life

Training opportunities. Many participants discussed their experiences receiving Tools for Life training from WCDSB personnel as positive ones that helped increase their understanding of the program. As Participant 24 explained, “just getting to know the program, I really knew nothing about the program.” Some participants explained that, prior to receiving training, they knew very little about the Tools for Life program and thus saw training as a learning experience for themselves. For instance, Participant 18 noted:

They showed us how to get your group what to do, cause I find sometimes they’ll give you things and say ‘okay now try it’ but to actually see it done was helpful. Going through the resource so that we knew what linked with what activity…. so just actually going through the resource and pointing things out and showing what was in the kit and how it was connected. (Extract 1)

Many participants viewed having the opportunity to go over the Tools for Life kit and familiarize themselves with how to apply the content in their classrooms as a beneficial aspect of training. Additionally, participants discussed the delivery of training sessions as interactive and engaging, as Participant 14 stated, for example: “It was useful to actually participate in some of the activities, like I remember throwing the beach ball around and actually reading it- and then sharing that information.” Many participants shared that training allowed them to learn about the Tools for Life program by actually practicing teaching of Tools for Life lessons. Participants also noted that the delivery of the training sessions they experienced was a motivating factor to use Tools for Life in their classroom, as Participant 6 explained:
Similarly, Participant 2 shared, “I think that it really showed the scope of what the program was about and it really motivated me to use it.” As many participants explained, training provided participants with a sense of empowerment and drive to want to bring Tools for Life back to the classroom and implement the program with their students.

While many participants received Tools for Life training from WCDSB personnel in a formalized session, two participants had different training experiences. For example, Participant 21 discussed being part of the pilot Tools for Life Kindergarten program:

For me it was a little different because I was actually part of the pilot program for the Tools for Life and then we just had a lot of chance to dialogue about it and how the program was going. So having that chance to come back together was always helpful. (Extract 3)

The Kindergarten classrooms that were part of the board piloted the Tools for Life program, which provided educators with the opportunity to give their thoughts on the program and provide feedback on the use of Tools for Life in the classroom. Participants described their training experience not as recipients receiving formalized hour-long training sessions, but rather as agents having their voice and ongoing input inform the development of the Kindergarten Tools for Life program. Participants who were part of the pilot valued the opportunity and perceived it to be helpful for the implementation of Tools for Life in their classroom. Likewise, sessions that provided participants with the opportunity to learn and discuss Tools for Life were perceived by many as a positive experience that served as a facilitator to the implementation of the program.

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1 The Tools for Life developers partnered with several organizations and school boards to create the Tools for Life Early Learning manual designed for use in Kindergarten. The WCDSB was one of the content development partners of the Tools for Life Early Learning manual (Tools for Life, 2019).
Alignment with Kindergarten program. As some participants explained, they were involved in developing the Early Learning Manual to reflect the current Kindergarten curriculum within which the Tools for Life program is situated. In part, changes to the Kindergarten curriculum, along with educators’ feedback and revisions, led to the development of the Early Learning Manual; many participants discussed such changes as facilitating the implementation of Tools for Life. For instance, when considering how the Early Learning manual aligned with the Kindergarten program, Participant 4 stated, “in the new manual they have more engagement and more like students moving and that kind of stuff, which is very important…. it’s a good connection to the Kindergarten program.” Many participants viewed the Tools for Life program as connecting well to the Kindergarten program as it supported the co-construction of learning. Participant 5 stated, “we make them [posters] with the students so they’re hopefully more meaningful to them.” The Early Learning Manual promotes students as active participants in creating Tools for Life materials, which directly relates to the way in which the Kindergarten program is structured.

Additionally, when discussing their initial experiences with using the Early Learning Manual, many participants explained that much of what Tools for Life focuses on is something that is already taught as part of the Kindergarten curriculum. For instance, Participant 16 stated: “What I’m saying is Tools for Life fits into how we teach as well because it’s kind of an innate thing to teach those skills and tools and thing to children of this age especially.” Evidently, the Kindergarten program consists of core skills that the Tools for Life program includes. As the Kindergarten program focuses on

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2 In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Education redesigned the Kindergarten curriculum to adopt a more play-based and inquiry-led curriculum than previously used.
foundational social-emotional skills, some participants viewed the Tools for Life program as a way of teaching these social-emotional skills in a more coherent, formatted way than that laid out in standard Ministry curricula. For instance, as Participant 17 shared:

*When you work with kids anyway you’re already trying to teach them those things about you know the value of kindness, the value of you know treating others the way you like to be treated that sort of thing. So you know it’s nice that this program kind of lays it all out from start to finish.* (Extract 4)

While some participants explained that such skills were being implicitly taught all of the time due to the nature of the Kindergarten program, participants also shared that, when they explicitly taught such skills, Tools for Life served as a guide that facilitated the teaching of important social-emotional skills.

Moreover, a few participants broadly discussed the climate of the school board and how Tools for Life aligned with the board’s expectations and objectives. As Participant 3 shared: “We’re very fortunate to work in a Catholic school board and a lot of this goes with our graduate outcomes, and sort of what we would expect and sort of the way we would teach our children.” The WCDSB was described as fostering an environment in which these core social-emotional skills were valuable skills that need to be taught. As many participants explained, the Tools for Life program aligned with the Kindergarten program and, more broadly, aligned with the WCDSB and its graduate outcomes. Tools for Life was perceived to be a program that was naturally embedded within the structure of the Kindergarten program because Tools for Life reflected key aspects of inquiry-led, play-based learning.

**Degree of experience with Tools for Life.** Participants related the confidence and competency level of educators to their successful implementation of the Tools for Life program. Some participants reported their own sense of efficacy in implementing Tools
for Life increasing over time with practice. Participant 25 shared, “I find I’m much better at it now after a few years using it than I was that first year.” Participants discussed their experiences initially implementing Tools for Life, recognizing that they were new to the Tools for Life activities and terminology.

As participants gained more experience implementing Tools for Life, they became more accustomed to how the program was laid out and the core themes that certain activities focused on (e.g., problem solving skills). Thus, they felt less reliant on the manual to implement a Tools for Life activity. Participant 26 shared, “I just do it naturally. I don’t refer back to the book cause you know it.” For some participants, Tools for Life was a program they were now knowledgeable about and comfortable with regards on how to implement the program.

**Ease of Tools for Life manual.** A positive aspect that was often described by participants was the perceived ease of implementing Tools for Life, specifically referring to the layout of information and activities in the Tools for Life manuals. For instance, Participant 12 noted, “I thought it was presented well. I thought it was explained well the manual is very easy to follow.” Participant 18 shared similar views about the ease of the Tools for Life manual:

*The guide is really easy to follow- you know it’s like a small kit, but everything that you need is there. I like that because you know lots of times you have to gather all the materials and if you don’t have certain things you know you can’t teach that part. So I think it’s just very simple and easy. (Extract 5)*

Moreover, some participants viewed the manual as a well-informed and informative resource that supported them with the delivery of the Tools for Life activities. For instance, as expressed by Participant 11, “It is certainly well researched- the questions are already formatted. If we need to refer to it the answers are there.” The Tools for Life
manual was, therefore, seen as a helpful tool that helped participants navigate the Tools for Life program more easily.

**Barriers.** In addition to reporting factors that supported implementation of Tools for Life, participants also discussed a variety of perceived barriers or challenges that they experienced while trying to implement Tools for Life. These challenges and perceived obstacles were external to the quality of the design of the program and recommended practices for its delivery; rather, resource-related circumstances and student reception of the program were identified as barriers. The following subthemes will be discussed:

1. Lack of Comprehensive Training
2. Having to Share the Manual
3. Time Limitations
4. Student Resistance to Learning

**Lack of comprehensive training.** While a majority of participants received Tools for Life training, there were some participants who shared that they had not received training in any capacity with the Tools for Life program. Various explanations were reported. For example, Participant 9 explained the lack of Tools for Life training as due to acting as a temporary teacher in the classroom: “I never received any training on it, as an occasional teacher we don’t attend the training sessions cause we’re filling in for the regular classroom teachers. So this is my first LTO [Long Term Occasional appointment].”

Other participants explained that they did not have the opportunity to receive training due to their transition between roles and the stepped level-by-level manner in which the Tools for Life program was rolled out. For instance, Participant 15 stated, “I have never received training for the program... I don’t know how that worked. I must
have been in grade five when it was implemented the first time.” As discussed by a few participants, their missed opportunity for training was largely due to not working at the primary level when training was first offered.³ Participants discussed how their work assignments at the board changed at times, with educators moving between the grades that they taught. Therefore, participants who initially taught at either the junior or intermediate level reported they did not receive training. These participants shared that much of their knowledge and experience with Tools for Life developed from self-directed learning and interactions with coworkers who had received Tools for Life training. For example, Participant 11 explained, “it was our ECE who did and they relayed all the kind of information to me, so it was second hand information.” Similarly, some participants discussed relying on personal experience and learning what the Tools for Life resource comprised of. For instance, Participant 10 shared: “I didn’t receive any training, my kids had done it through their school so I knew a lot of the language and then I just look through the resource books that we had and went from there.”

Educators who were transitioning between grades discussed the need to be self-sufficient in learning the Tools for Life program, as it is something they are aware that does need to be taught at the Kindergarten and Primary level. A few participants stated that previously teaching at a higher grade level was a possible barrier because of lack of appropriate training for their current grade assignment. The need for some participants to learn Tools for Life outside the context of a formal Tools for Life training session has possible implications for the implementation of the program more generally.

³ The implementation of Tools for Life is being rolled out in phases on the WCDSB. Tools for Life has been established at the Kindergarten level and primary grades and is now just starting to be introduced to the junior division (Grades 4 to 6). At present, the intermediate division (Grades 7 to 8) is not using Tools for Life.
Having to share the manual. Throughout the interviews, it became clear that, although many participants had their own copy of the Tools for Life manual, other participants did not have access to their own copy. Participant 4 shared: “Really the only issue we’ve had was trying to get the early year program cause it was another purchase for the board … and as it is now we just have one sharing with two classrooms.”

Although there was understanding demonstrated by participants that the cost of the Tools for Life kit created resource shortfalls, some participants identified as a significant issue the need to share the kit with multiple teachers in other classrooms. Participants discussed the challenges of implementing Tools for Life as intended when they did not have their own Tools for Life kit. Participant 12 stated, “Well there aren’t really enough posters for everybody to have their own- we share the kit.” Some participants explained that the necessity of sharing kits meant that the supplementary materials in the Tools for Life kit required to implement certain activities were not always available. This led to problems, one of which was explained by Participant 27: “I did find it frustrating like we have multiple kits across the school and they’re all in multiple pieces, right like there’s maybe parts of the kit here, parts of a kit there, and parts of a kit there.” Evidently, having to share the Tools for Life kits posed the problem of Tools for Life materials becoming dispersed across multiple classrooms, increasing the possibility of these Tools for Life materials becoming lost. Some participants said that when it was their turn with the Tools for Life manual, often materials were missing. Participant 22 explained, “it doesn’t have all the posters so I’d really like to have the body clues one up- but I didn’t have any of that in our thing.” For some participants, the absence of Tools for Life materials was an obstacle because they would have to attempt to locate the materials. As participants
discussed, the time needed to find the kit with the Tools for Life materials displaced particular teaching opportunities. Ultimately, participants perceived not having their own kit as a barrier to proper program implementation.

**Time limitations.** A key challenge that resonated with many participants and prevented many participants from implementing the Tools for Life program fully was finding the time to deliver the program because of competing expectations and other responsibilities that they had within the school. Some participants explained that not all lessons were implemented because there often was insufficient time to deliver Tools for Life in addition to teaching required subjects. Participant 25 shared, “*there’s assemblies, and there’s snack ... all these things that you want to get in as well, there’s all these interruptions to your day so it is sometimes difficult.*” As discussed by participants, finding the time to implement the program was not a negative aspect of the program design but rather was an external challenge impacting program delivery. As Participant 20 stated:

> I just feel like sometimes it takes a lot to get through, and that’s really just because we all have other things that we have to be teaching at the same time right? So that’s not a negative of the program, it’s just when you’re in the school and like you have all the other subjects you need to cover too, it’s hard. (Extract 6)

**Resistance to learning.** As a few participants discussed, a challenging aspect of the implementation of Tools for Life was that some students were not receptive or willing to engage with the Tools for Life program. Participants believed that one reason for this was that students believed that certain Tools for Life activities were criticizing their individual conduct and singling them out. Some students refused to actively participate in Tools for Life activities because of this belief. As Participant 23 explained: “I remember
when we were doing the *What are Hands For, like the Hands Are not for Hitting* book. The one particular student who was aggressive took that very personally and wouldn’t sit there for the lesson.”

Another reason for student resistance mentioned by a few other participants was that as students progress through Kindergarten to Grade 3, there was a lot of exposure to the program that students acquired. For instance, Participant 13 noted:

*I think by the time you get to grade three if I started introducing them again, this group would lose it. First, because they’ve seen it all and they’ve seen it before in Grade One and Grade Two [...] and you know they do lose their interest quickly.*

(Extract 7)

Similarly, Participant 26 provided an example when a student reacted to a prompt made using Tools for Life terminology: “*One of the students said, and it was a third year of using the program, I think, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, use your words, fill your bucket, got to be a bucket filler.’*” Therefore, part of the resistance to learning Tools for Life came from students already being familiar with the Tools for Life content.

**Modifications of the Program**

The second overarching theme, *Modifications of the Program*, was grounded inductively in participants’ perceptions of, and experiences with, making modifications to the Tools for Life program. Subsequently, two themes were developed: (1) Types of Modification and (2) Rationale for Modification.

**Types of modification.** Many participants discussed an array of modifications that they made to the Tools for Life. The extent to which the program was modified varied, based on what aspects of the program were being changed. For instance, participants discussed a variety of ways in which particular Tools for Life materials were modified. Participants also identified modifications that they made to Tools for Life practices. To
provide a more comprehensive overview of the types of modifications that many participants shared, the following seven subthemes will be discussed.

1. Creation of Tools for Life Materials
2. Creation of Tools for Life Practices
3. Use of Additional Resources
4. Breaking Down the Lessons into Smaller Parts
5. Teachable Moments
6. Cross-Curricular Connection
7. Deintensification of Programming over Time

**Creation of Tools for Life materials.** Although the Tools for Life kit provided educators with materials (e.g., posters), many participants expressed a preference for creating their own Tools for Life related materials with the students in their classroom. Participant 14 reported recreating the Tools for Life poster that depicts a “listening body” by using real images of students modelling the skills that are reflective of good listening:

> So I take photos of them [the students] and then they see themselves right up like showing how mouths are still and how you know hands on our laps. So that’s kind of fun to do that and that’s always in my classroom so that’s an anchor chart we do together. (Extract 8)

The modification of Tools for Life materials allowed for the development of materials to be a collaborative process that provided students with the opportunity to actively engage with their learning of Tools for Life. As Participant 7 shared: “I just created them on our own. I find by doing that with the kids it’s kind of embedded and they’re like ‘okay we did this, this belongs to our classroom, this is what we’re going to do.” Involving students in recreating Tools for Life materials allowed students to create and share their own ideas of what certain Tools for Life concepts look like. Therefore, students’ contributions gave
them a sense that what they recreated was unique and belonged to their classroom because of the customized design.

Furthermore, some participants discussed creating Tools for Life materials for the purpose of individualizing assistance to those students who required additional support in their learning. Participants discussed altering Tools for Life materials to convey Tools for Life concepts in a way that was tailored to the student’s level of understanding. For example, Participant 1 stated:

_We brought it down to colours actually for them. So we had colours on a little key ring that they flipped and then on the back of it, it had a face so we had like red, green and then we had yellow. So it was like a stoplight if you will, so red showed angry and then yellow was like frustration and green was you know, “I’m happy, calm” that sort of thing._ (Extract 9)

The creation of Tools for Life materials was described as providing support to student learning in numerous ways. Ultimately, many participants perceived modifying Tools for Life materials and creating their own materials as a valuable experience.

**Creation of Tools for Life practices.** Although the Tools for Life manual provides educators with suggested activities to implement, many participants reported creating extension activities, that is activities going beyond those outlined in the manual. Participants described making various kinds of extensions that involved increasing the frequency of particular Tools for Life activities, increasing student engagement by assigning particular roles, and creating new activities altogether. For example, Participant 18 described an extension made to the put-up activity. Rather than teaching the put-up activity only once, students are able to practice giving put-ups to their peers more frequently. Each week, a different student is selected to be the “star student of the week” and receive put-ups (i.e., compliments) from their classmates:
So every week each star student takes home a laminated poster of pictures of them doing things in the classroom or being the special student. Then we also have a list of put-ups for them and we ask them how they feel we go through the put-ups with them, how those put-ups make them feel and then they’re able to share them at home. So that’s kind of how we use put-ups. (Extract 10)

To increase student engagement, Participant 22 discussed an extension activity for the problem-solving lessons. Instead of the teacher just referring to the posters of the tools when a student experienced a problem with a classmate, the student was encouraged to go to another student who had been assigned to be the “problem solver” for that week to help figure out which tool to use rather than seeking help from their teacher. As Participant 22 explained:

So we have a ring with the tools on it everyday and everyday we have two problem solvers. So if the kids have a problem they grab the problem solvers- the problem solvers come over will all the tools on the ring and then they help them solve the problem…. we know they can solve it so we send them back and remind them to talk it out, use your tools, grab the problem solver- and so that’s something we’ve implemented on a daily basis for them to sort of practice using. (Extract 11)

Although it was recognized that the extensions were different from the Tools for Life activities outlined in the manual, participants often reiterated that core Tools for Life components from the manual were incorporated into the extension activities that they developed.

Instead of describing the creation of extensions built on currently existing Tools for Life activities, a few participants reported creating additional activities from scratch. For example, Participant 1 discussed an additional activity that encouraged students to recognize how they were currently feeling by moving a magnet on the board underneath the appropriate subheading (e.g., “Ready to learn”):

We also have... the “I’ve been a superstar” versus “I have gone above” so the one down underneath, “ready to learn” is slow down and think, and the bottom
one is “I need to stop and reflect” - and the kids will move themselves down they come in, if they don’t feel like they are ready to learn and they need to calm down. (Extract 12)

This activity, not part of the Tools for Life manual, encouraged students to recognize when they may need to take time to calm down. Thus, this activity captured key themes and skills targeted by manualized Tools for Life activities. Overall, participants perceived extension activities to be a valuable modification that enabled students to practice certain skills on a more consistent basis and to be more engaged with learning Tools for Life related skills and concepts than would occur if such modifications were not introduced.

Use of additional resources. Although various reasons were reported for using additional materials, including lack of availability of Tools for Life resources, many participants perceived the use of supplementary materials as a beneficial modification. The flexible use of supplementary materials, both their own and those of the school board, was something that participants reported valuing when teaching Tools for Life. For example, Participant 10 stated “I found like a book like through you know things that we’ve been given, that really fits in with what we’re talking about- and we’ll add that in as well.” Evidently, additional materials were used when participants perceived the material to be relevant to the Tools for Life activity that was being implemented. As Participant 10 shared, educators often obtained new materials via Professional Development workshops, as well as from coworkers. Thus, educators often had a collection of materials, not part of Tools for Life, that were perceived as applicable to and reflective of the Tools for Life skills being focused on at that particular time (e.g., emotions).
In addition, Participant 21 discussed using other books from a personal collection instead of the suggested Tools for Life books: “We kind of even expand beyond just the suggested--those books we’ve read those plus we have a whole basket of books that deal with feelings and different feelings.” This participant discussed the importance of using additional books, beyond the suggested Tools for Life books, which this participant had already incorporated. Implementation of Tools for Life on a yearly basis involved using the same Tools for Life materials; this participant expressed wanting and needing variety, similar to other participants, to build an expanded book collection relevant to the central skills and concepts of Tools for Life.

**Breaking down the lessons into smaller parts.** Throughout the interviews, participants shared their perceptions about the structure of the Tools for Life lessons, which consist of the goals and objectives of the lesson, learning activities with corresponding educator prompts, and a script to facilitate discussion with students. Many participants expressed a need to restructure, to some degree, the delivery of Tools for Life lessons. Participants often expressed feeling the need to modify the structure of lessons by breaking them down into smaller learning activities or miniature lessons. For example, Participant 7 shared, “I broke them down so not one, one lesson would be like three- it wouldn’t be, I wouldn’t do the whole lesson in one part. I break it into three different chunks.” Additionally, participants provided accounts that exemplified specific ways in which Tools for Life content was broken down and taught. For instance, Participant 3 elaborated:

> So sometimes what we need to do when we’re doing a lesson is we might introduce sort of what the skill is and then we might the read the story, and then we might go back the next day or in the afternoon. I do think it’s a lot to push in. (Extract 13)
**Teachable moments.** Tools for Life learning activities were not perceived as entailing a formal structured lesson, but rather could be used in a variety of ways that were connected emergently to what was going on in the classroom. Participants often discussed bringing up Tools for Life related content in conversation. For example, Participant 25 explained:

> I think that’s the awesome thing about teaching nowadays, it’s not very prescriptive anymore. It’s not say this and wait for an answer, and this is the answer that’s correct. I think it’s more all that inquiry-based learning where you just kind of bring it up and then see where the conversation goes. (Extract 14)

Many other participants shared similar views and often discussed ways in which Tools for Life could be used in response to occurrences that arise in the classroom. Participant 18 shared:

> I think once people get into it and use it they realize that it can be connected to a lot of things that happen in your classroom, day-to-day things or things you know if kids tell you something that happened.... so we’re always trying to make connections but if there’s a teachable moment in terms of something that’s happened then we’ll do it again. (Extract 15)

Accordingly, many participants perceived the continuous use of Tools for Life through daily interactions with students as important. Participants perceived bringing Tools for Life up in response to daily incidents as a strategy to support how students learn, that is, teaching in a way that is relevant to what a student is currently experiencing and are therefore able to connect with. Participant 17 stated:

> So if we notice something is happening, you know we’ll ask the child ‘do you mind if we talked about what happened?’.... And if the kids are on board with it, then we’ll you know kind of make that a teachable moment. (Extract 16)

**Cross-curricular connection.** A type of modification often discussed involved incorporating aspects of Tools for Life into different curricular subjects. Participants
often perceived making cross-curricular connections as a potential time-saver. For instance, Participant 15 wished that Tools for Life was already woven into spiritual instruction or another required subject:

*Like I wish it was included in religion or in another program that was embedded in that, because then it would be easier to keep going with your lessons... we have religion, which is of lots of this kind of stuff.* (Extract 17)

Many other participants not only wished for this integration but also made a conscious effort to integrate aspects of Tools for Life into various areas. Cross-curricular use of Tools for Life was viewed as a creative way to make whatever is being taught in Tools for Life count for something else. For example, Participant 8 shared, “*you can integrate it into all of your lessons ... like everything.*”

In addition to participants’ expressed need for integrating Tools for Life with traditional curricula, a recurring topic of discussion involved the use of Tools for Life alongside another SEL program, Roots of Empathy (ROE). Although there is a clear distinction between the ROE and Tools for Life programs, participants acknowledged that both programs complement one another to some degree. Consequently, participants discussed ways in which Tools for Life concepts were often reiterated during ROE lessons. For example, Participant 24 discussed establishing a cross-curricular connection between Tools for Life and ROE:

*We do love how they mesh like they really work together, they really fit [...] talking about the empathy and emotions all it just really brings a lot of it together--and we'll often reflect back in the two lessons. So when I'm running Roots of Empathy, I'll be like, “Oh remember when you guys had your Tools for Life lesson and we talked about this? Well this is kind of what we're talking about today."*(Extract 18)

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4 The ROE program focuses on developing emotional literacy and empathy skills in Kindergarten students (Roots of Empathy, 2018). ROE is an experiential learning opportunity for students in which an infant and parent visit the classroom every three weeks over the school year. Students learn to identify and reflect on their own emotions and how their peers might feel.
Evidently, participants perceived Tools for Life as a program that could be embedded in a variety of ways outside of formal Tools for Life lessons. Many participants perceived using Tools for Life in a cross-curricular manner as an asset that allowed for Tools for Life concepts to be frequently repeated and further practiced.

**Deintensification of programming over time.** Throughout interview discussions, a few participants discussed modifying the program by focusing on the delivery of Tools for Life less as the school year progressed. For example, Participant 27 shared:

> Our big focus on Tools for Life I would say is in term one. So a lot of the directed lessons would be in that period, with a heavy focus. So now that we’re in term two, it’s not like a direct focus lesson as much. We still do activities with respect to the Tools for Life program, so we still refer to it…. but to be honest, the heavy piece with activities is term one and then term two is just more a lower level of integration. (Extract 19)

Participants explained the importance of focusing heavily on Tools for Life at the beginning of the year as a strategy to have Tools for Life concepts and terminology in place for students from the beginning and as a way of setting classroom expectations. For instance, Participant 17 shared: “At the beginning of the year it’s really important for them to, you know, learn how to listen and be respectful of other people’s feelings and so we talk about those things at the beginning.”

Although participants often discussed the focus of Tools for Life lessening over time, participants recognized the importance of educators still revisiting and integrating the use of Tools for Life language and certain Tools for Life activities throughout the year to ensure retention and ongoing application. Participant 3 explained: “I don’t think you can’t just teach it at the beginning of the year and say ‘okay we’re done it’, I think you have to go back and revisit the different lessons or the different skills.”
Rationale for modification. When describing their modifications of the Tools for Life program, participants typically provided reasons for making these changes. The following subthemes capture participants’ perceptions about why modifications to the implementation of Tools for Life were required or preferred:

1. (In)Accessible Resources
2. Ineffective Tools for Life Materials
3. Know Your Learner
4. Accommodations for Students with Special Needs

(In)Accessible resources. It was evident that there was much variation across participants in terms of their access to Tools for Life resources. Some participants discussed their ready access to the required accompanying Tools for Life materials. Participant 20 shared:

*I think it's great that our board provided us with the resources cause then that would be a lot harder. I don’t know if that’s typical, like I don’t know if the books actually come with the program when you buy it or not- but I think it’s great that we have them so that we can utilize them properly.* (Extract 20)

In contrast, other participants reported having limited access to Tools for Life materials. For example, Participant 13 stated, “the only thing I haven’t done is read the stories cause I haven’t had the stories.” Participant 27 described a similar experience, “we need some of the books that are suggested. I found it very frustrating though because a lot of the books suggested aren’t necessarily in our school library.” Thus, participants who did not have access to Tools for Life materials explained that they had to substitute the materials that were used (e.g., books) to accompany Tools for Life lessons. Participant 9 stated:
So the suggested ones we have to go find and yeah they are, it's difficult to go find them. So what we did use for some of our tools- so if it was like “say sorry,” we’d change up the book ... so yes we switched out a book. (Extract 21)

**Ineffective Tools for Life materials.** Many participants co-created Tools for Life materials with students because they felt that the original materials (i.e., cartoon representations) were difficult for students to identify with and not engaging enough to facilitate effective learning of particular Tools for Life concepts (e.g., emotions).

Participant 17 stated:

*Some of the pictures, I don’t know if it’s just the character, the bitmoji or whatever ... they just don’t seem to gravitate to it that much. Whereas when we put up our anchor chart that we’ve made with their own they’re that much more interested- maybe because they helped to create it or maybe because they recognize the different people in it.* (Extract 22)

Similarly, participant 3 shared, “because their faces are on it and they’re around the classroom, they would look at those more so than a commercially made poster.” Many participants perceived the use of realistic images as pictures that students could more readily identify with than those on the mass-produced posters provided with the Tools for Life kit.

In addition, participants explained that Tools for Life concepts and skills depicted on the mass-produced posters lacked clarity at times and were not as effective as when educators substituted the original posters with the use of real images to convey key Tools for Life concepts. Participant 21 discussed, “my most challenging piece was the posters. I just found the artwork not as effective as say actual photos of children and I think for them they had a hard time identifying some feelings just by the poster.”

**Know your learner.** Throughout the interviews, many participants alluded to the importance of knowing your learner (adapting the Tools for Life program because of
characteristics of individual students or groups of students) as a rationale for modification. Participants discussed the importance of knowing your students and recognizing that not all students are going to learn the same way. As Participant 20 shared, “I think you put your own twist to it, it can be even better but that’s like anything you use right? You have to know your learner and then just see what works best for them.” Many participants modified elements of Tools for Life materials and practices in relation to the perceived needs of students in the classroom. For example, participants described modifying the lessons by breaking them down because of limits on students’ attentional capacity during Tools for Life lessons. Participants emphasized the importance of minimizing the length of the lessons to keep students engaged. Participant 24 explained: “There’s a lot to do the lessons... so making sure that you’re doing a breakdown to keep the kids interested.”

Participants also discussed cohort differences year to year as a factor they considered when determining what aspects of Tools for Life to focus on. Many participants viewed the modification of the Tools for Life program as required in order to support the needs of the classroom. Participant 6 explained:

We’ve probably done the whole toolbox but in different ways every year as what’s happening in the room. I find this year we’re focusing a lot on the emotions look at the kid’s body clues.... last year I found we did a lot of the toolbox activities cause the kids knew how to calm down and were really well aware of the emotions and the emotions of other but they didn’t know how to solve it. It was different so we didn’t teach as much about the emotions last year as we’re doing this year. (Extract 23)

The needs of students in the classroom influenced the Tools for Life activities that were delivered and shaped the overall structure of the implementation of the Tools for Life program. Notably, as Participant 7 explained, modifying the Tools for Life program
attended to the unique needs of students, as well as allowing students to co-constructing their own learning, which leads to the program looking different to some degree every year as a result:

> I think no matter what you can turn around and use it even if you don’t use the whole program, there are definitely areas of the program that can help in your room. It’s not just a program that has to be taught the way it’s taught. It’s a program that you can create and create it on your own.... so every year we create the Tools for Life program in our classroom, so it’s not the same every year. (Extract 24)

**Accommodations for students with special needs.** When asked to consider ways in which students with diverse needs were supported, participants frequently discussed the Tools for Life modifications they implemented. Modifications were a means of accommodating and meeting the needs of students with special needs in their classrooms and hence of promoting inclusive practice, as reported by Participant 1:

> We use visuals and we have an iPad as well because we have a student with special needs. So the iPads, we’ve tied so there’s like little icons on the front of the iPad and you would click things like emotions or faces and then though back doors it would be angry, frustrated, mad so that’s been helpful. (Extract 25)

Similarly, Participant 27 incorporated components of Tools for Life onto an iPad to support a particular student in their classroom:

> So we would make sure on their communication tablet we had like the different types of tools they could use on the tablet or like different language that they could access like “I’m sorry” would be a button that they could touch. Or “I need help” would be a button as opposed to them searching through everything. So we programmed their tablet that way. (Extract 26)

In addition to using assistive technology, some participants described creating their own posters and charts to use as a visual aid for supporting students’ understanding of Tools for Life. For instance, as Participant 16 stated, “I think using their faces and our anchor charts and pictures are helpful for those students.” Similarly, participant 26 created
visuals to serve as a prompt for students, “I also have made for their desks, the tools on their desks.”

Notably, some participants believed that the Tools for Life manual did not provide explicit suggestions on how to support students with diverse needs. Thus, participants spoke of many instances in which they perceived it as their role to make the necessary modifications to support students with diverse needs rather than relying on the Tools for Life manual to do so. As Participant 2 explained:

*Like every child with a modification it’s different. There is no blanket approach that’s going to work.... so I can’t say because you’re modified in this way all kids modify this way or are going to be. So I think that’s part of the educator’s role to kind of know where to go with it.* (Extract 27)

Overall, participants recognized making accommodations for students with special needs as an important reason for modifying the Tools for Life program as it aligns with the inclusive practice that the WCDSB adopts.

**Recommendations**

The educators who participated in the present study provided a variety of suggestions for the improvement of the Tools for Life program. These recommendations arose in the context of participants’ reports of the barriers they experienced in implementing Tools for Life and of the modifications they made to Tools for Life and the explanations for those modifications. The third overarching theme, *Recommendations*, was inductively grounded in two themes generated from analysis of participants’ perceptions of required recommendations about program design (Tools for Life curriculum) on the one hand and program implementation by the school board on the other.

**Tools for Life curriculum.** Participants provided suggestions for improvement to
the Tools for Life program itself in terms of three particular components or subthemes involving the Tools for Life manual:

1. Use of Realistic Images
2. Updating the Manual
3. Diversifying the Manual

**Recommendation 1: Use of realistic images.** Many participants perceived the Tools for Life visuals provided to be ineffective because of the lack of realism in the images used. Participants often discussed the benefits of incorporating realistic images in a range of Tools for Life materials provided in the Tools for Life kit. For example, Participant 16 recommended the use of realistic images on the key rings illustrating the various emotions:

> I might say something about those cards... I don’t know if they could use actual faces rather than- cause there’s so much more you see in a face than just those cards.... so maybe that could be a next step to make them with the kids’ faces. (Extract 28)

In addition, Participant 19 discussed the importance of using realistic images on the Tools for Life posters:

> So I think, I don’t know if they would ever consider using real faces on some of the pictures- because some of the feelings one, sometimes they’ll look and they’re you know they might be like ‘oh that looks frustrated ‘or whatever but I think real faces sometimes... when they’re just kind of getting the concepts they look at the pictures and cause they’re not real they’re kind of like ‘hmm’ you know.... I don’t know if that’s something they’ve considered from the get go. (Extract 29)

Evidently, realistic images in the provided Tools for Life materials were thought to better support students’ comprehension of the Tools for Life concepts and skills and thus would enhance students’ learning.
**Recommendation 2: Updating the manual.** A few participants discussed the importance of keeping the Tools for Life manual current. Notably, there were two forms of updating participants recommended. One form would involve updating the manual on the basis of current empirical research in SEL. When asked to consider how to improve the Tools for Life program, Participant 25 recommended:

*Maybe just update it [the manual] ... I’m not sure when this was written.... are they going to look at it in like a few years and add something? So it was first published in 2007, it says revised and printed in 2013... I know there’s a lot of conferences and stuff.... that’s what I mean about keeping up with the research, adding to it.* (Extract 30)

The second form of program updating recommended by participants involved incorporating advancements in digital technology to make the Tools for Life manual and associated resources available online. Participants perceived the importance of accessing Tools for Life lessons and resources online as a valuable suggestion that the Tools for Life program developers could provide as an option upon the purchase of the program. Participant 27 said:

*More online resources would be good. A lot of teaching or a lot of like my planning and stuff occurs with me going online and looking at resources--so like a teacher portal. I don’t know if they have a teacher portal, but I definitely don’t have access to it if they do.... so having some sort of internet access to like a portal where the lessons are laid out, here’s the resources here’s some other suggestions. That would be I think more beneficial and more appropriate for this digital age.* (Extract 31)

Ultimately, participants recognized that updating the manual to incorporate the most recent research relevant to the pedagogy of SEL is a recommendation that would entail a lengthy timeline; however, participants highlighted the eventual need for revisions. Updating the availability of the Tools for Life manual by providing online access was an invaluable suggestion that participants believed could be attained relatively quickly.
**Recommendation 3: Diversifying the manual.** Many participants believed their role was to make appropriate accommodations to Tools for Life programming to support effective learning students with diverse needs. As a result, participants identified the need for the Tools for Life manual to provide materials, as well as suggestions, for adapting activities to facilitate inclusive practice. Participant 22 shared:

*I don’t think that in the manual they really do any of that, it’s just sort of an overall “Here’s your lesson, this is how it works” and they don’t really do a whole lot to help those kids that do have diverse needs.... it’s a broad program that addresses regular most regular kids coming in but not a lot of kids that have diverse abilities. It doesn’t really address teaching it to them specifically.* (Extract 32)

Thus, a few participants perceived the Tools for Life manual to be a generically designed program with limited consideration of how to adapt Tools for Life activities to support students with diverse educational needs. Participants suggested ways in which the Tools for Life manual could be diversified. For instance, Participant 1 stated, “I think that we should have a few more little helpful visuals.” Participant 1 described using a strategy to support students with diverse needs by creating visuals that translated Tools for Life concepts (e.g., emotions) more simply than in the original materials (e.g., by colour instead of cartoon faces to illustrate certain emotions).

Other participants suggested that the manual should provide in the recommended books section more inclusive books in the sense of including representations of children with disabilities. Participant 18 shared: “Maybe something you know incorporating in terms of a book or you know somebody in a wheelchair or you know maybe somebody that isn’t able to see.... so maybe something more kind of addressed to the special needs.”

Although participants recognized that there was a Tools for Life lesson that touched upon diversity, they perceived added value if the manual were to be expanded to incorporate
more inclusive materials (e.g., books and visuals) and provide additional strategies to include students with diverse needs in Tools for Life activities.

**Implementation by the school board.** In addition to participants’ recommendations regarding components intrinsic to the design of the Tools for Life program, many participants identified a variety of suggestions pertinent to the implementation of the program by the WCDSB. The following four subthemes outline recommendations that may assist administrators in the WCDSB in facilitating and implementing the Tools for Life program.

1. Access to Resources
2. Tools for Life Follow-up Sessions
3. Going Across the Board
4. More Effective Data Tracking

**Recommendation 1: Access to resources.** Since a perceived barrier for some participants was limited access to Tools for Life resources, an important recommendation was for the WCDSB to widen full access to Tools for Life resources to all teachers using the program. Participant 4 shared, “we’re trying to push for more [Tools for Life manuals] because next year there is going to be three classes, so one manual for three classes is even harder to use.”

Given budgetary constraints, it was acknowledged that the Tools for Life kit may be too costly for all teachers to have their own copies. Another recommendation suggested the importance at minimum of having the required supplementary materials (e.g., books and posters) available in all schools and to all staff who are implementing the Tools for Life program. As some participants alluded to, there was differential allocation of Tools
for Life resources, with some schools in the board having access to a full range of
materials and other schools having limited access. Participant 27 explained:

*I think the board should make sure we have the books and resources necessary-
like the resources are good but the books especially. I think the school library
should ... have all of the books for the Tools of Life program in a very specific
labelled section.... I know different schools have more than maybe this current
school and some other schools probably have less than we have. So I think that
needs to be much more consistent across the board for an improvement.* (Extract
33)

Access to Tools for Life materials in a centralized location (e.g., the school library) may
be an important solution that permits accompanying Tools for Life materials to be
available to educators who do not have their own copies.

**Recommendation 2: Tools for Life follow-up sessions.** Participants
recommended various types of follow-up face-to-face interactions to support effective
implementation of Tools for Life. These included formal training sessions, refreshers for
users who had had prior training, check-ins and consultations with opportunities to
trouble-shoot aspects of program delivery, and conversations about Tools for Life as a
discussion item at staff meetings at the beginning of each school year. Some participants
did not receive formal Tools for Life training, which suggests the importance of ensuring
equal access to initial training opportunities. Another issue for other participants was that
they had received Tools for Life training quite a while earlier. Thus, many participants
discussed the need for a Tools for Life refresher to be offered. Participant 1 suggested:

*I think it would be helpful... if teachers were able to kind of sit down in a PD
setting and get some professional development in terms of refreshers on Tools for
Life. Even if it were just Division Leads...that are actually active that would then
bring it back to the division and sit down and say ‘hey let’s revisit this.’* (Extract
34)

Participants also viewed having a check-in as important to have the opportunity to share
with colleagues their experiences regarding the implementation of the Tools for Life program. Participant 9 recommended:

*It would be good to have sessions on what’s working and what’s not working. As a new teacher, I would follow that manual...and that’s all I have time for as a new teacher, but for experienced teachers they could say ‘in addition to this, this is what we did’ or if we’re struggling with something--having that support..... sometimes it’s meeting up with experienced teachers... that you can bounce ideas off of.* (Extract 35)

Based on participants’ responses, the suggestions regarding who could facilitate the Tools for Life refreshers are as follows: (1) the principal as the key facilitator of a Tools for Life check-in at staff meetings; (2) a staff member within the school designated as a Tools for Life resource person who could support with Tools for Life inquiries and check-ins; and (3) participants identified at a broader level, with an individual who could be responsible for following up with Tools for Life in a role similar to that of a Division Lead. These aforementioned suggestions have been ordered by ease of attainability (i.e., suggestion 1 and 2 might be easier to achieve than suggestion 3). The first two suggestions are notably easier to incorporate into practice than the last, which would require coordination and provision of resources at the board level rather than the school level. Therefore, a feasible recommendation would be for principals at each school to periodically (not at every staff meeting) check in with their staff regarding their use of Tools for Life. As Participant 25 suggested:

*Maybe if they had somebody who just automatically came back every year and talked at one of the staff meetings that we have once a month, for like twenty minutes or something just to kind of say what’s new--at the beginning of the year to get everyone motivated again to use it.* (Extract 36)

At minimum, a Tools for Life refresher could be scheduled at the beginning of the year, with a mid-year check-in to follow up, and multiple opportunities for educators to
provide feedback about how the implementation of Tools for Life is going in their classrooms.

**Recommendation 3: Going across the board.** Many participants explained the importance of having everyone in the school board involved in using Tools for Life. For example, Participant 17 noted:

> Everyone has to be on board with it, I think for it to be as effective as it possibly could be... everyone has to be using it not just you know--like it has to be very consistent I think. (Extract 37)

Participants often discussed the notion of consistency as an important aspect of the effectiveness of the Tools for Life program. Many participants reiterated the importance of all staff who are part of the board being able to use Tools for Life. As Participant 2 explained, there are potentially negative implications if an individual does not have an understanding of Tools for Life:

> If other educators don’t have that understanding as well and the kids go with that language and talk ... that’s why I think going across the board really helps. If I come to you and I’m saying ‘I tried this tool’ and they don’t know what you’re talking about. I think then it kind of falls a little bit flat because there’s only one person that has that understanding right? (Extract 38)

The concern was that staff members who are in varying roles and who are not trained in Tools for Life and hence are not familiar with the program may not reinforce students when they utilize Tools for Life skills. For example, Participant 4 shared, “I don’t know if the lunch/outside supervisors are trained at all.” Consequently, the reinforcement and application of Tools for Life concepts and skills may not transfer to alternative contexts (e.g., the playground) as a result of students’ interactions with staff who are not trained on Tools for Life.

Notably, participants perceived administrators as important leaders of Tools for
Life who should encourage and support their staff with the implementation of Tools for Life. For instance, Participant 20 suggested, “even if there was like an insert for an administrator--like things to say on the announcements or something like that, I think would be good.” Other participants reported that the principals of their schools were already speaking about Tools for Life over the announcements on a daily basis. Participant 5 shared, “well everyday on the announcements it’s emphasized by our principal and they talk about a tool... and when they talk about a tool they explain it.”

Evidently, administrative staff were not consistently utilizing strategies across all schools. Therefore, many participants perceived it as important that all administrative staff also use Tools for Life to some capacity.

While participants discussed the importance of all staff members being on board and trained in Tools for Life, participants also recognized the importance of Tools for Life extending beyond the educational setting to students’ homes. Although there is a home Tools for Life kit for parents to use with their children, the WCDSB does not currently use it as part of their Tools for Life initiative. In the absence of implementation of the home kit, the board periodically provides information about Tools for Life online for parents to access and encourages educators to provide Tools for Life updates in newsletters sent home. Many participants spoke of how they connect Tools for Life with the parents. For example, Participant 21 stated:

*We’ve shared with parents what we’re doing and talking about the Tools for Life program and what we’re focusing on. We share, when we’ve done the collaborative posters, we’ll share that with parent so that they can see and try to use the same language at home.* (Extract 39)

Despite efforts made by educators to connect with parents about Tools for Life, some participants identified the need for more than just newsletters to be sent home.
Participants discussed the importance of providing resources to help educate and familiarize parents with Tools for Life language and concepts. Some educators believed that the lack of parental education on how to use Tools for Life poses difficulties for the use of Tools for Life in varying contexts. Participant 1 recommended:

_There needs to be some sort of resource... something that we can send home that’s not just a sheet but maybe, I don’t even know what to suggest flash cards or something where parents can use that common language because if they are saying something different at home anywhere you try and use that language here it becomes convoluted._ (Extract 40)

As discussed by some participants, the discrepancy between different environmental contexts then leads to lack of reinforcement and mastery of Tools for Life skills for students as the skills are being promoted and encouraged in the classroom setting; however, the skills are not continuously reinforced and used by parents at home. Although not immediately attainable, it is important that parents are able to use the Tools for Life language with their children at home to ensure consistency for the child to ultimately enhance and support their learning of Tools for Life concepts. As Participant 27 stated:

_More parent education pieces I think would be important.... ‘cause there’s a piece missing, ‘cause parents maybe they don’t solve problems as under the same sort of guide as that we solve them at school. So there’s this disconnect between the parents and the kids will go home and will be solving problems one way at school and then they go home.... and it’s hard for them to understand the consistency._ (Extract 41)

**Recommendation 4: More effective data tracking.** Participants also indicated the importance of continuing to track the use of Tools for Life in the classrooms, as it would provide valuable insight into the degree to which Tools for Life is being implemented. For instance, as Participant 1 suggested:

_Participant: Let’s see how we’re doing and then maybe keep track of--do some_
Participant 1 reported not receiving feedback about the use of Tools for Life in their classroom. Therefore, more consistent data tracking is important to ensure that all educators implementing Tools for Life would be included in any data collection that takes place in the board.

**Summary**

This chapter reported the findings of the inductive thematic process analysis, which focused primarily on educators’ experiences implementing the Tools for Life program in their classrooms in the WCDSB. Sub-themes that mapped onto the following overarching themes, *Factors Affecting Implementation, Modifications of the Program,* and *Recommendations* about how to improve the delivery of Tools for Life were unpacked in detail and grounded in illustrative quotations from participants’ responses during the semi-structured interviews.

Moreover, findings generated from participants’ responses provided answers to the research questions which are addressed in sequence below:

1) What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about the program? Do these beliefs and expectations determine the extent to which they implement the program? Many participants spoke positively about the program, valuing particular features (e.g., fosters common language, see Appendix I), as well as the perceived flexibility of the program. Interestingly, because many participants reported modifying Tools for Life to improve student engagement and learning.
2) What are the perceived barriers or facilitators in implementing Tools for Life?
Numerous sub-themes were generated from participants’ responses that identified barriers to implementation (e.g., lack of comprehensive training, having to share the manual, time limitations, and student resistance to learning. There were also sub-themes related to facilitators to implementation (e.g., degree of experience with Tools for Life, training opportunities, ease of use of the Tools for Life manual, and alignment with Kindergarten curricula).

3) Do teachers think Tools for Life is successful in aiding children with social emotional development?
Many participants viewed Tools for Life as successful in aiding children with social-emotional development. For instance, participants saw the Tools for life program as empowering students by giving them the tools necessary to problem-solve, as well as to identify how they are feeling (see Appendix I). In addition, participants reported instances where they observed students using the Tools for Life skills independently (see Appendix I).

4) How is the practice of inclusivity incorporated into teaching Tools for Life? The sub-theme related to educators’ modification of the program based on knowing their learners is germane here. Many participants reported implementing the Tools for Life program to all students, but modified aspects of the program when necessary based on the diverse needs of the learners. There was specific mention of making accommodations for students with special needs.
Chapter 4: Discussion

Overview

The present research project was undertaken in response to an identified community need by the WCDSB to conduct a process evaluation to analyze the use of the Tools for Life program in schools within the board. The aims of the study were to use the qualitative research method of thematic analysis to investigate Canadian educators’ experiences with the implementation of Tools for Life, to identify the perceived manageability of program delivery and expressed needs in order to provide recommendations that would support the sustainability and use of the Tools for Life program. Three overarching themes related to implementation (with six themes and twenty-six subthemes) were generated from the data and reported in the present study: (1) Factors Affecting Implementation; (2) Modifications of the Program and (3) Recommendations. This chapter discusses these three strands of findings. The analyses are considered in the context of the theoretical and empirical literatures on program evaluation generally and how they might be applied in guiding future use of the Tools for Life program in the WCDSB specifically.

Connections with Previous Research

Factors affecting implementation. The facilitators and barriers reported by participants in the present study are consistent with the findings of previous research on factors that influence the implementation of evidence-based programs in educational settings (e.g., Forman, Olin, Hoagwood, Crowe, & Saka, 2009; Han & Weiss, 2005; Langley, Nadeem, Kataoka, Stein, & Jaycox, 2010; Mihalic & Irwin, 2003; Moore, Bumbarger, & Cooper, 2013).
Barriers. A barrier experienced by some participants in the present study was the lack of Tools for Life training they received. Participants who did not receive training recognized the implications for implementation of Tools for Life. Participants often explained the lack of training as a missed opportunity due to them transitioning between roles. Discrepancies in training across school personnel are a frequently cited challenge to achieving the sustainability of evidence-based interventions in schools (e.g., Bopp et al., 2013; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman et al., 2009). Bopp and colleagues’ (2013) fictionalized case study considered how staff turnover and keeping staff trained influenced the implementation of a physical activity program in its entirety. Although past studies defined staff turnover as involving staff leaving an organization altogether, turnover in the present Tools for Life study referred to staff roles changing (e.g., Long Term Occasional Appointment, intermediate to Kindergarten), which influenced implementation of the Tools for Life program.

Participants often encountered challenges with implementation of the Tools for Life program as a result of limited resources. Finding the time to implement Tools for Life was a significant barrier due to educators’ other responsibilities and duties that were seen as taking precedence over Tools for Life (e.g., curricular subjects). In addition, some participants reported that not all staff had a copy of their own Tools for Life manual and other materials due to lack of funding. These findings are consistent with a plethora of studies that have examined barriers to implementation of school-based programs (e.g., Forman et al., 2009; Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton 2011; Langley et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2013). A recent study explored educators’ perceptions of barriers to and facilitators of healthy eating and physical activity in schools and found that the primary
perceived barriers were: (1) lack of time within the school day and (2) lack of funding (Hammerschmidt, Tackett, Golzynski, & Golzynski, 2011). As suggested in prior research (Joyce et al., 2011), there is an ongoing tension experienced by educators when attempting to meet multiple curriculum commitments.

**Facilitators.** A study conducted by Forman and colleagues (2009) explored program developers’ perceptions of the following facilitators of the implementation of school-based programs in the United States: (1) implementer characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy); (2) good training; (3) compatibility with school philosophy; and (4) teacher and principal support. These findings correspond to the results of the present study in regards to the identified facilitators of the implementation of Tools for Life. Firstly, participants identified their degree of experience and knowledge of Tools for Life, and their own sense of efficacy, which is defined as peoples’ beliefs in their ability to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task (Han & Weiss, 2005), as factors contributing to the facilitation of Tools for Life. Previous literature supports that self-efficacy is an important aspect that influences educators’ enthusiasm for implementing new programs (e.g., Berman, McLaughlin, Bass-Golod, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Han, Catron, Weiss, & Marciel, 2005; Han & Weiss, 2005). Berman and colleagues (1977) found that teachers reporting greater self-efficacy were more likely to implement innovative instructional programs and sustain their implementation efforts to support positive learning outcomes for students than were educators who had a lower sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, educators’ attitudes regarding their own professional competence are positively related to the accomplishment of program goals and objectives, student performance, and continuation of implementation (Berman et al., 1977). In the present study, participants
perceived their own competence level and confidence in their ability to instruct
increasing over time and with experience with the program as characteristics that
facilitated the implementation of Tools for Life.

Secondly, quality training is an important resource related to successful school
program implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Han & Weiss, 2005; McCormick,
Steckler, & McLeroy, 1994; Mihalic & Irwin, 2003). This notion is reflected in a study
conducted by McCormick and colleagues (1994), which examined the implementation of
a smoking prevention educational program in the United States. Trained educators were
more likely to implement the program more fully and to continue to implement the
program one year after training than were educators who did not receive training
(McCormick et al., 1994). These findings resonate with those in the present study in
which participants described their training experience as an important factor that
contributed to the extent to which Tools for Life was implemented. Participants also
described how interactive, role-playing, and activity-driven training methods contributed
strongly to the quality of Tools for Life training received. This finding is consistent with
previous literature showing that active forms of learning in training sessions are
important for promoting skill acquisition (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Elliot & Mihalic,
2004).

Lastly, a noteworthy facilitator in the present study was the perceived “fit”
between the Tools for Life program and the Kindergarten philosophy. A core aspect of
the Kindergarten philosophy is that learning is done through exploration, play and inquiry
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Effective learning occurs when children have an
active role in exploring ideas, manipulating objects and using their creativity to
experiment with various materials (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Participants in
the present study often explained how the skills emphasized in the Tools for Life program
aligned with the areas of learning that are implicitly part of the Kindergarten program
(e.g., self-regulation and well-being). This finding is consistent with those of previous
studies, which suggest that programs are implemented more effectively to the degree that
they align with an institution’s missions, goals and existing practices (e.g., Bopp et al.,
2013; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman et al., 2009).

**Modifications.** An important finding of the present study was that participants
adapted the Tools for Life program for various reasons, some of which were attempts to
overcome implementation-related barriers associated with limited resources and some of
which were tied to customizing implementation to optimize student learning. This section
will discuss the following areas within the context of previous theoretical and empirical
literature: Types of Modification, Rationale for Modification, The Fidelity-Versus-
Adaptation debate, and a Note on Researcher positionality and Fidelity-versus-
Adaptation.

**Types of modification.** Moore and colleagues (2013) discussed the various types
of adaptations that can be made to evidence-based programs, including the following: (1)
procedure (e.g., time, location); (2) dosage (e.g., the number or duration of lessons); (3)
content (e.g., adding or removing sessions, activities, materials); and (4) cultural
relevance (e.g., whether or not the program is relevant to the program recipients). These
types of adaptations correspond with findings from the present study, as participants
described a variety of adaptations to Tools for Life that fall within the aforementioned
categories including: (1) use of Tools for Life in varying contexts (e.g., playground and
classroom) and often at varying times throughout the school day; (2) the adjustment of lessons by making them shorter in length; (3) addition/creation of new materials (e.g., books, posters) and practices; and (4) modifications of materials and activities to encompass inclusive practice and support the unique and diverse needs of elementary learners.

**Rationale for modification.** Participants often provided rationales for certain adaptations that were connected with reported facilitators (e.g., training, alignment with Kindergarten philosophy, Tools for Life manual) and barriers to implementation of Tools for Life (e.g., time limitations, having to share the manual, lack of comprehensive training). This finding is similar to that of a study conducted by Moore and colleagues (2013) who examined the reasons for adaptations made to programs implemented in natural settings by developing a classification system consisting of three categories that evaluated adaptations: (1) Fit (organization’s philosophy vs. logistical capacity); (2) Timing (proactive vs. reactive); (3) Valence (positive, neutral or negative alignment with program’s theory and goals). Time constraints were frequently reported as one of the factors that led to the adaptations of lessons being delivered. Additionally, adaptations were often made in response to challenges encountered during the implementation of the program that were unanticipated (i.e., reactive); whereas, making adaptations prior to the implementation of the program (i.e., proactive) did not occur frequently. Lastly, more than half of participants made adaptations that did not align with the program’s theory and goals (e.g., teaching all of the lessons); however, some participants made adaptations by creating new activities that were identified as aligning with and enriching the curriculum to make it more engaging for students. In the present study, participants
sometimes made changes to the Tools for Life program due to time constraints and not having enough Tools for Life materials for every classroom. Thus, participants made adaptations to the program to enhance the learning of students as an improvement upon available resources. For instance, participants identified the limited availability of supplementary materials (e.g., books) as a reason to use additional resources. Participants also created Tools for Life materials (e.g., posters) and activities with students that aligned with the Kindergarten philosophy. Therefore, similar to Moore and colleagues (2013) findings, many viewed the fit of the Tools for Life program with the Kindergarten philosophy as important and ultimately what encouraged adaptations of the program.

Furthermore, a finding in the present study was how educators’ rationales for making adaptations differed depending on students’ grade levels. Participants who taught at the primary level frequently identified time limitations due to other curricular demands as a reason for adapting the Tools for Life program. Interestingly, a finding in this study that differs from Moore and colleagues findings (2013) is that, at the Kindergarten level, proactive reasons for adaptations frequently occurred. For instance, participants perceived the length of the lessons as a foreseeable challenge in terms of getting Kindergarten students to sit for that long. As a result, participants in Kindergarten adapted the length of the lessons ahead of time.

Additionally, participants discussed the importance of knowing your learner as an important rationale for making modifications to the Tools for Life program. The American Psychological Association [APA] Task Force on Psychology in Education (1993) developed a framework of Learner-Centered Instruction (LCI) comprising of

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5 This difference could be due to the greater number of Ministry expectations in the Primary grades than in Kindergarten.
psychological principles that focus on factors internal to the learner (e.g., intrinsic motivation to learn) while still acknowledging the interaction with contextual factors external to the learner. The framework provides a holistic view of the learner, as well as an integrated perspective of learning (Schuh, 2003). LCI requires educators to understand the individual learner’s perspective and support capacities inherent to the learner in order to achieve necessary learning outcomes. Therefore, learning is situated within a dynamic context in which the educator and learner co-construct the learning process, taking into consideration the experiences, talents, interests, and unique needs of the learner (McCombs, 1997; Schuh, 2003). Many participants in the present study explained that they modified the Tools for Life program based on the individual or group differences of their students. As one participant mentioned, the Tools for Life program can be customized depending on the learners in the classroom.

**Fidelity-versus-adaptation debate.** All participants acknowledged that Tools for Life lessons were adapted and not always implemented as outlined in the manual. This finding then poses the question as to whether or not the adaptations made to Tools for Life were problematic with regards to program fidelity. Fidelity refers to the quality and integrity of the implementation of a program (Baranowski & Stables, 2000). The tension between fidelity and adaptation found in the present study is situated within an ongoing fidelity-versus-adaptation debate that is widely documented in program evaluation research (e.g., Backer, 2002; Castro, Barerra, & Martinez, 2004; Cutbush, Gibbs, Krieger, Clinton-Sherrod, & Miller, 2017; Elliot & Mihalic, 2004; Hill, Maucione, & Hood, 2007; Horne, 2017; Kemp, 2016; Moore et al., 2013).
There are two differing viewpoints on program adaptability: “profidelity” and “proadaptation” (Bopp et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2013). Proponents of a profidelity perspective believe that making adaptations to a program results in poorer outcomes and ultimately undermines the effectiveness of the program (Elliott & Mihalic, 2004). Researchers who adopt this perspective also often consider adaptations of a program as an implementation failure. Bound up with their critique of adaption, profidelity researchers believe that implementing a program as intended (i.e., with high fidelity) is achievable (e.g., Elliot & Mihalic, 2004; Fagan & Mihalic, 2003).

In contrast, proadaptation proponents argue that making adaptations may be advantageous and improve program outcomes (e.g., Castro et al., 2004; Durlak, 2010). Researchers who hold a proadaptation viewpoint argue the importance of giving consideration to a multitude of context-specific factors. Castro and colleagues (2004) suggested the following dimensions of adaptation that are important to consider in regards to the implementation of programs: (1) Cognitive Information Processing Characteristics (e.g., age/developmental level); (2) Affective-Motivational Characteristics (e.g., gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity); and (3) Environmental characteristics (e.g., unique ecological components of the community). Evidently, context is multi-faceted and often necessitates adaptation of programs in order to best support the program recipients. In the present study, participants discussed the need to adapt the Tools for Life program in order to best support the diverse needs of students. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Dariotis, Bumbarger, Duncan, and Greenberg (2008) that examined programs implemented in a variety of settings (e.g., community, community, community).  

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*Interestingly, the program developer and Tools for Life team view adaptations of the Tools for Life program positively. According to the team, educators can customize the program to fit with their classroom (A. Croxall, personal communication, December 19th, 2018).*
family, school) and found that all school-based programs had made adaptations. Participants in the present study often perceived adaptations to Tools for Life, to some extent, as necessary in order to ultimately make it work for their classrooms. Overall, participants perceived the flexibility of the Tools for Life program as a valuable aspect that influenced their decision to implement Tools for Life.

Although the fidelity-versus-adaptation controversy involves two strongly opposing perspectives in more extremized versions of the debate, there are other researchers who view fidelity and adaptation as dynamic concepts falling along a spectrum, with both concepts required for successful and sustainable implementation (Backer, 2002). The occurrence of adaptations to a program is two-fold: (1) it can happen whether there is high or low fidelity, and (2) may either align with/enhance the original program model or misalign with it (Moore et al., 2013). Although not all adaptations are necessarily positive (i.e., when it results in misalignment with a program model), this is not to say that adaptations made to the implementation of a program model are a hindrance. Adaptability and fidelity can co-occur without necessarily having a negative impact on program outcomes and can improve them in actuality (Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Therefore, when adaptations to a program occur, it is important to consider what components of a program are adapted to better understand if the core aspects of the program are maintained during implementation and to ensure that any adaptations do not impact the overall fidelity of the program (Durlak, 2010).

Note on positionality and fidelity-versus-adaptation. As an evaluation researcher conducting the present study, I found myself continuously reflecting on my stance within the fidelity-versus-adaptation debate. From my analysis, I came to understand that the
implementation of Tools for Life is a complex and dynamic process that is ultimately influenced by various context-specific factors. Thus, while I believe the fidelity of implementation is important, I also recognize that adaptations to a program can be positive and are sometimes necessary because of the context in which the program is situated. I believe that a fidelity-adaptation balance is important when considering the implementation of programs. This stance aligns with my aforementioned critical-realist position that I consider to take when conducting research.

**Participants’ Recommendations**

In the present study, recommendations were inductively generated from participants’ responses. The recommendations made by the participants provide the WCDSB with suggestions to further support the facilitation of Tools for Life implementation on schools across the board.

**Going across the board and Tools for Life follow-up sessions.** Both of these recommendations emphasize the need to ensure that all staff are trained in the use of Tools for Life. As previously mentioned, participants often stressed the importance of consistency in the use of Tools for Life terminology and strategies amongst staff, as well as parental participation in Tools for Life programming. Training of WCDSB staff should be institutionalized prior to facilitation of parent involvement. Therefore, it is important to ensure that all staff should be familiar with Tools for Life terminology and use the Tools for Life language with students to support their knowledge and use of Tools for Life. Participants also perceived that support and use of Tools for Life by administrators would be key factors that would contribute to the sustainability of the Tools for Life program in the board. Supportive and knowledgeable school leadership is instrumental in
ensuring that a program is made a priority and is comprehensively implemented (Han & Weiss, 2005). To best prepare for successful implementation of school-based programs, a multilevel, top-down approach has been identified as valuable (Forman et al., 2009). In particular, it is considered beneficial for administrators to be trained, then teachers, and then special services staff (e.g., Educational Assistants, Special Education Resource Teachers).

Training and program supports need to be in place to reach large numbers of school personnel (Forman et al., 2009). In the present study, participants who did not receive formal training explained that it was often due to a transition between roles in the board. As Durlak and Dupre (2008) discuss, a turnover/change in staff can hinder the implementation of the program and therefore contingencies need to be put in place in order for staff new to a program (e.g., Tools for Life) to receive the appropriate training.

In addition to advising that all staff receive Tools for Life training, participants recommended having Tools for Life follow-up sessions. These sessions would serve as a check-in for staff to discuss the use of Tools for Life in their classroom and to seek support if need be. Ongoing consultation and support throughout the implementation process have been documented in previous literature as important to ensure the continual use of a program in an educational setting (e.g., Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Forman et al., 2009). Han, Catron, and Weiss (2005) found that ongoing support provided to educators throughout the implementation of a cognitive-behavioural skills training program for Prekindergarten children was beneficial. Therefore, having opportunities to receive ongoing support in the consistent and effective use of Tools for Life is important for educators throughout the school year.
**Access to resources.** Participants who experienced limited access to Tools for Life materials/resources recommended that the WCDSB provide standardized universal access to required Tools for Life materials. As previously mentioned, the lack of resources available is frequently cited as a barrier to the implementation of programs (e.g., Forman et al., 2009; Langley et al., 2011; Moore et al., 2013). Despite limited funding, which often impedes the allocation of resources, there were other cost-effective avenues mentioned by participants in the present study, approaches that could improve accessibility to resources. Participants suggested that the board provide Tools for Life materials in a centralized location, such as the school library. While Tools for Life materials borrowed by other users could mean the materials would not always be readily available, many participants suggested that this would still be better than having no access at all to ensure consistency across the board. Additionally, an alternative suggestion provided by participants was making Tools for Life lessons and resources available online.

**More effective data tracking.** Previous literature has suggested the importance of monitoring implementation and of providing staff performance assessments and feedback (e.g., Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, & Wallace, 2005). The WCDSB has done some preliminary data tracking regarding the uptake of the Tools for Life program (B. Kenyon, personal communication, August 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2017); however, it was evident that not all educators had provided feedback on the use of Tools for Life in their classroom. Furthermore, there were discrepancies regarding receipt of formal training, accessibility to materials, which lessons were implemented, whether Tools for Life follow-up sessions happened, and whether Tools for Life connections with parents were
made. Therefore, there is a need for consistent data tracking that reaches all educators who are currently implementing Tools for Life to better understand how Tools for Life is being used in the board. In addition, effective data tracking should assess whether all staff acquired an understanding of key program principles and objectives (Han & Weiss, 2005). If educators have a comprehensive understanding of program principles and objectives, adaptations can be made without sacrificing program fidelity (Han & Weiss, 2005). Given the reported modifications made to the Tools for Life program in the present study, collecting data to better assess educators’ knowledge of the core principles of Tools for Life would be important. Overall, data tracking could also inform all future evaluations conducted on Tools for Life.

At a broader level, participants also provided recommendations for program developers of the Tools for Life program. The recommendations included the following: (1) use of realistic images; (2) diversifying the manual; and (3) updating the manual (e.g., online access to Tools for Life resources). Participants’ recommendations captured the perceived benefits of providing alternative access to Tools for Life resources. In particular, providing access via an online portal was seen as an additional solution to the experienced barrier of inconsistent availability resources. Although these recommendations may not be immediately attainable, participants provided insight on important aspects for program developers to consider when moving forward with any revisions to the Tools for Life manual.

**Strengths of the Study**

In conducting the present study, I was successful in collaborating with key stakeholders (i.e., Mental Health Lead and CYWs) in developing key process evaluation
objectives and support throughout the recruitment process. Moreover, the findings of this research project provide insight on the implementation of the Tools for Life program within a Canadian educational setting. To date, there is limited documentation of any program evaluations of Tools for Life. Thus, the present study filled a gap in the Tools for Life evaluation literature by addressing facets of implementation that have not previously been considered and/or documented (e.g., facilitators of and barriers to implementation of Tools for Life).

**Sample.** The robustness of the sample size attained in this study ($N=28$) is supported by previous work (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), which suggests that at least 12 interviews are needed in order to reach data saturation, which refers to a state of affairs in which “no new information or themes are observed in the data” (Guest et al., 2006, p. 59). Saturation is believed to have been reached in the present study because no new information was revealed and minimal to no changes needed to be applied to the themes after exhaustive analysis of all 28 interview transcripts. Including 28 interviews generated thick and rich data. Additionally, having a sample of between 15 to 30 participants is advantageous for identifying patterns across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

**Study design and procedures.** Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon that captures the complexity of individuals’ experiences in a way that quantitative research cannot (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In the present study, the qualitative data collection method of semi-structured interviews

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7 At the time of the writing of this thesis, the RAND Tools for Life study is still ongoing. Additionally, KidsLINK gathered preliminary data in a pilot outcome evaluation of Tools for Life in the Waterloo region in 2009.

8 Fusch and Ness (2015) refer to thick data as the amount of data collected and rich data as the quality and depth of the data.
elicited in-depth, detailed responses with regards to the implementation of Tools for Life. In addition, using interviews allowed for natural conversation to take place in which additional observations could also be made with respect to body language and tone to better understand the context surrounding participants’ responses. Discussions with participants elicited important details about factors that facilitated and impeded implementation, and the reasons for modifications to the program. By analyzing qualitative data inductively, we can discover things about peoples’ experiences that we might not have anticipated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A main strength of using Inductive Thematic Analysis to analyze the data in the study was that it helped provide a rich story that captured the similarities and differences across the data set (e.g., variation with respect to participants’ training experiences); as well as generating unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A noteworthy finding that was not initially anticipated was the value participants placed on the flexibility and adaptability of the Tools for Life program.

Throughout the data analysis phase, various steps were taken within each phase of thematic analysis as a means to establish the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The steps taken were in accordance with Norwell and colleagues’ proposed procedure that aims to meet the trustworthiness criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Throughout the initial phase of data analysis, there was a significant amount of time spent on reading the transcripts and documenting reflective thoughts, as well as possible codes. I then proceeded to complete exhaustive line-by-line coding of each transcript and consult with my advisor, Dr. MacMartin, to quality-check (phase 2). While searching for themes, I

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9 Trustworthiness and credibility are concepts used in qualitative research that parallel the notions of reliability and validity used to evaluate quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).
drafted a diagram (i.e., initial thematic map) and made notes to get a sense of theme connections (phase 3). At this point, I met with Dr. MacMartin a few times to discuss the possible connections between the themes as well as determine the hierarchies of themes and concepts. Detailed notes were maintained in order to keep track of initial themes and their evolution. Themes and subthemes were developed and vetted in consultation with Dr. MacMartin to ensure that there was consensus on the names of the themes and subthemes (phase 4 and 5) and that they were persuasively grounded in the data.

**Limitations of the Study**

Despite the noted strengths and contributions of the present study, it is important to acknowledge that this study is not without its limitations.

**Sample.** The findings of the present study were based on a small sample size ($N = 28$). A larger number of participants ($n = 20$) taught at the Kindergarten level than at the Primary level ($n = 8$). As a result, there were limitations with regards to capturing a diverse range of perspectives on and experiences with the Tools for Life program across the board, as well as an uneven representation of educators at different grade levels. In particular, a majority of the participants spoke to the experience of using the Tools for Life Early Learning manual and teaching Tools for Life in a Kindergarten classroom; in contrast, participants’ voices at the Primary level were underrepresented. The Kindergarten and Primary curricula are substantially different from one another and therefore the unique challenges and facilitators experienced by Primary educators may not have been as adequately captured as if there had been a larger Primary subsample. Moreover, although data saturation was reached in the present study, there remains a lack of generalizability. This study recruited participants from a relatively smaller school
board in Ontario. Although participants were recruited from multiple schools located in four different geographical locations (mostly rural), a majority of participants who participated in the present study resided in the same geographical location. Therefore, findings from the present study cannot be extended to other school boards in Ontario and more broadly, Canada. Further research should have a larger sample size and examine the implementation of Tools for Life across multiple school boards.

Notably, it was evident that many participants were Tools for Life “program champions” who possessed positive attitudes, high energy, and enthusiasm towards the implementation of Tools for Life. Being a program champion is suggested as a positive implementer characteristic facilitative of the implementation of school-based programs (Forman et al., 2009). Although this is a strength with respect to implementation, it is important to recognize that the present study does not necessarily capture in an adequate way the experiences of educators who either had difficulties with implementation or who were not implementing Tools for Life and should have been. Despite the possible limitations of having a small sample size, it is important to note that the time-consuming nature of thematic analysis of transcribed individual interview precluded collecting a large quantity of data.

Study design and procedures. The use of qualitative semi-structured interviews poses some limitations within the present study. Firstly as the interviewer, it is difficult for me to ascertain whether the prompts and follow-up questions used could have potentially had an impact on the way in which participants responded. Secondly, it is important to recognize the possibility that participants didn’t fully answer all questions asked throughout the interview (i.e., providing a one word response). Lastly, collecting
data cross-sectionally reflects participants’ responses in a certain point of time and does not necessarily take into consideration experiences of the implementation of Tools for Life over a span of time. Thus, the collection of data at multiple time points (e.g., pre and post) and using an alternative data collection method such as a survey would potentially overcome the limitations of the present study’s design.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of the present study, there are numerous recommendations regarding future directions for research on the implementation of Tools for Life. Firstly, it would be of benefit to gather information regarding the use of Tools for Life in schools from multiple key stakeholders’ perspectives. This study solely looked at Kindergarten and Primary educators’ experiences with implementing Tools for Life; however, administrative support is an essential factor that contributes to the sustainability of a program in a school (Han & Weiss, 2005). Therefore, future studies should also examine administrative staffs’ perspectives on the implementation of Tools for Life to better understand the extent to which their beliefs and practices may have an influence on Tools for Life implementation. Future studies should also consider looking at parental engagement with Tools for Life. The Tools for Life home kit is currently not implemented in the WCDSB. Nonetheless, participants continuously discussed the various strategies used to establish a home connection and viewed it as important that parents were involved with and educated about the use of Tools for Life. Therefore, future research should consider parental involvement and its impact on students’ use of Tools for Life skills and outcomes.
Additionally, findings of the present study reflect the implementation of Tools for Life in a particular time and context. As previously mentioned, more effective data tracking is required to accurately track the quality and sustainability of Tools for Life implementation. Data that are collected on the implementation of a program early on might overestimate the level of implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Therefore, future studies should collect implementation data at multiple time points to better understand and determine whether or not there is consistent implementation of Tools for Life.

An important finding of this study highlights the adaptations made to multiple implementation components. It is clear that implementation often influences program outcomes such that better implementation is associated with achieving the intended outcomes for program recipients (Durlak, 2010; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Although the present study provides insight on the types of and reasons for modifications made to Tools for Life, the impact of these adaptations in relation to outcomes has yet to be examined. In some instances, adaptations may enhance program outcomes; however, other adaptations may weaken the overall effectiveness of a program (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to conduct research that continues to monitor these adaptations rather than treating them as a failure of the program. Future research that considers the relationship between the adaptation of implementation components and outcomes will help better understand how programs, such as the Tools for Life program, function in real world settings.

To date, there is still little known about the implementation of the Tools for Life program. Future research should aim to conduct program evaluations that extend beyond
the sample of the present study. For instance, schools part of the WCDSB just began the uptake of Tools for Life in the junior division (Grades 4 to 6). Therefore, future research should capture a range of perspectives consisting of the implementation of Tools for Life across grade levels, as it is possible that there are factors pertinent to each grade level that may possibly affect implementation. Furthermore, due to a small sample size and the qualitative nature of the study, program evaluation research should consider utilizing a mixed-methods approach to evaluating the Tools for Life program. In addition to the use of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions, future research should also consider using either online-surveys or comparative research approaches (e.g., pre and post-tests) to evaluate Tools for Life.

**Implications of the Present Study**

The present study highlights what is currently working and what needs improvement with respect to the implementation of the Tools for Life program in classrooms in the WCDSB. These findings are critical pieces of information for stakeholders (i.e., WCDSB Mental Health Lead, executive council) for a few key reasons. Firstly, the findings have the potential to provide WCDSB stakeholders with a sense of the program’s progress and how it is currently being used. Secondly, providing WCDSB staff and administrators with a comprehensive overview of these findings helps guide possible next steps as to which changes and/or recommendations (e.g., Tools for Life follow-up sessions, access to resources) are feasible and can be incorporated into existing and future use of the Tools for Life program in the WCDSB. Moreover, the findings from this study may inform future decisions made by the board (i.e., Executive Council) that involve the allocation of funding to support the ongoing use of the program.
In addition, findings from the present study are of relevance and importance to the program developer and Tools for Life team. Participants’ feedback about the program (i.e., the use of realistic images) was intended not only for users, but also for the developer of the program and the Tools for Life team who will have access to the published thesis. It is hoped that insights about the reported strengths of Tools for Life, as well as suggestions for program improvement, will be helpful for the team to consider moving forward. Moreover, as previously mentioned, at the time of the writing this thesis, there is limited documentation in regards to published program evaluations of Tools for Life. As a result, the program developer expressed keen interest in the findings of the present study to use for practical purposes. In particular, findings from this study are considered important for supporting the introduction and uptake of the Tools for Life program in other school boards across North America and for disseminating the findings at educational events (i.e., conferences; A. Croxall, personal communication, December 19th, 2018).

Conclusion

This study captured themes that inductively reflected the voices of Kindergarten and primary educators in order to better understand their perceptions of and experiences with the implementation of the Tools for Life program. This study was intended to inform and generate recommendations for both WCDSB personnel and Tools for Life program developers. Interview discussions revealed a diverse range of factors that were perceived to impact the implementation of Tools for Life. Additionally, the perceived flexibility of the program was a noteworthy finding. Many participants held positive perceptions of Tools for Life and liked the freedom to adapt the program in order to best
support the unique and diverse needs of the learners in their classroom. Furthermore, this study provides novel insights into the implementation of Tools for Life within a Canadian context. Overall, the Tools for Life program is a valuable program that with the right supports in place can be a sustainable program in school boards such as the WCDSB.
References


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doi:10.1016/j.ridd.2011.08.016


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Appendices

Appendix A: Tools for Life Program Logic model

Why the program is needed
As many as 1 in 5 children and youth will experience some form of mental health problem in Ontario (CMHO, 2017). These findings underscore the importance and need for promoting positive mental health. School-based interventions such as Tools For Life (Tools for Life) assist children in developing and continuously refining skills to think differently and adapt successfully when faced with perceived experiences that are stressful and challenging. Tools for Life aims to teach children the fundamental skills that contribute to the development of protective factors and to the core competencies of building supportive and healthy relationships.

Target Groups*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Children (Grade 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Strategies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training and Consultation</th>
<th>Education and skill development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Program Activities:

- Accredited Tools for Life leader facilitates a 1-day practical introductory workshop for teachers and education assistants
- Consultation with Tools for Life leader is offered post training to ensure fidelity
Tools for Life comprises of lessons focusing on the three following core skills:
Lesson 1: Communication
Lesson 2: **communication and feelings**
Lesson 3: communication
Lesson 4, 5, 6 & 7: Relationship Problem Solving
Lesson 8: Communication, feelings, Relationship Problem Solving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Activities</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 1: “Listen! How?”</td>
<td>Listening bodies poster, <strong>Learns to Listen</strong> book, Farm Animals worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2: “Speaking and Feeling”</td>
<td><strong>The way I feel</strong> book, feelings and body clues poster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3: “Making friends with put ups”</td>
<td><strong>Sticks and Stones</strong> book, Put ups poster, put up strips and pouch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4: “Take a big breath”</td>
<td>How to calm down Poster, problem solving light poster, <strong>When I feel Angry</strong> book, calming down activity page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 5: “Stop! Calm down! Think!”</td>
<td>Problem solving light poster, body clues, how to calm down, tools for problem solving poster, situation cards and tool cards from the kit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 6: “What are hands for?”</td>
<td><strong>Hands are not for Hitting</strong> book, Role play cards (I feel messages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 7: “Asking for help”</td>
<td><strong>Tattlin’ Madeline</strong> book, Relationship skills tool box, Tattling questions and word search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 8: “Great Job!”</td>
<td><strong>Relationship skills jeopardy, review of posters</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Shorter Goal:**

1. Increase in teacher’s knowledge of the program
2. Improved skills of utilizing the program material effectively when teaching
3. Increase in teacher’s self-efficacy to implement Tools for Life

**Longer Goal:**

1. To achieve an effective learning environment
2. Less time spent in classroom management
3. Teachers will share a common language with their students
4. Increased job satisfaction

1. Recognition of one’s and others body cue of anger and frustration
2. Increased knowledge of when to ask for assistance
3. Improved active listening in order to understand and respond appropriately in various situations

1. Utilizing appropriate and effective calming down strategies
2. Improved self-regulation when anxious or frustrated
3. Application of relationship skills when problem solving
4. Increase in prosocial behaviour

To support all children in achieving and sustaining optimal health and developmental potential

*The Tools for Life program consists of a parent package; however, it currently is not an incorporated component of the implementation at WCDSB*
December 4, 2017

Dr. Clare MacMartin
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition
University of Guelph
Guelph, ON
N1G 2W1

Dear Dr. MacMartin,

On November, 20, 2017 the Executive Council of the Wellington Catholic District School Board reviewed the proposal submitted by Ms. Ranby and Dr. MacMartin. The Council approved the proposal and the recruitment of volunteer participants from our primary division classes.

Proposed Project:
Research Project Evaluating Tools for Life in the Wellington Catholic District School Board

Submitted by:
Sarah Ranby, BAH (Psychology). Master’s student in Family relations and Applied Nutrition
Dr. Clare MacMartin, Associate Professor, Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, Advisor

WCDSB Sponsor: Dr. Benda Kenyon, Mental Health Lead

Tools for Life forms an important part of our efforts to enhance student well-being through direct instruction of social emotional and self-regulation skills. The proposed study will help us understand how we can best facilitate the practical use of the program by teachers in our classrooms to ensure that this component of our primary prevention programming is available to all students in kindergarten to grades 3.

I can be reached at 519-821-4600, ext. 209 or via email at brian.capovilla@wellingtoncdsb.ca if there are any questions regarding this proposal.

Sincerely,

Brian Capovilla
Superintendent of Education
Appendix C: Executive Summary

Proposed Research Project Evaluating Tools for Life in the Wellington Catholic District School Board

Research Team

Graduate Student Researcher: Sarah Ranby, BAH, Psychology
Master’s student in Family Relations and Human Development
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph
    Email: sranby@uoguelph.ca    Tel. 905-909-5476

Master’s Thesis Advisor: Clare MacMartin, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph
    Email: cmacmart@uoguelph.ca    Tel. 519-824-4120 Ext. 52419

Master’s Thesis Advisory Committee Member: John Dwyer, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph
    Email: jdwyer@uoguelph.ca    Tel. 519-824-4120 Ext. 52210

Research Sponsor: Brenda Kenyon, PhD, C. Psych., Mental Health Lead, WCDSB

Executive Summary

As many as 1 in 5 children and youth will experience some form of mental health problem in Ontario (CMHO, 2017). Mental health problems can potentially hinder children’s academic and social development (Kang-Yi, Mandell, & Hadley, 2013). Past research has shown that school-based prevention and intervention are essential in reducing the incidence of mental health problems (Reinke, Stormont, Herm, Puri, & Goel, 2011; Kang-Yi et al., 2013). Numerous programs are available to assist educators in preventing problem behaviours and promoting children’s health through facilitation of children’s social and emotional learning. One socio-emotional program, Tools for Life (2016), aims to equip children with the skills that will promote their resiliency, confidence and emotional well-being. Although social emotional learning programs are posited to produce positive effects (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyck, Bloodworth, Tompsett
& Weissberg, 2000) there is a lack of research that explores the quality and feasibility of the implementation of such programs.

The proposed Master’s thesis project will consist of a qualitative process evaluation of data collected from 40-minute semi-structured interviews with thirty teachers and ECE providers in the Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes in Wellington Catholic District School Board regarding their use of Tools for Life. A draft of the interview questions is being developed by the research team. However, a consultation meeting led by Sarah Ranby and Brenda Kenyon will also take place with interested Child and Youth Workers employed at WCDSB. This group of employees, who have previously been involved in monitoring the implementation of Tools for Life, have been identified as key informants well positioned to assist in further development and refinement of the interview questions. Once approval with WCDSB has been given, an application to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Guelph will be submitted in Fall 2017. Drafted recruitment materials, information sheets for potential educator participants, and consent forms, created by the research team with approval by WCDSB, will be included in the ethics application. After ethics approval is granted, recruitment of participants will begin, with the hope that interviews with participants can start in January or February of 2018.

The research questions that will be used to guide the interview questions and their analysis are as follows:

1. What are teachers’ expectations of and beliefs about the program? Do these determine the extent to which teachers implement the program?
2. What are the perceived barriers or facilitators in implementing Tools for Life?
3. Do teachers think Tools for Life is successful in aiding children with social-emotional development?
4. How is the practice of inclusivity incorporated into teaching Tools for Life?

The interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed, and then analyzed using inductive Thematic Analysis (TA). Inductive TA is a discovery-oriented process, during which themes and patterns are identified through thorough, cyclical coding of written transcripts of participants’ interview answers. Research findings will be reported in the write-up of the thesis, using anonymized quotations from the interview transcripts to illustrate the research claims. A copy of the thesis will be provided to the WCDSB. It is hoped that this study will provide Canadian educators and researchers with valuable information about the benefits of, and possible challenges in, integrating such programs into the school curricula, along with generating recommendations for further curriculum development and delivery to equip children with effective life skills and build resilience.

References


Appendix D: REB #18-01-002

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human participants in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2nd Edition.

The REB requires that researchers:
- Adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB.
- Receive approval from the REB for any modifications before they are implemented.
- Report any change in the source of funding.
- Report unexpected events or incidental findings to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.
- Are responsible for ascertaining and complying with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements with respect to consent and the protection of privacy of participants in the jurisdiction of the research project.

The Principal Investigator must:
- Ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of facilities or institutions involved in the research are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.
- Submit an Annual Renewal to the REB upon completion of the project. If the research is a multi-year project, a status report must be submitted annually prior to the expiry date. Failure to submit an annual status report will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.

The approval for this protocol terminates on the EXPIRY DATE, or the term of your appointment or employment at the University of Guelph whichever comes first.

Signature: __________________________

Date: February 16, 2018

Stephen P. Lewis
Chair, Research Ethics Board-General
Appendix E: Recruitment Materials

Sample e-mail:

Dear Colleagues:

As part of our primary prevention program to help students acquire basic social skills, Tools for Life has been introduced throughout our Kindergarten to Grade 4 classes. Tools for Life helps students learn self-regulation, social problem solving, and self-awareness.

We are committed to monitoring the implementation of the program to ensure it is accessible for teachers and useful in the classroom. This winter (January-February 2018) the University of Guelph will be conducting a research project exploring educators’ perceptions of the Tools for Life program in Wellington Catholic.

We are interested in hearing from all Kindergarten to grade 3 educators, whether you are a fan of Tools for Life or not, and whether or not you use Tools for Life regularly in the classroom.

You will be invited to participate in an individual 40-minute interview. Only the research team will have access to the data, which will be summarized without including identifiers such as names in the results section of the final thesis and in a brief report to the Board that will also be available to participants upon request.

Participants will receive a gift card in appreciation for their involvement.

If you are interested in participating and have further questions, please feel free to contact the, Student Investigator, Principal Investigator or myself. Additional information can also be found in the attached Information Sheet.

Best regards,
Brenda

(n.b., Brenda is the Mental Health lead of the WCDSB who oversees the use of Tools for Life and will be sending the e-mail to the teacher listserv)
Information Sheet:

Title of Study: A Qualitative Process Evaluation of Tools for Life

Principal Investigator: Clare MacMartin, Associate Professor, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph, cmacmart@uoguelph.ca, 519-824-4120 Ext. 52419

Co-Investigators:
John Dwyer, Associate Professor, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph, jdwyer@uoguelph.ca, 519-824-4120 Ext. 52210
Sarah Ranby, BAH, Psychology Master’s student in Family Relations and Human Development, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph, sranby@uoguelph.ca, 905-909-5476

Dear WCDSB staff:

We are pleased to provide you with this information letter informing you of an upcoming research project entitled: “A Qualitative Process Evaluation of Tools for Life.” The purpose of this study is to understand educators’ perceptions about the effectiveness, accessibility, and manageability of program delivery, along with barriers to, and facilitators of, the implementation of Tools for Life. As you know, this program is currently being implemented in the Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms at the Wellington Catholic District School Board (WCDSB).

Further details on the project will be forthcoming. As either an ECE or teacher implementing this program, your involvement will include:
- Attending a 40-minute interview discussing your thoughts about the implementation of Tools for Life
- The interview will take place in a booked out room at your place of employment. Alternative arrangements can be made upon request to meet on the University of Guelph campus.
To thank you for your participation upon completion of the interview you will receive a 25.00 gift card.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Guelph for compliance with federal guidelines involving human participants. If you have any questions about your rights and welfare as a research participant, please contact the University of Guelph Director of Research Ethics, Sandra Auld (519-824-4120, ext. 56606, sauld@uoguelph.ca).

If you have any questions about this project, please contact the Student Investigator or Principal Investigator:

Student Investigator: Sarah Ranby
sranby@uoguelph.ca

Principal Investigator: Clare MacMartin
cmacmart@uoguelph.ca
Tel. 519-824-4120 Ext. 52419

Sincerely,
Sarah Ranby, BAH,
MSc Graduate Student, Family Relations & Applied Nutrition
905-909-5476
sranby@uoguelph.ca
Appendix F: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study titled, “A Qualitative Process Evaluation of Tools for Life”. The results of the study will contribute to faculty research in addition to a Masters thesis project. This research is being conducted by the researchers listed below and contact information is provided should you have any questions or concerns about the research.

Investigators

Principal Investigator: Clare MacMartin, Associate Professor, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph, cmacmart@uoguelph.ca, 519-824-4120 Ext. 52419

Student Investigator: Sarah Ranby, BAH, Psychology, Graduate student in Family Relations and Human Development, Family Relations and Applied Nutrition (FRAN), University of Guelph, 905-909-5476 or sranby@uoguelph.ca

Purpose of the Study

As many as 1 in 5 children and youth will experience some form of mental health problem in Ontario. This highlights the importance of developing effective ways of promoting positive mental health and teaching children how to be resilient in the face of various stressors. Given the amount of time that children spend engaged in compulsory education and the important role of schools in shaping the lives of children and youth, the school setting is considered to be an ideal environment for early identification programs and supporting the social emotional well-being of children.

Numerous programs are available to assist educators in preventing problem behaviours and promoting children’s health through facilitation of children’s social and emotional learning curricula. Tools for Life (Tools for Life) is a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program that aims to prepare children (Kindergarten through intermediate) with the skills that will support their resiliency, confidence and emotional well-being. Although in theory SEL programs are proposed to produce positive effects, the question then
becomes, “How feasible and sustainable is the process of implementing programs such as Tools for Life in schools?”

As teachers play an important role in the delivery of Tools for Life, it is essential to evaluate what teachers indicate as identified needs for their students, any barriers that they believe to exist, and/or any issues related to their teaching experiences. Therefore, the aim of this study is to gain further insight on Canadian educators’ views on the process and impact of the Tools for Life program. It is hoped that this study will provide educators and researchers with valuable information about the benefits of, and possible challenges in, incorporating such programs into the school curricula, along with making recommendations for further curriculum development and effective ways to equip children with effective life skills and build resilience.

**Procedures for Data Collection**
If you decide to volunteer to participate in this research study, we will require that you sign the consent form. After you have read and signed this consent form, you will be invited to participate in an interview that will take place in a booked out room at your place of employment. Alternatively if you wish to have the interview in a different location, arrangements can be made upon request to meet on the University of Guelph campus. It is anticipated that the interview will take 40 minutes to complete. Research findings are expected to be available to you in summer 2018.

**Procedures for Data Analysis**
The interviews will be audio-recorded on a laptop and transcribed word for word. A form of qualitative analysis will be used to analyze the written transcripts of the interviews once the data is collected. The goal is to identify themes and patterns across participants’ responses.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts**
Due to the nature of the interview, participation in this research could create a bit of discomfort regarding possible risks of being identified as having volunteered to be in the study. These risks have been addressed below (see “Confidentiality”). There are no other identified risks to participating in this study that are greater than those you would experience in daily life. Please understand that if this study causes you to feel emotionally overwhelmed, you may withdraw. You are also encouraged to decline to respond to questions, if they make you feel uncomfortable.

**Potential Benefits to Participants and/or Society**
A benefit of your participation may include impacting the future use of Tools for Life by the School Board to potentially improve training and how the program is taught. The initial information collected and suggestions made to improve the quality of implementation from this study will provide the base for further program evaluation research. More broadly, this research study will also inform Canadian practitioners in selecting community-based programs and inform decision-makers in the distribution of resources. By participating in this study, you will be able to have your voice heard on this
important topic. A summary of the results of this study will be made available to you as a
digital copy upon your request.

Payment for Participation
By participating in this research project, all participants will receive a Tim Hortons gift
card ($25.00) Upon completion of the interview, your signature will be needed to indicate
that you have received the gift card.

Confidentiality

Due to the qualitative nature of the research study, your words, not numbers, are the
primary focus of this research project and are what will be used for data analysis.
Quotations from participants’ transcribed interview answers will be included in written
reports of the research project findings. The use of quotations is important to demonstrate
to readers that the research findings are sound and clearly based on what the participants
have told the research team. For this reason, the data collected for this project is not kept
confidential; however, your name and contact information will be kept confidential

The entire interview, including questions in the form of digitized audiotapes and your
responses, will also be stored on a password protected, encrypted laptop. Only the
research team will have access to the audiotapes and transcribed interviews. A summary
of the results will be e-mailed to you, if you indicate below on this consent form that you
wish to receive a copy of the summary.

Although only the research team will have access to the transcribed interview, the
responses you give in the interview will not be confidential. Quotations from the
interview will be used to back up the research claims in the Masters thesis, any
publications and so forth. In order to anonymize the data and reduce the risk of
recognition of your identity, all identifying features in transcribed interview responses
will be removed prior to publication of results. This will be done by using pseudonyms
and by changing some details that could lead to identification of students, other staff,
classrooms and schools. All data will be summarized, anonymously, in the results section
of the final report. At no point will any comments/data be attributed to any individual,
unless there was specific agreement to do so given beforehand. The audio recordings will
be stored for 1 year to allow for interviews to be transcribed and for accuracy of
transcription to be re-verified if necessary. The written transcriptions in the form of
digital word-processing files will be kept for a period of 3 years, following the
completion of the study and then destroyed. This will allow for potential re-analysis as
part of the publication process. Personnel who work at the Wellington Catholic District
School Board will have no knowledge of whether you participated in the project.
Personnel from the School Board will not have access to any of the data collected from
this study nor will they participate in the analysis of the data. Any data they see will be in
the form of anonymized quotations included in formal write-ups of the research findings.
Participation and Withdrawal

This study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to participate in the study, the option to withdraw will remain available up until June 30th, 2018. As analysis consists of identifying patterns across data, it would at this time be difficult to remove data once the analysis has started. If you have any concerns regarding withdrawal, please contact the Principal Investigator.

Rights of Research Participants
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. The researchers may withdraw your responses, only if circumstances arise that warrant doing so. This project has been reviewed by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines in Canada for research involving human participants (REB #18-01-002). You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact:
Director, Research Ethics
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph ON N1G 2W1
Telephone: 519-824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: 519-821-5236

Questions:
If you have any questions regarding this research project or this consent form, please contact Sarah Ranby at 905-909-5476 or by email at: sranby@uoguelph.ca. Please see next page for signatures

Signature of Research Participant:

I have read the information provided for the study “A Qualitative Process Evaluation of Tools for Life “as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

___________________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

___________________________________  _________________
Signature of Participant                        Date
Please indicate below whether or not you would like to receive a summary of the research results:

☐ Yes: ________________________________
   e-mail

☐ No

Appendix G: Interview Guide
1. What did you find useful when you received training?

2. What did you not find useful when you received training?

3. Did trainers provide you with scenarios of challenges you may encounter and provide you with way to handle it?

4. Which Teaching Activities implemented as planned?

5. Which suggested accompanying materials used when you taught Tools for Life lessons?

6. What were some of the aspects you liked about the Tools for Life program?

7. Were there any aspects of Tools for Life that you didn’t like?

8. What degree do you observe children using Tools for Life skills?

9. What strategies do you use to keep children immersed/involved in the program beyond just the lessons?

10. Do you have any suggestions for any improvements that can be made for Tools for Life?

11. Was there anything unexpected that occurred in the Tools for Life program for the children or for you as a facilitator in the classroom?

12. Are there any other social-emotional teaching activities that you would suggest integrating into regular programming that is missing from Tools for Life?

13. Were there any challenges that you encountered when implementing Tools for Life?

14. Do you know who to seek support from and have you in the past if you are experiencing difficulties and need consultation?

15. What strategies do you use when teaching Tools for Life to assists students who require additional support and/or accommodations?

16. What are the biggest obstacles that you encounter using Tools for Life with children with diverse needs?
Appendix H: Inductive Thematic Analysis

*Figure 1.* Initial thematic map representing provisional candidate overarching themes, themes and subthemes and their inter-relationships.
Appendix H: Inductive Thematic Analysis

Figure 2. Final thematic map representing overarching themes, themes and subthemes and their inter-relationships.
**Figure 3.** Portion of final thematic map (see Fig. 2) representing process evaluation-related overarching themes, themes and subthemes and their inter-relationships.
Appendix I: Quotations Illustrating Fourth and Fifth Overarching Themes

Table 2

Educators’ Perceptions of Program Impact/(Non) Achievement of Learning Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Illustrative Quotes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Developmental Capacity of Students</td>
<td>I think it just depends on where they’re at emotionally some of them are younger at the beginning of the year and developmentally not just ready to be fully able independently access those tools […] we have children that are three, four, five and now are six […] so it’s quite an age difference and so developmentally some are just needing more support and that’s fine (Participant 21). By Grade three they have a good grasp, they’ve been taught it you know […] when I started talking about Tools for Life they knew right away what strategies to use and in different situations (Participant 13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group of Students*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Understanding Tools for Life Concepts*</td>
<td>There’s one in there compromise […] it’s a very hard one for Kindergartens to understand, so it usually ends up being share and take turns [laughs] I mean it’s a good word for them to kind of hear, but they don’t understand that concept (Participant 28). Often they don’t know the different feeling, like to say frustrated- like the picture for frustrated- the kids would look at and say ‘she looks angry’, like they know sadness,</td>
</tr>
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</table>
they know happiness, they know anger—but you know… feeling jealous, or feeling shy or feeling frustrated—they don’t know how to label those feelings (Participant 17).

Individual Differences*

Yes I do, for lets say twenty-five percent, but then they’re the leaders of the class. It always takes you know the one who picks it up more, they’re the ones using it and the rest follow (Participant 26).

I think there’s always some kind of leaders that kind of maybe start initiating (Participant 19).

2. Teacher Guidance

It depends on the kids definitely, like it’s- I think it can be very individual for some- it’s really based on their individuality some of them. Some of them are really receptive and can reflect on that in the moment […] there are some kids who are that intuitive that can, that can use it—whereas some really need that help and those reminders and that adult presence to remind them (Participant 17).

I suppose it depends on how much I teach it, if I focus on it a lot I think they use it more and if I don’t then they don’t cause they’re not familiar (Participant 12).

*Sub-themes of Theme 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Illustrative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Shifting Role of Educator</td>
<td>Before we started using the program you were constantly, your entire day was solving issues and conflicts and problems- now my first response is ‘well what tool did you use?’ […] You know instead of always jumping in and trying to solve conflict for them- we try to do more stepping back and then watching how they solve it (Participant 24).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I like that it puts faith in the kids and it tells the kids that we trust them […] they can handle their own problems if you trust them to do it and I have to bite my tongue so often (.) I want to interfere sometimes (Participant 5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Empowers Children</td>
<td>I really like the part that they feel empowered to recognize their own feelings- that they feel empowered to solve problems in different ways, and that they don’t feel a helplessness or overwhelmed. They can have a deeper understanding of themselves and their interactions with their peers (Participant 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It just puts back ownership to the kids of you need to navigate how to solve the way you’re feeling and how to solve a problem that you’re having with somebody (Participant 6).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Fosters a Common Language

So if I talk about you know whatever the feelings, or all feelings are okay or use your tools- they know that I’m talking about, the kids all know. So when they come up the next year they also know what I’m talking about and we don’t have to start from fresh, we start from what they already know. So we’re building on knowledge already that they’ve developed [...] you can say the same language and have the same response (Participant 15)

It’s giving us the common language that from one class to another they’ll understand so they know when we’re outside if I’m talking to a Kindergarten in the other class you know we’ll talk about ‘well what strategy could you use?’ when they come to us with a problem (.) what strategy could you use? They make a suggestion they can go and use it so we’re using the same (.) strategies or tools- That they know so I like that common language understanding (Participant 3).

I mean you know what the thing that’s nice is that they have the opportunity to hopefully use the same language, so they’re introduced to it in their early years and then when they move on to the primary years, the hope is that there’s a consistency in the same language (Participant 3).